

[Gordon Dritschilo, Rutland Herald](#)

Vermont's congressional delegation thinks it can still find money in Washington for the western rail corridor.

The trio signed a letter, dated Thursday and released Friday, asking U.S. Transportation Secretary Raymond LaHood to use some money about to be reallocated for the Vermont project.

"As I understand it, Wisconsin and Ohio had between them about \$1.2 billion and they're rejecting that money," Democratic Rep. Peter Welch said Friday.

The letter comes roughly a week after the \$73 million plan to extend the Ethan Allen Express and offer Amtrak passenger service from Rutland to Burlington failed to make the cut for stimulus funding.

Welch said he did not know exactly how much the project missed the cut by, but that the Federal Railroad Administration praised the quality of Vermont's application.

"Vermont's been on this even before there was stimulus money," he said. "If these states are rejecting \$1.2 billion, Vermont's ready to use about \$60 million of that."

Welch characterized the rejection as being for "local political reasons." He said the administration is looking for projects that are "ready to go" and that the corridor fit that requirement perfectly.

"We've got a marriage that could be made in Washington heaven," he said.

Proponents have said the extension would add little in the way of operational costs to the line while increasing ridership by at least 50 percent. The rejection last week was the second time the federal government passed over the project.

Meanwhile, upgrades to increase speeds between White River and Montpelier on the Vermonter line got \$58 million earlier in the year.

While the federal government would not fund the entire project — the state match was almost \$15 million — legislators reached Friday said funding the corridor entirely at the state level was unrealistic.

"I don't think anybody gave up after the recent snub," said Republican Sen. Kevin Mullin of Rutland County. "Everyone is still enthusiastic."

Mullin said the Legislature has done what it can to boost the state's chances.

"What we did last year was try to set it as a priority and Sen. (William) Carris got language in a bill that the corridor was our number one priority in the state," he said.

Carris also said federal funding was the key to the project.

"That's a given because of the cost of infrastructure," he said.

Welch said the congressional delegation intends to find the money somewhere in Washington.

"There's going to be a new transportation bill and obviously I'll be advocating for the western

corridor in it," he said, adding that he resisted the term "earmark" in transportation projects. "If you're going to build highway projects or you're going to build rail projects, you have to be specific about where you're going to build them. ... Whatever you call it, I'm for it."