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H.598

Introduced by Representatives Page of Newport City, Anthony of Barre City,
Bongartz of Manchester, Bos-Lun of Westminster, Goldman of
Rockingham, Hango of Berkshire, Houghton of Essex, Labor of
Morgan, Lefebvre of Newark, Masland of Thetford, Morgan, L.
of Milton, Morgan, M. of Milton, Mrowicki of Putney, Nicoll
of Ludlow, Rosenquist of Georgia, Seymour of Sutton, Sims of
Craftsbury, Smith of Derby, and Yantachka of Charlotte

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Transportation; passenger rail service; freight rail service; feasibility
study

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to have the
Agency of Transportation conduct a feasibility study on expanding passenger
and freight rail service throughout Vermont and to neighboring states and
Canada.

An act relating to a rail feasibility study

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

1 (1) There are nearly 580 miles of active rail line in Vermont.

2 (2) Vermont's rail system carried almost seven million tons of freight in
3 2018, which is approximately 15 percent of the total tons shipped to, from,
4 within, or through the State.

5 (3) Improved infrastructure in rail yards throughout the State would
6 increase the amount of freight shipped to, from, within, or through the State via
7 rail. In particular, improved infrastructure in the rail yard in Newport,
8 Vermont, would increase the amount of freight shipped into the United States
9 from Canada.

10 (4) It is more fuel efficient, per passenger mile, to travel by rail than by
11 personal vehicle or airplane. Amtrak is 46 percent more energy efficient than
12 traveling by personal motor vehicle and 34 percent more energy efficient than
13 domestic air travel on a per-passenger-mile basis.

14 (5) Travel by rail is also viewed, by some, as a more enjoyable and
15 convenient way to travel, and there is an existing market for traveling with a
16 personal vehicle via the Amtrak Auto Train from Washington, D.C., to
17 Orlando, Florida.

18 (6) Quebec, Montreal; Portland, Maine, and neighboring Old Orchard
19 Beach, Maine; Island Pond, Vermont; and Newport, Vermont, and neighboring
20 ski mountains, including Jay Peak, are all tourist destinations. Increased travel

1 by rail to these destinations would provide a beneficial economic impact,
2 including the creation of jobs.

3 (7) The following rail lines already exist and connect Montreal, Quebec,
4 to East Northfield, Massachusetts, by way of Newport, Vermont; St.
5 Johnsbury, Vermont; and White River Junction, Vermont, with Amtrak service
6 continuing south from White River Junction, Vermont, to Miami, Florida:

7 (A) Canadian Pacific is a private railroad and the sixth largest Class I
8 railroad by revenue in the United States. It operates just over 24 miles of rail
9 line in Vermont with one terminus in Newport, Vermont. Canadian Pacific's
10 main rail line runs between Montreal, Quebec, and Searsport, Maine, and
11 connects Montreal, Quebec, to Newport, Vermont.

12 (B) The Connecticut River Subdivision of the Washington County
13 Railroad (WACR) leases rail line owned by the State and operates freight
14 service as a Class III short-line railroad from Newport, Vermont, to White
15 River Junction, Vermont, by way of St. Johnsbury, Vermont.

16 (C) The New England Central Railroad (NECR), a subsidiary of
17 Genesee & Wyoming Inc. (GW), which is the world's largest short-line
18 railroad holding company and a subsidiary of Brookfield Infrastructure,
19 operates 228 miles of rail line in Vermont, including rail line that connects
20 East Northfield, Massachusetts, to St. Albans, Vermont, by way of White
21 River Junction and provides passenger service via Amtrak's Vermonter.

1 (8) The St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad (SLR) is also a subsidiary of
2 GW. It operates 34 miles of rail line in Vermont and rail line in New
3 Hampshire and Maine that connects Island Pond, Vermont, to Portland, Maine.

4 (9) If passenger rail service is restored from Montreal, Quebec, to
5 Newport, Vermont, and Montreal, Quebec, to Island Pond, Vermont, it would
6 serve to increase passenger rail traffic to, from, within, and through Vermont
7 and increase tourism opportunities in Vermont, Maine, and Quebec.

8 (10) There are plans to build a new joint customs and immigration
9 facility at Montreal Central for the Canada Border Security Agency and U.S.
10 Customs and Border Protection to allow passengers departing from Montreal,
11 Quebec, on the Vermonter and Adirondack, with service to New York, New
12 York, to clear U.S. customs and immigration prior to boarding the train and for
13 passengers arriving in Montreal, Quebec, to clear Canadian customs and
14 immigration after detraining.

15 Sec. 2. FEASIBILITY STUDY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

16 (a) The Agency of Transportation, in consultation with Amtrak; railroads
17 that operate in Vermont, Maine, and Quebec; the Maine Department of
18 Transportation; and the Ministry of Transportation of Quebec, shall conduct a
19 passenger and freight rail feasibility study and develop an implementation plan
20 for the following corridors:

1 (1) between Montreal, Quebec, and East Northfield, Massachusetts, via
2 Newport, Vermont; and

3 (2) between Island Pond, Vermont, and Portland, Maine.

4 (b) The purpose of the feasibility study and development of an
5 implementation plan shall be to determine the feasibility of and plan for
6 passenger and increased freight rail service within the corridors identified in
7 subsection (a) of this section, including to estimate the time horizon to plan for
8 and design the service; to estimate ridership potential; to estimate costs for
9 operations and capital acquisition; to estimate costs for rail yard infrastructure
10 improvements; to identify any other general operational, capital, legal, and
11 administrative requirements, including any additional enhancements to plans
12 for the new joint customs and immigration facility at Montreal Central; and to
13 develop a robust implementation plan to best accommodate the resumption of
14 passenger rail service and increased reliance on freight rail service to, from,
15 within, and through Vermont.

16 (c) As part of the feasibility study and implementation plan, the Agency of
17 Transportation shall consider seasonal and non-daily passenger rail service.

18 (d) The Agency of Transportation shall file a written report with the
19 findings of the feasibility study and the implementation plan with the House
20 and Senate Committees on Transportation on or before January 15, 2023.

1 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

2 This act shall take effect on passage.