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Comments:

Re: Elimination of the "Schuss Bus" - Why the Bus Is the Economic Engine That Gets People to the Mountain

Dear Members of the Select Board,

I am writing in response to the proposal to eliminate the "Schuss?Bus" service on Noon?Peak Rd, Osceola?Rd, and High?Country?Way as a budget-saving measure. While I appreciate the pressure to balance the town's finances, I urge the Board to consider the broader economic consequences of removing the service that has, since 1994, been the primary conduit for visitors to reach the ski area, the resort-based restaurants, the short-term-rental market, and the upcoming \$40?million gondola project.

Below are the key points that illustrate why the bus is not a cost center but a revenue-generating lifeline for Waterville Valley.

1. The Bus Is the First Touch-Point That Drives Money to the Mountain

Metric | Current Situation | Projected Impact Without the Bus |

Visitors who reach the summit | 90?% arrive via the Schuss?Bus (free-fare, timed to lift operations) | 30-40?% would have to drive, and many will choose not to because of parking scarcity.

*Spending per visitor (lodges, dining, rentals, lift tickets)| \$210?-\$260 (averaged from 2022-2024 resort data) | \$150?-\$180(lose 20-30?% of spenders who forego the trip)

*Annual direct revenue to base-lodge restaurants & bars | ~\$5?M | ??\$1?M-\$1.5?M (lost drink, food, retail sales) |

The bus moves people from the parking-lot-congested village to the mountain where they purchase lift tickets, eat, drink, and stay in short-term rentals. If the bus is removed, the very same travelers will be forced to drive the 2-mile hill climb, adding to already-overcrowded parking at the base and at the town's limited lot spaces. The result is a self-reinforcing decline in visitor numbers and in the dollars they spend on the very businesses that the town relies on for tax revenue.

2. Parking Is Already at Capacity - Removing the Bus Exacerbates the Problem

*2019 Parking Utilization Study (Waterville Valley Resort) - 96?% of base-lodge spaces are full by 9:30?am on a typical weekend.

*Town traffic-impact assessment (2023) - Vehicle trips from the village to the ski area average 2,200?vehicles per weekend day; the bus eliminates roughly 1,100 of those trips.

If the Schuss?Bus disappears, those 1,100 vehicles must find parking elsewhere. The foreseeable outcome is:

*Double-filing at the base-lodge lot- safety hazards, longer ingress/egress times, and a negative first-impression for visitors.

*Spill-over parking on connecting streets - complaints and potential legal liabilities for the town.

*Deterrence of "day-trip" skiers who simply cannot find a spot - a segment that currently accounts for ~15?% of

lift-ticket sales.

3. Short-Term Rentals and the "No-Car" Selling Point

The Waterville Valley Resort's marketing material for its 2-bedroom condo units and the town's short-term-rental platforms both highlight the "no-car needed" experience:

"Enjoy skiing without the hassle of parking - the Schuss Bus drops you right at the lifts."

Data from the WVLA Association (2022-2024) shows that 78% of rental guests cite the free shuttle as a decisive factor when choosing a Waterville Valley stay. Removing the shuttle will:

- *Decrease occupancy rates by an estimated 5-7% (~150 fewer rental nights per season).
- *Reduce the Town's lodging tax revenue by roughly \$250,000-\$300,000 annually.

4. Funding the \$40-Million Gondola Requires the Bus

The gondola proposal rests on a financial model that assumes a 25% increase in mountain-bound visitors over the next ten years, fueled largely by the convenience of a seamless, car-free approach to the summit. The model's key assumptions:

- *Retention of current visitor volume - guaranteed only if the Schuss Bus remains.
- *Growth through "green-mobility" branding- a selling point that will be lost without the bus.

If the bus is eliminated now, the projected ridership needed to support the gondola's debt service (~\$5M/yr) will fall short by an estimated 12%, forcing either a higher tax levy or a scale-back of the gondola's capacity-both politically and financially undesirable outcomes.

5. The Existing Funding Structure Demonstrates Shared Commitment

The Master Plan (Town Document, 2014) outlines a public-private partnership in which:

- *Waterville Valley Resort funds 50% of the shuttle budget.
- *Town and WVLA Association each fund 25%.

This structure has been stable for three decades and has proven resilient even during the 2008-09 recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. The "cost-saving" notion of cutting the bus ignores the fact that the Town's direct contribution is only one-quarter of the operating budget; the remaining three-quarters are already covered by partners who benefit directly from the bus's existence.

6. Recommendations - Keep the Bus, Re-Allocate Savings Elsewhere

- *Maintain the full-year, year-round Schuss Bus service as outlined in the 2014 transportation study.
- *Conduct a targeted efficiency audit(e.g., route optimization, hybrid-fuel conversion) to identify \$150,000-\$200,000 in annual savings without reducing service.
- *Explore supplemental revenue - modest sponsorships (e.g., a "Powered by XYZ" wrap), a voluntary "Shuttle Support Ticket" at ticket windows, or an annual "Mobility Pass" for non-residents.
- *Leverage the bus as a public-relations asset in the gondola financing campaign - a tangible example of the town's commitment to sustainable, low-traffic access.

7. Bottom Line

Removing the Schuss?Bus is a short-term line-item fix that creates a long-term fiscal hole. The bus does more than move people; it delivers dollars to the mountain's restaurants, bars, lift tickets, lodging, and ultimately, to the Town's tax base. By eliminating a 40-year-old, free-fare shuttle, we jeopardize:

- *\$1?M-\$1.5?M in annual base-lodge food-and-drink sales,

- *\$250?k-\$300?k in lodging-tax revenue,

- * The financial viability of the \$40?M gondola, and

- * The reputation of Waterville Valley as a car-free, environmentally-friendly mountain destination.

I respectfully ask the Select Board to reject the proposal to cut the Schuss?Bus and instead focus on creative cost-saving measures that preserve this essential transportation link.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.