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Agency of Transportation

February 5, 2016

Local Project Management Team  
Downtown Middlebury Railroad Bridge Replacement Project  
Town of Middlebury  
94 Main Street  
Middlebury, VT 05753

Dear Local Project Management Team:

I would like to share with you my findings on the vertical clearance issue associated with the Middlebury Tunnel project. With the objective of reducing construction durations on the Middlebury Tunnel project, I tasked VTrans staff and VHB to evaluate the benefits of a reduced vertical clearance. I also evaluated the benefits of adhering to the long standing state policy on rail vertical clearances, understanding that the policy has come under question.

The result of this exercise has illuminated a number of important facts I want to share with you prior to the Rail Council Meeting on February 17<sup>th</sup>. Ultimately it is important that we agree on a design clearance that will meet the needs of Middlebury Village and the State of Vermont during construction and into our future.

I have reviewed the analysis prepared by my staff and VHB and have concluded that reducing the vertical clearance component of the project will result in modest to minor savings at best in terms of project schedule and duration – even when reducing the project design down to 18 feet 8 inches. We have already shared this analysis with you.

Although we are not aware of any current specific need for double-stack clearance needs along this rail corridor, it is realistic to envision a minimum of 20 feet being utilized for both freight and passenger rail purposes in the future. New businesses are locating along rail corridors throughout Vermont and we anticipate this trend to continue, particularly in light of substantial recent state, federal, and private railroad investments (recent USDOT TIGER grant awards to extend the Ethan Allen Express to Burlington are an example of these investments). Likely double-stack requirements in the future include auto carrier rail cars utilized to move new vehicles to dealerships along US 7, and by residents along the Western Corridor who wish to travel by train to Florida or California and take their personal vehicle with them. The standard for these types of rail cars requires a vertical clearance of 19'6" and up to 20' to include tolerances.

Vermont's Western Rail Corridor is connected by the Clarendon-Pittsford Rail Line to the Canadian Pacific – a major, unrestricted 20'8" rail line just across the border in New York State that has access to major railway hubs in Albany, New York and Montreal, Quebec. There are currently seven (7) vertical clearance restrictions between Rutland and Burlington below 21' with the two in Middlebury being the most challenging to address. The other five (5) are quite manageable to address in gaining 21-foot clearance by track or bridge adjustments. There is one other restriction between Rutland, Vermont and Whitehall, New York that can be increased to 21'. After the completion of the Middlebury Tunnel project, the remaining vertical clearance obstacles are relatively simple to clear and open this corridor up to new economic development opportunities in Vermont.

The alternative is to build the Tunnel to a clearance less than 21' and make design adjustments in the future. Future alterations to the tunnel will likely involve raising the top half of the precast box rather than lowering the bottom half. This will negatively impact the character of the streets and storefronts above by raising the elevation of the road – we have been trying to avoid this.

Another factor to consider is the time and cost to alter the design and construction contract documents to address any vertical clearance to less than 21'. If we were to select a 20-foot clearance as our target, the redesign costs would negate much of the construction savings as well as potentially put the fall 2016 work season in jeopardy, with little construction savings to show for it.

Somehow we have collectively focused heavily on the vertical clearance issue for some time now when it is clear after discussing the decision with the CMGC Team there are a number of other opportunities to trim away at the construction schedule timeline. The other options also appear to provide more benefits to the Town now and in the future. It is for these reasons I think we should decide to stay the course on a vertical clearance of 21' as prescribed by state statute and not request a variance for a lower vertical clearance.

I want to confirm what we have discussed previously: the Town and State as joint owners of the project have the ability to write construction documents that prescribe the hours of the construction work week and any other limits to the construction schedule. In some cases, this may require the contractor to deploy more resources and work into the winter season. These requirements may add cost to the project and the cost is project eligible and will not require any increase above the town commitment of \$500,000 that has been agreed to. Keep in mind these types of construction documents are used on other Agency projects and we need to be realistic with the approach as not to unreasonably inflate the cost of the project. We will work closely with you on that matter.

I hope the LPMT would understand it is time for us to focus our attention on other drivers of construction durations. I remain steadfast in my engagement with the project team and

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it is my expectation the team will continue to be bold in identifying parameters and methods that may reduce construction durations cost effectively, and report to me any hurdles they face.

I look forward to discussing my position on the vertical clearance matter with the LPMT so we may prepare for our time together as a team before the Rail Council meeting on February 17th.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chris Cole".

Chris Cole  
Secretary of Transportation