

1 H.16

2 Introduced by Representatives Page of Newport City, Higley of Lowell, Labor  
3 of Morgan, Smith of Derby, and Williams of Granby

4 Referred to Committee on

5 Date:

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

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

12 An act relating to a rail feasibility study

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

14 Sec. 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

15 The General Assembly finds that:

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

17 (2) Vermont's rail system carried almost seven million tons of freight in

18 2018, which is approximately 15 percent of the total tons shipped to, from,

19 within, or through the State.

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

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

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

14           (6) Quebec, Montreal; Portland, Maine, and neighboring Old Orchard  
15           Beach, Maine; Island Pond, Vermont; and Newport, Vermont, and neighboring  
16           ski mountains, including Jay Peak, are all tourist destinations. Increased travel  
17           by rail to these destinations would provide a beneficial economic impact,  
18           including the creation of jobs.

19           (7) The following rail lines already exist and connect Montreal, Quebec,  
20           to East Northfield, Massachusetts, by way of Newport, Vermont; St.

1 Johnsbury, Vermont; and White River Junction, Vermont, with Amtrak service  
2 continuing south from White River Junction, Vermont, to Miami, Florida:

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

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

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

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

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

5           (10) On July 29, 2022, service on the Ethan Allen Express extended  
6           from its prior terminus in Rutland, Vermont, to its current terminus in  
7           Burlington, Vermont. There is now nonstop passenger rail service from  
8           Burlington, Vermont, to New York, New York.

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

16          (12) On October 3, 2022, the Vermont Agency of Transportation  
17          submitted its Expression of Interest in the Corridor Identification and  
18          Development Program (Corridor ID Program) to the Federal Railroad  
19          Administration, which indicates that Vermont intends to submit proposals to  
20          extend service on the Vermonter from the current terminus in St. Albans,  
21          Vermont, to Montreal Central.

1           (13) While the Agency of Transportation indicated in its October 3,  
2           2022 Expression of Interest in the Corridor ID Program that extending service  
3           on the Vermonter to Montreal, Quebec, is Vermont's top passenger rail  
4           priority, other priorities in the Corridor ID Program include connecting service  
5           on the Ethan Allen Express from the current terminus in Burlington, Vermont,  
6           to service on the Vermonter in Essex Junction, Vermont.

7           (14) There are plans to launch an overnight passenger train running  
8           between Montreal, Quebec, to Boston, Massachusetts, with stops in Island  
9           Pond, Vermont, Berlin and Gorham, New Hampshire, and Portland and Old  
10          Orchard Beach, Maine, among other places. It was reported as recently as  
11          September 2022 that there are hopes that the route will launch as early as 2024,  
12          with agreements in place with railroad companies as early as the midway point  
13          of 2023.

14          Sec. 2. FEASIBILITY STUDY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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

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

1           (2) between Montreal, Quebec, and Boston, Massachusetts, via Island  
2           Pond, Vermont, and Portland, Maine.

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

15           (c) As part of the feasibility study and implementation plan, the Agency of  
16           Transportation shall consider seasonal and nondaily passenger rail service.

17           (d) The Agency of Transportation shall file a written report with the  
18           findings of the feasibility study and the implementation plan with the House  
19           and Senate Committees on Transportation on or before January 15, 2024.

20           Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

21           This act shall take effect on passage.