

Capital City Transit/Visitor Center

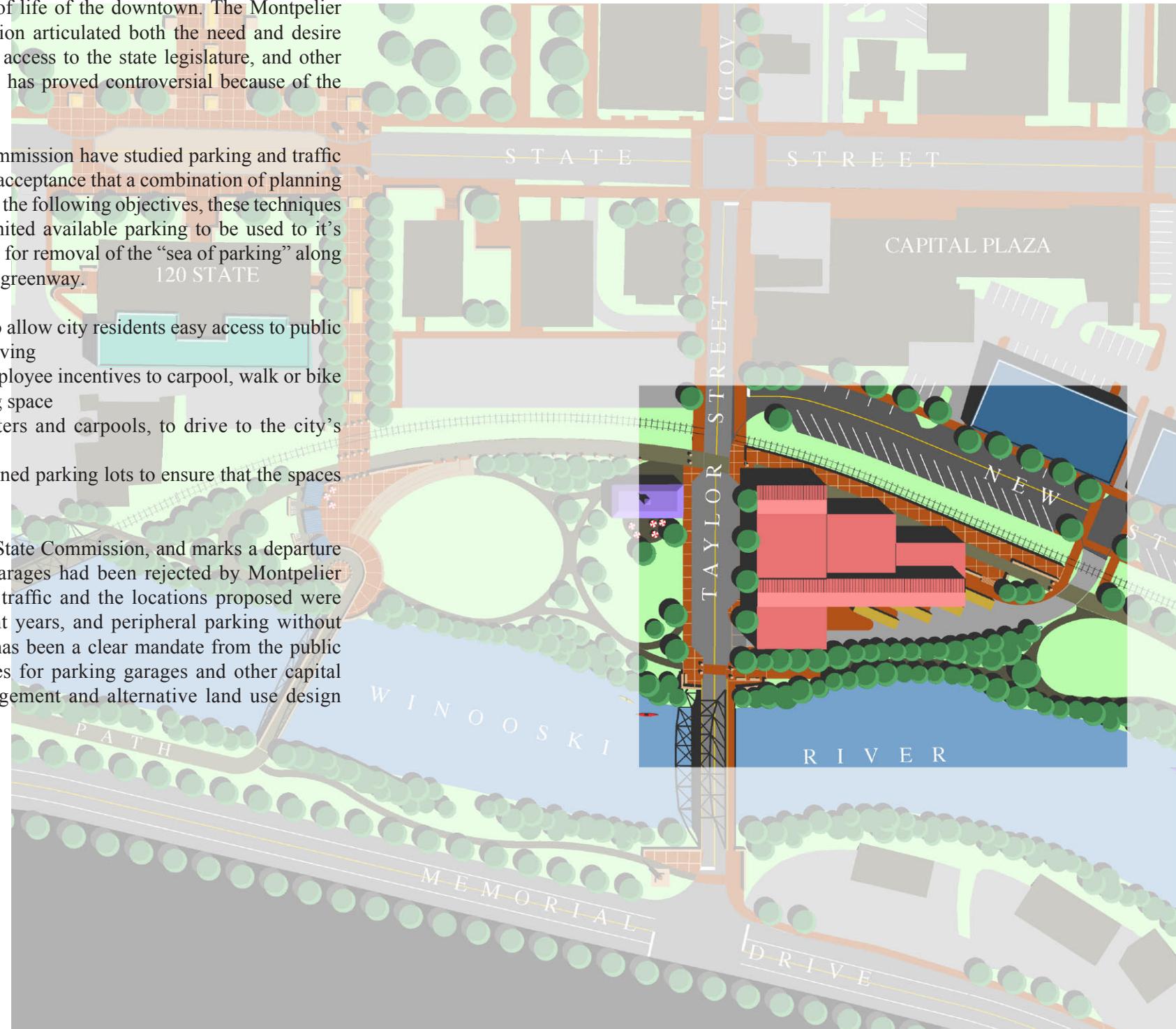
Background: the link between traffic, parking and transit

Like all cities, Montpelier experiences parking and traffic problems. The peak hours of congestion and lack of available parking spaces, in combination with unattractive inaccessible parking areas, have a deleterious effect on the economic vitality and quality of life of the downtown. The Montpelier Master Plan and the Phase I Plan for the City/State Commission articulated both the need and desire to integrate improved public parking, access to the downtown, access to the state legislature, and other state facilities. Implementation of that goal in the interim years has proved controversial because of the lack of consensus about parking and traffic.

The City, State, and the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission have studied parking and traffic issues in Montpelier for many years, and have come to a general acceptance that a combination of planning tools may work best to solve the problems at hand. Translated into the following objectives, these techniques are targeted to reduce traffic entering the city, to allow the limited available parking to be used to its maximum potential for business and economic gain, and to allow for removal of the “sea of parking” along the riverfront so that the area can be redeveloped as park land or greenway.

- Improve access and management of a public transit system to allow city residents easy access to public transit to get downtown and to work in the city instead of driving
- Create a program with the state employees union to offer employee incentives to carpool, walk or bike to work instead of using a designated state employee parking space
- Strategically locate “peripheral” parking lots for commuters and carpools, to drive to the city’s outskirts and then pool or take a shuttle bus
- Employ parking management of the downtown and state owned parking lots to ensure that the spaces provided are indeed used by the desired parties

This strategy has emerged from the Phase 1 effort for the City/State Commission, and marks a departure from past efforts to make singular improvements: parking garages had been rejected by Montpelier residents on several occasions, because they drew additional traffic and the locations proposed were near the river. Shuttle systems had mixed success until recent years, and peripheral parking without good shuttles was ineffective. At the same time though, there has been a clear mandate from the public that before the city and state invested in massive expenditures for parking garages and other capital intensive parking facilities, that public transit, parking management and alternative land use design should be used to the fullest potential.



Vermont has been recognized for its commitment to rail service through subsidization of AMTRAK. Across the state the VT Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has been involved in other project to develop public transportation. In Rutland, a downtown transit center has been constructed in conjunction with a large downtown parking garage, a similar facility is planned in Brattleboro, and the advent of commuter rail from Shelburne to Burlington will be supported by stations in Burlington and other towns along the route. Other parts of the state have also developed local transit services such as Advance Transit in the White River Junction area and Central VT Transit Authority (CVTA) in Montpelier, which operates “Wheels” the provider for the Central VT region.

Unifying Public Transit

Multiple transportation modes already serve Montpelier. However, these are not integrated into a comprehensive plan for MOBILITY in the capital city. The solution to municipal parking and traffic congestion problems calls for an integrated approach combining land use, zoning, and the power of market incentives, innovative approaches to parking and busing, among others. The Multi Modal Transit and Visitor Center is one piece in the plan, not the entire solution.

Five different providers of public transportation currently serve the City of Montpelier:

- *Vermont Transit*, the interstate bus company owned by Greyhound Bus Lines
- *Central Vermont Transportation Association (CVTA)* or “Wheels”, the inter - and intra - city transit provider serving numerous towns in the Central Vermont area
- *Amtrak* rail service from Montreal to Washington
- *Tour buses* from dozens of companies across the U. S. and Canada
- Private *taxi* companies

While all components of the public transportation systems operate independently of one another, a linkage program which would allow people to move efficiently through the city has yet to be developed, and the overlap of those services is generally thought to be reliant on a single point of contact for all providers: a transit center.

Why a built facility?

As a major regional and statewide destination for travelers and state employees, Montpelier has all the characteristics of a city that would benefit from enhanced public transit: large commuting population who work “regular” hours, a “captive audience” on the part of state employees that are an employment pool that are organized and accessible to being invited to participate in alternative transportation programs, and a local population that live and work within the city, for whom the convenience of public transit

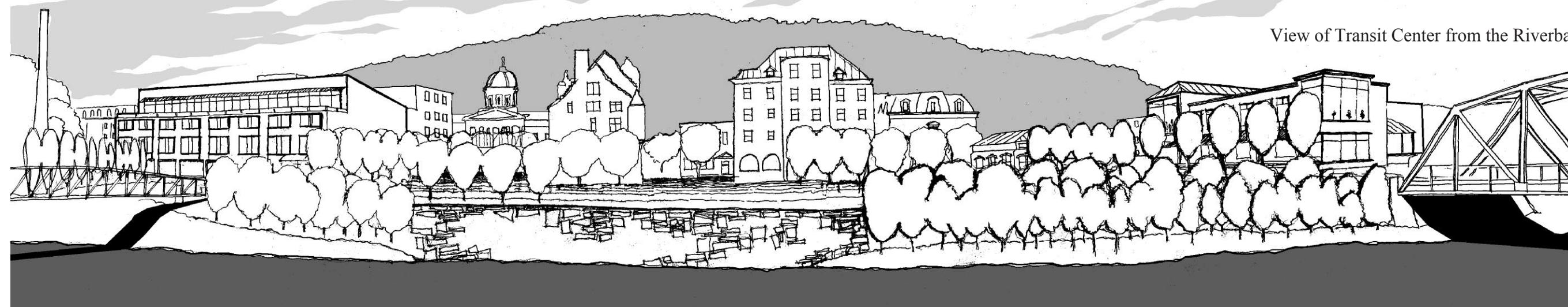
would provide a tangible alternative to commuting short distances and having to locate and pay for long - term parking. In acknowledgment of these potentials, the city and state have considered establishing such alternatives such as peripheral parking, improving the “Wheels” transit program and improving the availability of parking for both the state and the city, and the city bikepath projects promise on the long term to create a non - vehicular travel alternative on a seasonal basis.

The concept of a centrally located Transit Center has been advanced by city officials as a way to efficiently bring together public transit providers, such that comprehensive services can be made efficient and accessible for local and regional/statewide riders. The facility has been conceived as a place for residents, visitors, and people who work in the city, integrated with a larger urban plan as a unifying public facility to link the different ways that people come to Montpelier.

The transit center could be a pivotal development to the Capital Area, and its location and function are critical to both the operation of the whole system as a public orientation center for the city. Given the current priority for alternative transportation funding, a comprehensively sited and designed facility could be highly fundable via a variety of TEA21 programs through the VTrans.

- This building will be the destination for VT Transit Bus Lines, Wheels, a central facility and Welcome Center for tourists and tourist buses, current Washington County RR uses and a potential stop for a future AMTRAK connection.
- A second function of the transit center will be for shuttles to and from satellite parking lots for state employees and legislators when the state government is in session. The shuttle program may also be used by downtown businesses as part of the larger parking policy. Further details concerning parking can be found in the “Parking and Traffic” chapter.
- A third element in the transit center program could be to integrate transit with a new and larger Montpelier Visitors Center, a concept supported by many state and city officials, perhaps even as expansive as a VT Welcome and exhibition center.

A Multi Modal Transit Center should be located so passengers can combine trips to everyday services such as banks, dry cleaners, etc. and within easy walking distance of their ultimate destination — a place of employment. The facility should be designed to be visually prominent while compatible with its architectural setting in historic downtown Montpelier. The Center should link travelers with travel modes within the Montpelier area (Wheels, peripheral parking lots, etc.) and beyond (i.e. buses to Burlington International Airport, Amtrak). Ideally, the Center should be easy to get to and easy to get away from; time spent at the Center should be as comfortable as possible. Some of the amenities typically found



View of Transit Center from the Riverbank

in successful transit facilities include a coffee or sandwich shops, gift shop, displays of local crafts, agricultural products and merchandise, information guides, etc. The Center should be designed to be secure, well lighted, well signed, affordable to construct and easy to maintain. The sheltered waiting area should have all of the amenities of a public building and, if possible, attractive views of the Winooski River, the State Capitol and the hillsides around the city.

A Range of Possible Transit Center Facility Alternatives:

The function of a Multi Modal Transit Center is to provide interface between differing modes of transportation. Broadly defined, passengers interface in the following ways:

- Passengers enter the transportation system either at peripheral parking lots and travel to the Center or directly at the Multi Modal Transit Center
- Passengers change between modes of travel (i.e. leave a car and get on a shuttle bus, etc.)
- Passengers interchange within modes (i.e. leave a bus and get on another bus, etc.)
- Passengers leave the transportation system (i.e. return to their cars in a peripheral parking lot)

Transit service for downtown Montpelier could take several forms depending upon the need, funding and public policy. The options are:

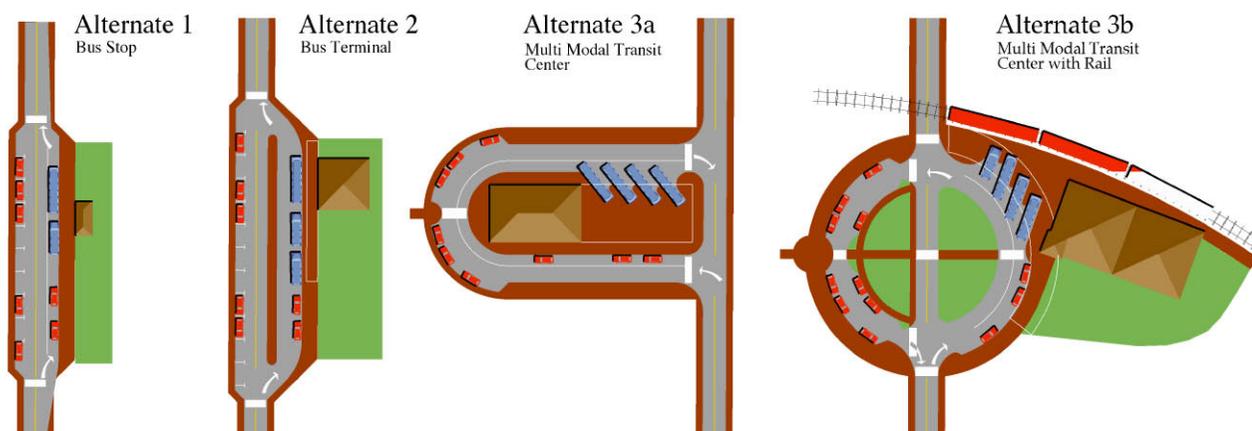
- A **simple bus stop** at the curb of a street typically with a shelter, similar to the VT transit bus station currently in use.
- A **bus station** serving one or more companies providing intercity or interstate service
- An **intermodal center** serving multiple forms of transit providers such as buses, shuttle buses, taxi, commuter rail station, auto leasing, etc.
- A **multimodal** center serving all of the above plus direct connection with Amtrak service

Montpelier's existing service demands substantiate needs that are already greater than the first two options. Montpelier has an established demand for inter- and intracity bus service, airport shuttle service to Burlington, a shuttle bus/peripheral parking lot system, taxi service and a vibrant tour bus destination demand. However, direct connection (via rail) with Amtrak is infeasible since their existing station is located out of town.

These factors suggest that an intermodal transit center in the downtown would best accommodate the transit needs and provide a facility adequate for the city's transit needs to grow to a mature level of service effective enough to contribute to the overall transportation and mobility scenario of the city.

Public policy and user preference for transit has been changing rapidly in recent years and promises to

HIERARCHY OF TRANSIT FACILITIES

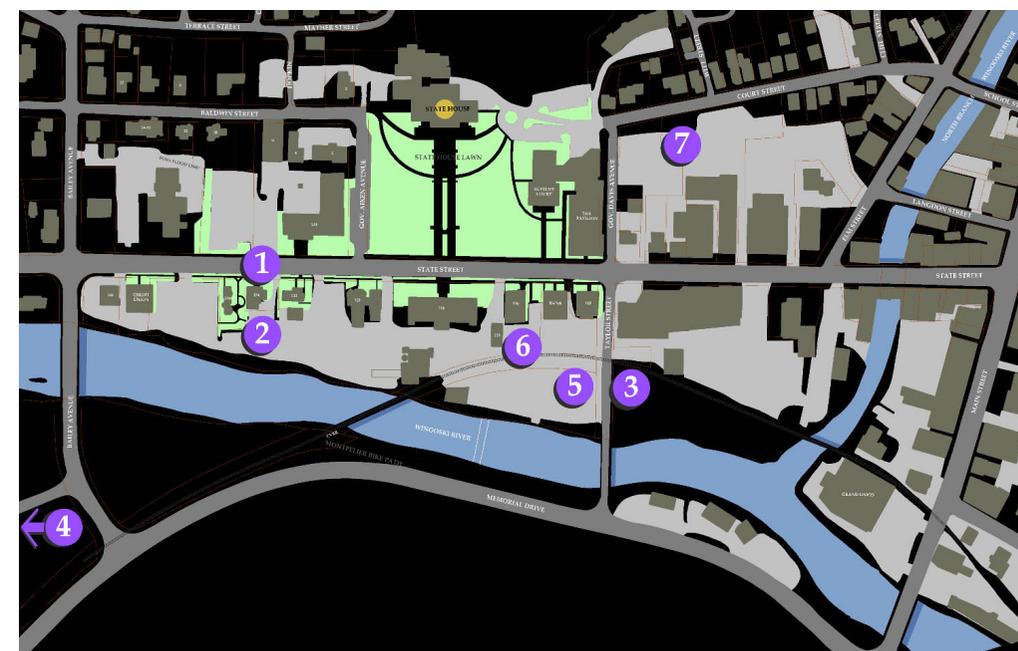


change even more so in the future. Therefore, planning for a true intermodal transit center seems warranted. While commuter rail service from Montpelier to Burlington does not currently exist — and may not materialize for more than a decade — the location and design of the transit center should anticipate this development and remain flexible enough to accommodate rail use in the future.

Determining the best location for the Transit Center

Seven potential sites for the Montpelier transit center were evaluated during this study. The nominated sites were identified during discussions with public officials, the transit providers, local residents and people attending the various public meetings. The sites evaluated were:

- Taylor Street at the existing Vermont Transit ticket trailer
- The Department of Employment and Training parking lot off Memorial Street



- State Street in front of or behind the existing State Visitors' Center
- Court Street behind the Thrush Tavern;
- The Capitol Complex parking lot on Taylor Street
- The Amtrak Station
- The I-89 Triangle park-and-ride lot

The optimum site criteria used to evaluate sites:

- Large enough to accommodate all transit operators in the area: Vermont Transit, Wheels, tour buses, taxis, rental car leasing and, in the future, commuter rail service.
- Proximity to the downtown central business district and the Capitol Complex is essential to attract ridership.
- Convenient walking distance of no more than ten minutes to-and-from principal places of work and the transit center.
- Connections between the transit center and the Wheels intra-city and shuttle bus stops on State and Main Streets.
- All buses should be able to maneuver quickly and easily in and out of downtown Montpelier from I-89

- and from the peripheral parking shuttle lots
- Nearby available long - term downtown parking so VT Transit riders can leave their cars if going out of town for several days.
- Space for parking for tour buses
- Future potential to accommodate commuter rail service to and from Burlington.

Each site was evaluated and ranked with a numerical score. (See Appendix for Site Evaluation Matrix) The highest ranking sites in order, with a brief explanation for the reasons why, are:

- Taylor Street in the Capitol Complex parking lot; this site does not require buses to cross the rail tracks in order to get into and out of the transit center
- Taylor Street in the same location as the Vermont Transit trailer; this site is currently being used as a bus station and is available. Depending upon the final facility layout buses may be forced to cross the rail road tracks entering and/or exiting the transit center
- Taylor Street between the Chittenden Bank building and the rail lines; this site has the best potential for coordinating with a future commuter rail service but requires that buses cross the tracks. The existing bank drive-in teller operation would need to be relocated to accommodate this scheme
- The DET site; this site is already being used as a shuttle bus parking lot and could be available for development as a transit center but is located very far from downtown

The highest ranking, and therefore best recommended site for the transit center is on Taylor Street. Locations either in the Capitol Complex parking lot or across the street at the existing Vermont Transit trailer on the Carr property. Due to limitations on the part of the state that precluded use of state land for the facility, the conceptual plan shows the transit center on the Carr Prop. on the east side of Taylor street, a location generally supported by all participants. Other sites evaluated were dropped from further consideration for a variety of reasons as noted.

A transit center space needs to be approximately 2,500 to 3,000 square feet and could be as large as 5000 square feet depending on the use projections for the facility. The building and bus platform and circulation, can easily be accommodate on less than one acre of land, particularly if combined with other complementary uses like the visitor center.

Optimum external facility space program:

- Berthing space for a minimum of three 55' long buses and, ideally up to five
- Parallel parking for shuttle bus stops and taxi standing in front of the facility
- A covered passenger platform over the entire island
- Physical proximity to the existing rail line
- Sidewalk connection to State and Main Streets
- Short-term parking spaces for approximately two dozen vehicles

Optimum external internal space program:

- One ticketing counter with secure package storage so that a single agent can sell tickets for Vermont Transit, Wheels, Amtrak, and lease rental automobiles
- Space for tourist information displays about Vermont and surrounding attractions
- A waiting room sufficient to handle approximately two dozen people
- Public bathroom facilities and a public telephone
- Space for vending machines and vendor carts and rough - in plumbing to accommodate a potential coffee shop operation with a small number of tables and chairs