

# Dutchess County Transportation Council

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*Marcus J. Molinaro, Chairman*

To: Dutchess County Transportation Council (DCTC) Voting Members

From: Mark Debald, Transportation Program Administrator

Date: July 27, 2021

Re: Revised Summary of Public Comments for *Moving Dutchess Forward*

The DCTC held a 30-day public comment period from June 16-July 16, 2021 for the Final Draft of [Moving Dutchess Forward](#). The comment period was initiated with a Public Notice and Executive Summary that was emailed to the DCTC's public information list, various media sources, and the DCTC Planning Committee; the Dutchess County Planning Federation also issued a newsletter article announcing the new Plan. A virtual public meeting for the Final Draft was held on June 16, 2021. Comments on the Plan were requested by July 16, 2021 and could be submitted by phone through our dedicated comment phone line, by email, mail, or fax, or through our project website. We received comments from six individuals (five by email and one by mail). Below is a summary of submitted comments and responses from staff, listed in the order received:

1. **I-84/Route 9D Interchange & Van Ness Road** – Ms. Kelly Tanner-Backenroth, Fishkill resident

Ms. Tanner-Backenroth supported the redesign of the I-84/Route 9D interchange and efforts to reduce congestion on Route 9D. She also expressed concern about safety issues at Route 9D and Van Ness Rd, particularly when making a left turn from Van Ness Rd onto 9D or making a left turn from southbound Route 9D onto Van Ness Rd. Visibility is limited due to the two northbound lanes on Route 9D, there is no signal, and the hatched area on 9D is not observed by drivers. She asked if the interchange redesign could reconfigure the lanes on Route 9D to improve safety in this area.

***DCTC Response*** –

*We agree that safety and congestion issues at the I-84/Route 9D must be addressed. Regarding the intersection of 9D and Van Ness Rd and nearby lane designations, we reached out to NYSDOT to discuss possible short-term actions to improve visibility and safety. Per NYSDOT, the intersection does not meet signal warrants, so it is unlikely that a signal could be installed, at least in the short term; there is also concern that a signal could unintentionally worsen congestion and backups. They noted that the 'do not block the box' striping and signs at the intersection were installed years ago to address this issue, and by law, vehicles on 9D should not be blocking Van Ness Rd. Due to the complexity and cost of a redesign for the I-84/Route 9D interchange, our project recommendation is considered long term (2035-2045). A long-term redesign would incorporate safety and congestion improvements, which could include replacing the bridge over I-84, adding turn lanes on Route 9D, redesigning the on- and off-ramps, updating traffic signals, and improving pedestrian and bicycle access in the area. In the shorter term, a planned Route 9D corridor study, which would evaluate*

*safety, congestion, and access along the length of the corridor, could provide recommendations and opportunities for improvements at this location.*

**2. Walkability, Electric Vehicles, & Transit – Mr. Paul Findeis, resident**

Mr. Findeis expressed doubt about the Plan’s walkability analysis and stated that the Plan does not do enough to promote public electric vehicles or better access to County Public Transit. He noted that more jobs are needed in Dutchess County, with transit connections to them. In particular, he cited the lack of bus service on Route 82, stated that the bus schedule and routes are not useful, and said that the County has refused to improve local public transportation.

***DCTC Response –***

*Our walkability analysis is intended to give a broad understanding of sidewalk coverage in centers and for accessing basic needs destinations (goods and services, education, recreation) in Dutchess County. We explain this in our Barriers to Basic Needs [methodology document](#), where we also acknowledge opportunities for a more refined analysis in the future. Regarding electric vehicles, our funding assessment of Dutchess County Public Transit assumes a shift to electric buses beginning in 2034; the timing of this electrification is based on their assessment of when the shift would occur. This, along with our [Transformative Investment](#) recommendations for electric vehicle charging stations, bus service improvements, train access improvements, and transit services for the Harlem Valley and Northern Dutchess, demonstrate our commitment to improving access to public transportation and electric vehicle use. Dutchess County Public Transit is also evaluating options to improve transit across the county in a Transit Study that is currently underway. We will incorporate findings and recommendations from this study when available. This also speaks to the fact that Moving Dutchess Forward is a strategic transportation plan, meant to support recommendations in more detailed studies such as the Transit Plan, which can better determine if bus service on roads like Route 82 is appropriate.*

**3. Rail Transit – Mr. Steve Strauss, Empire State Passengers Association**

Mr. Strauss suggested that a more detailed list of actions/recommended actions would be helpful, as would more specific targets for the Plan’s performance measures. He stated that the Plan does not address actions to comply with the State’s climate change law or discuss how the County might use potential new infrastructure funding. He also recommended six specific modifications to the Plan: 1) include the two Federal Railroad Administration grant programs available to NYSDOT and Amtrak; 2) discuss NYSDOT’s role in improving Amtrak stations and service; 3) incorporate more recommendations to improve rail service, such as additional parking facilities (in particular, at Rhinecliff station), on-demand transit service, station shuttles, and mixed-use development around stations; 4) incorporate projects from the 2005 Hudson Line Railroad Corridor Transportation Plan in the Plan’s list of projects; 5) add more specific goals for bus access and consider an inter-county Metro-North fare and free or reduced price transfers to buses; and 6) develop an on-demand shuttle between the Rhinecliff station and Rhinebeck, Bard College, the County Fairgrounds, Kinston and Woodstock.

***DCTC Response –***

In our [Advocate](#) section, we list specific actions that the DCTC can take to address the barriers identified in the plan. We also list specific actions that Dutchess County agencies can take, and best practices for local governments. In our [Transformative Investments](#) section, we list both holistic transformative packages that address broad goals for our system, and larger-scale transformative projects. This organization was intended to address the various barriers we identified in the Plan.

Our [System Performance Report](#) discusses how the Plan and recommendations meet the goals of statewide performance measures and targets. These measures and targets were established in coordination with the 14 MPOs in New York, NYSDOT, FHWA, and FTA and designed to meet federal requirements. They are meant to provide a uniform system to measure performance across the state. In addition to these statewide measures, we established specific [performance measures](#) to measure our progress in improving safety, reliability, access to basic needs, and equity. To help clarify our goals, we will add more descriptive language to our performance measures.

In support of the State's climate change law, the Plan identifies and recommends a wide range of projects, policies, and practices to promote active transportation and public transit. In our [Barriers to Reliable Access](#) section, we assess bus, train, and walking and bicycling access across the county. Our [Transformative Investments](#) section recommends funding for train access, bus service, walking and bicycling and shared-use path/rail trail improvements. In our [Climate Change Trends](#) section, we also discuss our role in reducing the climate impacts of transportation.

In considering the possibility of new infrastructure funding, we purposefully thought 'big' with our transformative investment recommendations. Although timelines and parameters for new infrastructure funding are unknown, we acknowledge that new programs could be used to fund transformative investments. However, the Plan must be fiscally constrained and focused on funding programs under our purview.

Regarding the specific suggestions:

- 1) Our discussion of railroad funding is general because the DCTC plays a limited role in rail service and does not oversee the grant programs offered by the Federal Railroad Administration. We will add language to acknowledge the availability of these funding sources.
- 2) We will add text under [Funding to Maintain](#) to clarify the role of NYSDOT in improving Amtrak stations and services in the county.
- 3) The Train Access Improvements package in our [Transformative Investments](#) section includes projects that improve walking, bicycling, and transit access to train stations, such as sidewalks, wayfinding signage, bicycle parking, and bus pull-off areas. It also includes projects that address safety and congestion issues at train stations. We will adjust this text to specifically include vehicle parking and shuttle service. Additionally, our Land Use and Zoning Reform package could be used to support transit-oriented development. We will adjust this text to highlight this.
- 4) We support Metro North and Amtrak projects that improve speed and reliability, but because they are funded outside of our purview/process, we did not include them in our list of investments.
- 5) We do identify "percentage of residents who live within a half mile of frequent or somewhat frequent weekday bus service (via streets)" and "basic needs destinations with frequent or

somewhat frequent weekday bus service” as [performance measures](#). We will add language indicating our goal to increase these percentages. We explain our analysis of bus access, including definitions for frequent, somewhat frequent, and infrequent service in our [methodology document](#).

6) We acknowledge the possibility of an on-demand transit solution at the Rhinecliff station in our [Train Access](#) section. Additionally, we include “improve bus access to train stations, possibly through fixed-route or on-demand services” under [County Actions](#). Finally, our Transformative Package C, Transit Services for the Harlem Valley & Northern Dutchess, includes on-demand transit service in this area.

#### 4. **Route 9D Interchange** – Mr. John Twohig, Beacon resident

Mr. Twohig suggested several specific improvements for the I-84/Route 9D interchange. He stated that work should not begin until the bridge resurfacing is complete. He suggested clear designations for turn lanes in advance of turns; updated speed limit signs and a 30mph limit on 9D for a half-mile north of the bridge; and upgraded lighting on Route 9D, especially near Dogwood Ln.

##### **DCTC Response –**

*We identify the I-84/Route 9D Interchange Improvements as a long-term (2035-2045) recommendation, given its complexity and cost. However, we agree that better road markings, lighting, and signage could improve safety and traffic operations at this location and should be considered in the short-term. We have passed these suggestions along to NYSDOT for consideration. Additionally, a planned Route 9D corridor study, which would evaluate safety, congestion, and access along the length of the corridor, could provide recommendations and opportunities for improvements at and near the interchange.*

#### 5. **Beacon Rail Line** – Mr. Michael Tortora

Mr. Tortora urged the DCTC to re-establish the Beacon rail line as a passenger rail line, particularly for one or two-car self-propelled trains. He cited several benefits, including access to Beacon’s Main Street and train station without a car, increasing travel options for tourists, reducing vehicle miles travelled and traffic, and opportunities for commerce and development at stations.

##### **DCTC Response –**

*We agree that it is important to connect Beacon’s Main Street with the train station to promote non-automobile access in Beacon, to reduce vehicle use and to promote local economies and tourism along the former rail line. Our proposed transformative investment, to convert the line to a rail trail, would share all these benefits. In addition, a rail trail for this location is more economically and politically viable than establishing local rail service, especially considering that Metro-North formally abandoned this line, operation of rail service is extremely expensive, and there is political support for a rail trail. If feasible from a safety, operational, and design perspective, a rail line could possibly remain intact alongside the proposed trail, leaving room for future rail service should that become economically viable and politically desirable. However, such a decision would need to be made at the project scoping level by the appropriate agency.*

## 6. Recommendations – Mr. Kevin Jones, resident

Mr. Jones suggested that the Plan include more details about some of its transformative investments and how they address barriers to access. Specifically, he suggested that bus service improvements should include improved sidewalk access, better signage and more shelters, website improvements, and real time bus information. Train access improvements should include promotion of transit-oriented development near stations, extending the electrification of the Metro North lines and considering other clean energy technologies, increased bicycle parking, and improvements at the Rhinecliff and Beacon stations. He noted that with a growing older population, it is important to ensure that non-driving transportation modes are accessible. Mr. Jones also suggested that the DCTC identify areas that are vulnerable to storm impacts, plan for electrification of the bus system, and provide electric vehicle charging at train stations.

### **DCTC Response –**

*In our [Advocate](#) section, we list specific actions that the DCTC, County Government, and local governments should take to address barriers to safe and reliable access, access to basic needs, and equity that we identify in the plan. We also list specific project and package recommendations in our [Transformative Investments](#) section. Together, these actions and recommendations are intended to specifically address the barriers identified in the plan.*

*Our Bus Service Improvements package includes new or improved bus service, real time information, and updated schedules. Regarding improvements to Dutchess County Public Transit’s website, their [‘DoubleMap’ phone app and website](#) show bus routes, stops, and real time bus locations. Also, Dutchess County Public Transit is working on a Transit Plan to analyze and improve bus service across the county. As part of Public Transit’s recent accessibility evaluation, improved signage and new shelters are planned (installation is on hold until the Transit Study is completed). Regarding electrification of the bus system, our [Funding to Maintain](#) discussion of Dutchess County Public Transit assumes a shift to electric buses beginning in 2034; this timing is based on Transit staff’s assessment of when the shift could realistically occur, given upcoming bus replacement needs and facility upgrades .*

*Our Train Access Improvements package includes projects that improve walking, bicycling, and transit access at stations, including bicycle parking, and our Electric Vehicle Charging Stations package could include new chargers at train stations. Our [Train Access](#) section also identifies potential improvements at the Rhinecliff and Beacon stations. In addition, our Land Use and Zoning Reform Incentive Program package could be used to support transit-oriented development. We will adjust this text to highlight this. Regarding electrification of the Metro-North lines, we support this but it would be funded outside of our purview/process.*

*Our Walking and Bicycling Improvements package includes other projects that improve non-motorized access, such as sidewalk repairs and replacements, new sidewalks, and accessibility improvements. Lastly, our [Flood Vulnerability Map](#) highlights flood zones and documents major flood events in Dutchess County, and our [Climate Trends](#) section highlights DCTC’s intent to perform a transportation infrastructure vulnerability study.*