

VERMONT RAIL ADVISORY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
DILL BUILDING
2178 AIRPORT ROAD, Rm 135
BARRE, VT 05641
and VIRTUALLY VIA MS TEAMS
August 13, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Carl Fowler
Rick Moulton
David Wulfson
Art Whitman

Sara Coffey
Chris Andreasson
Charles Hunter (NECR / G+W)
Charlie Moore

ATTENDEES:

Flynn, Joe VTrans Secretary
Messier, Amy L
Libby, Paul
Tillberg, David
Mary Anne Michaels
Jason Owen
Kilbride, Allyson
Ben Heckscher
Jake Twarog
Pannell, Ellen
Dan Peacock
Delabruere, Daniel
Steve Strauss (ESPA)
Parker, Christopher
Nummy, John
Walker, Mark
Lucie, Brian
Bannerman, Percy
Wendy Harrison
Natale, Christopher M

Coustasse, Valeria A
Slason, Johnathan
Jim Brogan
Charbonneau, Erin
William White
Clark, Margaret T
Brophy, Jane
Wilson, John (Manchester, NH)
Dejan, Sasa
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Pannell, Ellen
Layton, Renee
Peter Young
Ostebo, Kurt
Ryan Loucy (VRS)
Neaderland, Zoe
Trini Brassard
Seldon Houghton
Michele Boomhower
Anne Cummings VT Senate

1) Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Delabruere called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM. Introductions were done.

2) Approval of Previous Minutes

Previous Minutes from May 14, 2024

Corrections by Carl Fowler: Page 2, Lakeshore is wrong. It's Lacolle Quebec in the same paragraph. On page five page, at the bottom as referring to the root should be ROUTE. Then the next page at the top It's not the Valley fire train it's the Valley Flyer. At the bottom of that paragraph is not right out the summer but wait out this summer. Uh, moving on to page 7. There is a factual misstatement because it was true then, but it isn't now. The Adirondack wasn't in the end suspended for 40 days. The Adirondack was suspended until mid-October.

And I have just suggested that that sentence changed quoted me from his suspended for 40 days to is suspended until mid-October.

Very minor and the third line priority comma, as is the Green Mountain. Further down that page under project updates in the second paragraph, this is quoting again should read; I went by high railer, then from Hoosick Junction to Pittsburgh.

Change SNCSEX to CSX.

It's not the Beanie Genesee in Wyoming, it's the B & E / Genesee and Wyoming. Again, Berkshire and eastern Slash B & E

And in the final paragraph, quoting me again, the second line, not that station, but the new Brattleboro station.

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Rick Moulton, to approve the minutes of 05/14/2024 as amended.

Dan, said for approval of minutes as corrected: all those in favor say 'aye'. Online if no objections stay silent. Minutes approved as amended.

Corridor Id update: Dan Delabruere

We're still at the beginning stages going back and forth with FRA on the criteria as far as what our first step is going to be on the scope of work. We submitted to the FRA the project manager plan (PMP). They are currently reviewing it. We are poised and ready to go with the work order request to our consultant engineers as soon as the FRA says it looks good, then we'll start working on our scope of work. We have two different corridor ID, one's called the Green Mountain Corridor which is the current Ethan Allen along with the additional frequency down through Manchester, Bennington, and the Vermonter corridor is the current Vermonter service in green on the map with the addition of the extension to Montreal. We have talked to our neighboring states on where the break is going to be. We haven't finalized that 100%, but we are it's looking like we're going to probably break the Ethan Allen currently. First station in New York and then the question is whether we break at Brattleboro or we break in Massachusetts.

And then we're going to take the piece from Saint Albans to Cantic and New York's going to take where the Adirondack already runs.

For the for the grant, no two states can overlap. We have to have a breaking point. So no two states looking at the same funding the same piece of track.

That's my quick update on corridor ID. We're making progress.

A question was asked, "Is there a projected completion date for the studies?"

Our completion date we gave FRA a completion date of next spring.

Rep. Sarah Coffey: "I'm curious, can you tell us a little bit more, I mean in this year's transportation bill, there was a directive to work with Massachusetts, which I think is part of the rail corridor.

What is the engagement of the communities in this rail ID process?

Yes, there will be a public input piece. It won't be part of the first grant.

There are different steps.

First step is basically coming up with a scope of work on what each service looks like. Showing on that map, putting together it goes from here to here.

Next step, now what's included in that with a little more detail? Identify a station. The station is owned by who? Who's maintaining it? At what speed gets into more detail about what speed is actually in the corridor.

Then the next step after that is creating projects. So, what is in a state of good repair and then breaking into two types of projects, state of good repair projects and upgrade projects when we get to the project piece, they'll be a lot of public input when we get to that piece.

The first steps are more about collecting data.

Rep. Sarah Coffey: So just a follow up and then working with our neighboring states, we're going to enter with the process of separating who is doing it.

Dan: We'll be working hand in hand because obviously the trains don't just stop at the border or wherever we picked the break point.

When we talk about either state of good repair or improvements, it doesn't make sense for one state to say we want to get to 100 mile an hour train, but then Massachusetts says, well, we're only going to go 40, right? We all must be on the same page to make the whole train work together. Please don't anybody take that as Vermont's going to go higher miles an hour, that is just an example.

So, yes, we will be working with our neighboring states quite a bit.

And as a follow up can you clarify where service planning, conceptual service planning would occur in this process?

That's a little bit more of Step 2, a lot more of that in Step 3.

This is again, as I said last council meeting, a marathon not a sprint. This is going to take years to develop.

These are the plans; FRA knows that that's what they're expecting. What we want. They want us to get it right, and for us to take the time to get it right.

Ridership Report: Allyson Kilbride

I'll start with the Ethan Allen Express ridership and revenue have increased in all three months in the second quarter as compared to fiscal year 2023, which is great news.

In April, we saw an increase of 429 passengers and an 18% increase in revenue may an increase of 533 additional passengers, 16% increase in revenue.

Have you attribute the decline in Castleton? What do you think that's about? Ridership.

Alysson: I think in our last quarter, we also saw a slight decline in Castleton as well.

Carl Fowler: Castleton was primarily a target for riders in Middlebury who drove down there because there was parking, and it was a station that avoided going to downtown Rutland. When the extension to Middlebury started the local incremental traffic was sucked away. And Rutland, of course also was affected by that. I think if we look consistently, that's probably what's going on in Castleton. One positive for Castleton is, at least for riders who might have wanted to board at Whitehall, NY, on the Adirondack route, Castleton is only about 8 miles from there and at the moment the Adirondack is not running north of Saratoga, so that would be a good station for them to go to. But Castleton is a unique character anyway. It's a privately owned station that gives us the right to use it. But, it doesn't play the role it was playing as being the Middlebury stop.

With regards to the on-time data, I think there was the conflict of the Adirondack at Whitehall, which I think we've gotten resolved now.

Moving on to the Vermonter. We also saw ridership increase in April, May and June for the Vermonter. I see revenue decreased slightly in June. There are some adjustments that were being made with the fare family and that's something Amtrak would need to speak to. They could explain better than I can, but that does explain the slight decrease in revenue in June. Then we did see the increase in ridership for April, we saw an additional 777 passengers and a 3% increase in revenue as compared to April fiscal year 23 May. We saw an increase of 1256 additional passengers and an almost 3% increase in revenue. June, we saw 944 additional passengers and as I mentioned, the slight decrease. It's a 3.5% in revenue as compared to June fiscal year 23. Burlington, Rutland, Middlebury and Vergennes, as well as Castleton to station on time performance, is at 66% so far as compared to 79% in fiscal year 23 June is. At 67% as compared to 77% in June of fiscal year 23.

Dan D.: We've had some weather issues affecting our Vermonter service this year and we've also had construction project in South Royalton. Placing a bridge there, we've had between construction and Mother Nature, it's been a tough haul this summer to be on time for on time performance. Hopefully all that stuff will be put back together and slow orders hopefully will come off as time goes by and more freight can pass over some of the slow order intersections that have been repaired.

Hopefully our on-time performance will improve, and Mother Nature will cooperate.

Montreal Update – Dan Delabruere

I was hoping to have the station report. It is done, but it's in French and it's being translated.

I have gotten a loose verbal translation of the report, but I couldn't tell you exactly what it said because it was all verbal. I don't have anything in writing, but hopefully at our Fall meeting I'll be able to share that report with everyone. It's it seemed like a good report from the highlights I got. There's a couple of

cost estimates in there that are very rough, but you know, they give ballpark, and they talk about. You know what parts of the station are going to be used by whom, and by which agency.

We also have our monthly meetings with, you know, the folks in Quebec and Amtrak in New York and Vermont. We're continuing to make progress on not just the station, but on what's the next steps beyond the station.

So again, another marathon, not a sprint, but we are making forward progress, which is good to see.

Comment by Dan Peacock:

I just wanted to point out some really good news. Amtrak in June of this year put up the reports for the state in a factsheet, which allows people to know what the ridership for individual stations are in Vermont. And it turns out that when you compare the city of the station's ridership between physical year 2022 and 2023, #1 is now Burlington and #2 is Essex Junction, which both serve Burlington. That accounts for over 30% of ridership in the state. It also shows ridership in the state increased. I think it's like 35% between the two. So, that's really good news.

Encouraging news I would share is: I happened to go on to Vermont Vacations and they have a very good write up encouraging people to take the train from New York to Middlebury, New York to Vergennes and in Burlington and they gave a detailed plans for a weekend. I think that's really encouraging because they have very good graphics. So that's all I have to say--it's all good news.

Carl Fowler:

Dan produced a lovely map that combines the information on our two separate train reports onto one and if anyone wants to look at it I'll pass this pass around, but if anybody would like to have a copy, just contact me by e-mail and I'd send it to you and the fact sheets he was talking about are these roughly five pages long. They all come out up to date through FY23 and they are very interesting Amtrak slices and dices the facts differently, no matter how you look, we get ridership reports. Sometimes they are riders North of Springfield. Sometimes they're North of Brattleboro. This one ignores Claremont Junction because it's in a different state, but normally we count that in. But it's interesting and useful, and this also is a document that if anybody hasn't seen it, I can direct you to where they can pass this around as well. And there's another one for New Hampshire, Mass, Connecticut. It's remarkable that the kind of numbers that we're doing, and we have a lot to be proud of.

Amtrak station – Brattleboro update – Amtrak – Ellen Pannell

I believe I made a presentation to you folks back in March of last year. So, it's been over a year since our last update and a lot has been moving forward at Brattleboro. This is a quick update on where we are in a reminder of to everyone how far we've come on this design. I'll start in as a reminder; the Amtrak ADA stations program or as we like to say a DSP is tasked with bringing all the station components for which Amtrak has responsibility into compliance with ADA requirements.

We use 2006 DOTAS as our ADA kind of code that we that we work towards and then we also must use Amtrak station standards and any guidelines by the SHPO for historic aspects. The existing station at Brattleboro. If you're all familiar with, it is served by the Vermonter route. Two trains daily. They're great times of day to visit Brattleboro as far as when they come in and when they leave. Ridership was almost at 17,000 in 2019. It, of course decline through COVID years and is steadily climbing again with

last year. In 2023, we had just over 15,000. The tracks in right away are owned by NECR. There is a main track that rolls through the station and there is a siding track that runs through the station. At the time when we were doing design, that siding track was not active. It was only used by NECR for storage of maintenance equipment. The station building, the parking and all the surrounding property is owned by the town of Brattleboro, and Amtrak utilizes basement space within the Towns Historic Station building for a small waiting room, which has a single occupant restroom and an engineer caretaker room. The current asphalt path platform is currently around 460 feet long. It is at 0 inches above top of rail and is deteriorated if any of you have gotten on and off the train there, it's a big step at the end coming off from the train. Our stakeholders for this design project included VTrans, Town of Brattleboro, NECR Senator Leahy's office, state representative Molly Burke, and Green Mountain power.

A quick snapshot was shared of the existing station North. The layout of the new project was shown. The town demolished an existing structure to provide more parking, so that as we're doing our project along this side, there continues to be town parking available. Our new scope of work at the station will include rebuilding of the existing siding track and switches. That's already been completed. So that's great news.

A new 345-foot-long concrete platform at 48 inches above top of rail, as we like to call "level boarding" with an electric snow melt system, lighting, signage and drainage. This will be Vermont's first level boarding station and all new station building with waiting room, restroom covered outdoor area, engineer room and storage. This is being provided because it we cannot keep having our passengers wait in the towns basement of their historic station building. The project also has 88 parking spaces and a new bike shelter. Once the project is done, existing amenities in the basement of the town's building will be abandoned. Here is a rendering of the new station building and this is looking South here. You can see this is an existing shelter that the town has there. Here's the new station building. It's looking at the large, covered waiting area that has outdoor covered seating. Here's the proposed site plan in red is the new platform level boarding platform. Right behind it is the new station building and darker red. There will be 2 access points with two sets of stairs and two ramps coming up to the 48-inch-high new platform. We'll be redoing all this parking and sidewalks in this area. Once we're done, Amtrak and NECR will own the platform and station building per our agreements together and the town will own and maintain all the area in blue and in order to do this on the town has given Amtrak a permanent easement in order to for us to build this station building. In the actual station building there's a waiting room with about 50 seats, and then there's also additional standing room. There's an engineer room here with a potential for a ticket counter here. If that ever comes back, there's an IT room here in purple, there's a single user toilet room and janitors, closet storage, and electric closets around here. There is covered waiting area with a few benches and the new station design has large overhang, so they're also a couple benches here facing the tracks that are also basically undercover because of the large overhangs.

Here is a close up looking South towards the new station building. There is a new set of steps, new ramp coming up, signage in the in the rear and a new bike shelter and again of course the covered waiting outside seating.

The easement agreement with the town that I mentioned for the station building on their property was executed in March of 2023. All historic approvals were received also in 2023. NEPA approvals, which are associated with those historic approvals, were received earlier this year in May, the siding track

improvements and signal work was completed late 2023 and the construction notice to proceed was given to Enfield Enterprises, they were out of Springfield, MA, on May 20th of this year, and site work started in June.

A public groundbreaking event was held at the end of June, and we are right now projecting substantial completion for January of 2026 and final completion in February 2026. And of course, that is dependent upon weather conditions and any unforeseen conditions that might pop up. Once all these new amenities are completed, the space inside the basement of the historic train station will be given back to the Art Museum.

Carl Fowler:

Will there be any long-range, long-term parking at the depot area when this is completed?

Ellen Pannell:

The parking is provided by the town. It's not Amtrak's responsibility at this station. The town has long term parking in another area of the city of the town, but I don't know if they're going to entertain some long-term parking in the new parking lot that they provided.

Carl Fowler:

The long-term parking is at the parking garage, which is uphill and two full blocks away from the station. Not only is that garage troubled because of homeless problems and other events, but it is a difficult walk for elderly people. You must walk very steeply uphill on a very narrow sidewalk that curves around a corner and then clear multiple flights of stairs. I am acknowledging that it's the town's responsibility, but I would urge Amtrak to try to negotiate at least four or five long term parking spaces that could be controlled by a pass or some sort of ticket with the caretaker. It is really not a good thing if you're parking for more than a day at Brattleboro. And I know in the past people have come very close to being hit by cars trying to walk up to that line. Not to mention now honestly and candidly it is a real security problem in the parking garage.

Ellen Pannell:

I think our representatives for government affairs, both Jane Brophy and Margaret Clark are on the line listening. I think that we can start that conversation with the town. Thank you, Carl.

Dan Peacock:

First, I'd like to thank Amtrak for being willing to build this new station. It's a wonderful gift to the town.

Is it possible that you, or VTrans could make it available because the information in this can be spread far and wide on social media and could encourage even people interested in the construction to come down. You know, their trips and so forth to see what's going on.

Ellen Pannell:

Absolutely. Yeah. I know that Jane and I made several presentations to the town that were public and for the groundbreaking event in June. There was also a press release on that that included all those renderings and those plans. So, this is all public information and if this presentation wasn't already shared with you, I think Chris Nuttall is on the line. He can share that with you as well.

Dan Delabruere:

We'll put it on our website too.

Great job and we are looking forward to another update along the way at some point and we'll put these renderings up on our website.

Amtrak Points and Cash Reward Program Rollout – Amtrak: Valeria Coustasse

My name is Valeria Coustasse, marketing specialist over at Amtrak, and I'll do a quick overview of our newest feature for customers to purchase with.

The new program is called Points and Cash.

Basically, in June of 2024, our Amtrak guest rewards team launched one of the biggest enhancements in the history of the program called Points and Cash, which basically allows members to purchase Amtrak travel using a combination of points and cash. Prior to this, you were only able to use either all your points or all cash for booking. So now we have new, more options and fewer points needed to for customers to be able to purchase on Amtrak. The Points and Cash is only available on amtrak.com and the Amtrak mobile app. So basically, when booking members can select the use points filter and once they go to the payment screen, they'll be presented with four options that they can choose from. Uh, we have already launched the system, so this is available to you. On amtrak.com it goes through the step-by-step process for our customers to be able to use these Points and Cash system when booking. This is an example of what we've already been using to advertise this program. We've used our social media channels. It's on our web and we encourage all of our partners to be able to also put this on their social media channels, their web channels, because it is a win on both sides because we have customers that are already riding and if they're not already signed up for their Amtrak guest rewards and getting those points, we encourage them to do so. Also, on Amtrak.com, the Points and Cash page also has an extensive FAQ section.

For example, "is there a minimum number of points that people can use to do a Points and Cash?"

Yes, you must have a minimum of 100 points when booking.

Another caveat to this program is points and cash bookings cannot be changed or modified after the booking process. However, it can be cancelled so the customer gets those points refunded back to them as well as the cash used for this purchasing this booking.

Another question: "Can I book using Points and Cash with an agent on the phone or at a station?"

Points and cash again is exclusively available on amtrak.com and the Amtrak app. Reservations cannot be made by an agent, but they can assist with canceling a trip booked using the Points and Cash.

Another question: "Will I earn points on points and cash bookings?"

Yes, members can earn points when they use the Points and Cash system.

"Can I add pets, bicycle and any other additional items in my points and cash booking?"

Yes, you can. When searching for travel, you just select the use points filter in your search results.

Then you choose any additional items when making your booking like you normally would, and you can select the dropped out to see your Points and Cash options like I had mentioned before, you'll be presented with four options, and you just follow through with the steps to go to the payment process.

It's a very straightforward program. It's just a new feature that is added that just makes the whole travel experience a whole lot better for our customers.

Project Updates: Paul Libby

My group has been very busy getting projects out so we can get them built in, in constructions and this is this is highlights of a couple of them. One of them, that's part of our FRA build grant, it's in a busy time right now as far as the construction goes. There's a 21-day rail closure going on, which is unheard of you to see them for helping us get that in place. It was initially set up for one bridge 57.5 in Shaftsbury and which is a 60-foot-deep culvert about 145 feet long and it would just it was so massive we had to do an open cut and get in there to get that structure removed and put a new one in. Since we have this closure, we added some more bridges to it to do some more work on other structures at the same time with the reduced train traffic.

On the map you see here there's it shows each structure we're able to include in that closure, or at least do some work on during the 21 days. So, several structures that are all part of that FRA BUILD grant work in advantage of that.

The bridge 57.5 in Shaftsbury I have some fun pictures to share. It's a 60-foot-deep culvert the existing structure it was multiple segments of different material from masonry stone to concrete and there was some steel in there, kind of whatever it took to extend it over the years or to repair it, keep things going.

The before pictures. So, on the left is the outlet and on the right is the inlet side. As we began to prepare, you can see that upper left corner is. That's the inside of the existing old culvert, it's a neat structure, but failing nonetheless.

With this 21-day closure, that's the go time. But before that, there's a lot of work that must happen to prepare your access. Get all your material ready so that when 21 days starts, you can really go fast and do everything you need to do. They're working two 12-hour shifts around the clock. They started on July 31st and their busy since we only have 21 days. But if they push this first few weeks, maybe they don't need all 21. Access roads, staging areas, negotiations with other property owners--all that work had to be kind of ironed out before, before we even bid the project so that we could give the contractors something that was buildable, accessible and constructible all at the same time.

So, a lot of a lot of these pictures initially here show how we got into these sites on the lower right. That's the outlet side and then access Rd. that kind of went down into the hole to get us there up into a field and on the left, this is somebody's driveway that we were able to secure rights, and they have a bit bigger of a driver right now until our projects done. Now on to staging, so this is the box culvert in pieces before the closure starts. So, everything's on site and everything's ready to go. All the prep work happening before we can close the railroad, so we are prepared to do it when the outage begins.

There's an active stream in the existing culvert that has a lot of water in it, and to do work like this, you need to bypass that water around where you're working so that you can work in the dry. So, they have some really big pumps. I think that's an 18-inch pipe that they bypassed the existing stream up over the

tracks adjacent to the work area just to get the water out of the area they need to excavate. And if you if I zoom down this one right here, you could see water coming out of that pipe right there as it's bypassed over the tracks. So substantial amount of water to move to get the site ready. This has been a challenge. They have pumps on site, they have standby pumps and on-site generators. You need redundancy for these types of things to work out, so that if something fails or malfunctions, you can replace it and keep going because you can't afford to stop during a railroad project like this. So, a lot of that was on site before we began and then came the removal of a lot of dirt, as you can see on this upper left picture. That's the tracks and that excavator is sitting right in the middle of where the tracks would be, and he is hogging out that material (technical term) and moving all that dirt to get us prepared down to the existing culvert and remove everything that's step one. Essentially, once they started excavating, you can see the bypass pipe around their work over on this right-hand picture as they just start moving a massive amount of material.

Some more pictures of excavation, and the long access road. You can kind of get a sense of how deep this is starting to become with the banks on each side. This is the actual track up above so you can picture the tracks that are going overhead here. Prior to that excavation. Preparing so again, the working around the clock, so at in the dark a lot of lights and making sure that you can be safe and be seen during night construction.

Uh, so the box culvert was in was in segmented pieces, and each one was cast separately, and it's basically you put one piece at a time and with a crane. So, they began setting a large stone pad they had to build first in order to have a solid base underneath the concrete. They're four-sided boxes. So, sometimes there's a box, culverts that are three sided where the bottom might be earth. But this is four-sided with baffles in it that will be filled in with some larger stone when it's complete and that promotes different activities such as, velocity reduction of flow, aquatic organism passage. Just some different factors that go into the design of that structure besides water rushing through it.

So, you can kind of see there's a head wall on one side, on the upper side here. There are some retaining walls we're going to build on each side.

So, all these great plans? You know, put in place and then you know, things like this happen. Mother Nature said, we're going to give you a little rain. This was 3-4 days or something. It was one of the one of the many storms we've had. It's hard to know. Somebody earlier said the month, the weekly rain, the weekly flood, and it kind of feels like that sometimes, but this crew was determined and they pumped it out. They were able to redirect the water through the new structure already for overflow and excess storage to relieve some of the high the high areas before they're even done building it. You can see some of the retaining walls on the side here are starting to be to be built up to retain that large bank we're about to put back.

Massive backfilling operations began today, so it's probably buried by now, and you can't see it any longer. They're off to a good start. Hopefully the rain holds off and lets us keep the momentum.

It's going to look a lot different and probably the next Rail Council meeting we're going to do another overall presentation of all the BUILD grant bridges because it will be even more complete by then.

Dan:

Kyle and Renee have worked hard on this build project. They're highlighting just one of the many bridges that are going on right now. So, thank you and well done.

Comment:

That's quite a project to highlight. I live about a mile from that and it's a massive there was a massive taking. It really is and the coordination of everything the cranes arriving at the right time and all that sort of stuff was just very impressive. A lot of planning for this project. I got to tell you. Remarkable accomplishment.

Storm Damage update: Dan Delabruere

A little storm damage again this year, and VTrans worked too, but VRS, VRS again got it done. It's really something, and Seldon and I were probably on the phone about every 20 minutes talking about a new problem, a new solution.

In the beginning of July, it started raining, and we had a lot of rain quickly. We had Hurricane Beryl that came down this year. It hit our rail system in different locations than it did the previous year. This year, majority of our damage was central and northeast, so the little WACR got it again here in Montpelier. But not as bad this year. The big WACR, the Connecticut River line, is the line that took it the hardest. The NECR, they took it hard in the Middlesex area. They did a fantastic job putting their railroad back together.

But let's talk about the state system. A little background, a little history on what happened.

Here's the rainfall amounts. We had about 6 inches of rain, and if you look at the map, it's just basically where on state infrastructure that kind of shows where the major damage was in red. We logged 104 sites, but we then consolidated them into 74 project sites. We consolidated a couple that were, you know, some that were close enough together and make it into one site, but there were 104 actual damage locations that we recorded. Next, what that looked like on the map you can see in the blue. That's the Connecticut River line in the northeast portion of the map. The NECR is this other section West. In the central is the Little WACR, which never officially really closed, but it had enough damage where you couldn't really use it. There you got to do some work just to get trains across it, that was put back together by VRS quickly. The little WACR was reopened just a few days later, July 13th, and it never really closed officially.

The NECR, they had some very large washouts, and they quickly put theirs back together they were back open on the 23rd of July and that was amazing. The WACR Connecticut River line was back open to full trains on the 28th. And then another round of storms happened on the 29th.

Vermont has submitted request for FEMA assistance. We have not gotten our official declaration from FEMA yet for the July 10th Storm. We have to meet the criteria per county. That's how it works. You put your damage assessments in per county to see sure you qualify.

We had about we're estimating about \$6 million on the July 10th storm, and then an additional half million on July 29th. These are these are ballpark numbers on the initial damage assessments.

So, what we do is we team up with VRS and we get in the high rail trucks, and we start going out and we start measuring and looking at sites. And putting them in a Collector app which tracks all the sites.

So, this is a couple of pictures. So, the left is last year's storm. OK, so that's the damage we had last year. And then just to point out how resilient we, we did a great job last year because this year's storm water came up again, but it held together. So that armoring of the bank the water is almost up to that's Bridge 307 and that similar water level last year eroded that whole bank. But this year held together. So just wanted to show the work we did last year in some cases, most cases held together.

But in some cases, we had damage to the exact same sites. We have some vulnerable sites. This is just east of the yard and Barre. So again, the little WACR wasn't as bad. We had, you know, there's a big site we had last year. This year, we got to fix a little bit of the outlet area. So that's the kind of stuff we had not nearly as bad as last year. And stuff like this, This is one of the sites we get almost every single time. It's right in Barre right next to the road. And then up on the hill, we had some washouts coming down the hill, so again, not nearly as bad as last year. I think that's it for the little WACR. We had a bunch of just a bunch of silt and other things we didn't show pictures of, but there was minor stuff that we had to clean up.

Alright, the big WACR...

So, the storm was coming. I knew the storm was coming. So, I sent my drone team out the day before and I said, can you just give me some before and after and this on the left is the day before the storm and then this is July 10th. You can see in a day how much water was added to that floodplain just in one day. Railroads follow the low areas and that's where all the water ends up.

We had a lot of high water, some areas, you know in the Coventry area, this is what it does. It comes way up. And then it slowly goes back down. So, this is this water coming up and that's what we were hoping it stayed there. It did. Other debris underneath the bridges, and up against the bridges, so this is the stuff we had kind of clean up. More of the same.

And then the next one is you can see there's the water, one of the bridges is so see how high that water is. It's really at the bridge and then all the debris just gets caught in it. Alright, so some of the major sites we can start going up in Sutton. We had quite a few sites in Sutton up on the hill. We had some culverts wash out, so quite a few of these.

Here's one of the bigger ones in Barnett, and you can see Route 5 right above it that got washed out as well. Basically, the water came down the road, it went kind of around our culvert on the railroad, washed out completely on one side of it and tracks were hanging in the air, as you can see to the left there. Next, that's the same spot that's down closer. Looking back up the track, there's a culvert in there, but the water went around it. Again, a lot of high water over the tracks, lots of these washouts.

And here's the big one at milepost 51.5 in Barnett and quite a large section that was just gone there. It was I think it was a 4 by 6 culvert that was just completely gone, totally gone. Nothing left of it. This is VRS, with some contractors help, but a lot of VRS forces here. We had our engineer design the new one so it won't happen again. It was a four by six that was there. This is a 12 foot round culvert. That's what the hydraulics analysis told us should be there.

So, that's about, I don't know, one or two 2 1/2 weeks in there on the left or two weeks in on the left and we're about 3 weeks in on the right, ready for trains again. So there it is put back together with a lot of work by the VRS in their crew and contractors.

Another one that was a smaller culvert that the water just went around. It just completely eroded it and went around it.

That's it.

So again, a big thank you to Selden. They did a really fantastic job putting this thing all back together.

My team was out recording this, monitoring it, putting all the information that we need it for FEMA so that you know, hopefully the declaration comes in. When, with the federal reimbursement for some of this damage, again that was about \$6,000,000. We don't have actual costs right now, but know it's quite a bit damage.

And again, on the 29th, we had another storm that was focused more St. Johnsbury area. You saw one picture in there in the yard. A lot of unplanned construction work this summer putting railroads back together.

Question from guest:

So, when this kind of thing happens, what doesn't happen?

Dan: You know you have to shift. I mean, you have to shift the human and financial resources.

Question from guest: So what? What it's put on the back burner?

Dan:

Well, this one was tough for us because we had this 21-day closure that was coming up on the southwestern side of the state. A little bit of our staff sort of stretched a little thin. We worked some long days. We got it done, you know, I can't say enough about my team. When something like this happens, it's all hands-on deck and you know, we worked weekends and long days, and you know we got it done.

Operation Lifesaver Updates: Allyson Kilbride

Operation Lifesaver, things are certainly going great. I've been traveling around a lot to different events to schools, drivers ed classes. It's been really a lot of fun to get to chat with the public and students. I do have some pictures here to share. This is Renee and I at the National Summer Transportation Institute camp for high schoolers. We both gave two presentations there. Renee's presentation was on rail projects, the flooding, a little bit of history, things like that. And mine was Operation Lifesaver related.

I've got some photos of a booth I set up. This is at the cornerstone community Centers block party in Hartford. There were a couple 100 people there and I would say probably 30 or so stopped at the booth to ask questions. It's really amazing how many people will share with you the ways that collisions have impacted them. I think it's an important part of the program to get out there and speak with folks.

We have a couple events upcoming. Champlain Valley Fair is huge for us, Perry Martel says there's probably between 300 to 500 visitors at the booth each day, so we have 10 days of that and I'm pretty excited to get to connect with a lot of people there. We also have "see tracks, think train" week coming up at the end of September. So, we've got a bunch of things happening.

Also want to share with you that we're attempting to grow our social media following on our Instagram here. We have 49 followers, but I did just start this, so we're hopefully growing a bit and these are the posts that I make a couple times a week. So, if you would like to follow us on Instagram or at Operation Lifesaver of Vermont Facebook Operation Lifesaver of Vermont and our x-profile is lifesaver of Vermont.

We could always use some more followers and support. Our latest Instagram reel has over 3400 views last time I checked. One post I am explaining how brakes work. It was kind of fun and I certainly have a good time going out and taking videos.

Also, our mobile message board is on tour. Right now, it's that old Colchester Rd. which is in Essex. I'm just trying to raise some awareness about how to operate vehicles during when you're driving over crossings. It will be headed to the Champlain Valley fair on the first day. Got a few different locations around the state so it should be touring for the next couple months, and we'll probably put it away before snow flies.

And as always, we could certainly use some more volunteers. We have a few very engaged volunteers that I'm so thankful for and our board as well is fantastic, but if you know anyone who would like to go out and spread the word about rail safety, we are always open to new folks.

Charles Hunter:

We did have our railroads all donate to Operation Life Saver Vermont. They're proud and happy to support the organization with a check.

Chris:

Chris spoke of the concern over encampments on or near the rail tracks/tresses. And both railroads and VTrans commented on different tactics being employed to try to keep all safe and the amount of money and time it takes to address.

Statewide Rail Plan: Zoe Neaderland (AOT) and Jim Brogan (RSG, Inc)

We're starting with the rail plan, and we'll again do a coordinated update of the rail plan and the freight plan. I'm going to introduce the two people who will be participating in this presentation in just a moment. I want to say we will refresh everything as required by FRA and we will of course fully meet FRA requirements. But in addition, they're variety of Vermont-specific issues that we want to address, including expanding the very well-regarded transportation resilience planning tool that VTrans developed for our roads and structures to rail. You'll hear more about it. And we'll look forward as technology is shifted over these last couple of years to making an easier and more friendly visualization, communication, and access to all of this important work because you know that rail and freight are essential, exciting, fascinating and deserve more interest.

With that, I would like to invite Jim Brogan to come up on the screen and introduce John Sleezer. Dave Pelletier regrets said he's not able to be here. He'll be my partner in this work as well.

Jim Brogan:

We've just started our update effort here and we've been at it for the last couple months. So just want to share an overview of our scope, schedule, and outreach approach. And get your feedback on that to the degree we have time. There are a handful of very specific Vermont issues, some of which we heard

about today. We want to make sure we're including those in the update and then we've done some initial analysis, data analysis. Again, very high level. I just kind of want to share some initial results with you, but just kind of get you up to speed about what this this effort is and how we want to interact with you over the next several months.

So, what is this thing? A lot of you probably were involved in the previous update. We're taking a similar approach as you probably know, the FRA and Federal Highway Administration require an update of the rail and freight plans every four years to gain access to funding through a grant funding and on the highway side to get access to Formula Funds. So, the rail plan, just like last time rail plan covers both freight and intercity passenger services. The freight plan covers all the freight modes. They're happening just like last time. They're happening on slightly different schedules, but they'll be tightly coordinated. We're starting with the rail plan that one is due in July of next year. On the freight plan will kind of come right on the heels of that. But again, as for those of you that were involved the last time, we're taking a very similar approach. And particularly you know there are a lot of elements that it'll just be shared across both efforts, particularly on the stakeholder outreach side, on the evaluation of existing conditions and future conditions, visions, goals, trends, analysis, et cetera. We'll be doing that effort once and we'll be sharing the results of those across both plans. So, we won't be coming to you more than we will be coming to you two or three times asking you for the same information. Obviously, we want to respect your time, but make sure we're getting access to the expertise that's around the room to feed both of those plans.

John and Zoe will be sticking around afterwards as well. So, moving on, one of the things that federal railroad requires is a description of goals. These again, for those of you that were around the last update, these are what we were planning on carrying over the goals we came up with last time. We still believe that there's still relevant. We believe that there's still appropriate.

You can see we are early in this in the project.

Dan:

Today's purpose was just to kick it off, have you guys introduced, and introduced us to your process. As you can all see, there's going to be many opportunities to give your input and that's, you know, that's what we look for to this Council to do. You guys are the experts, and we want your opinion.

So yeah, there will be many opportunities and again this slide presentation will be in our folder. You can access this contact page if you have questions about today's presentation or any of the ones that are coming up and do this. This will be on the agenda for our November 12th meeting. Because they'll be again, this is the kickoff and they'll we'll start talking about some real information on November 12th. Between now and then, there might be some interaction individually on some of this stuff, so don't be surprised if folks reach out to some of you. So anyway, it's up again. There's more to come. This is really the kickoff, but it's exciting to do a new rail plan because our last rail plan, if you look at everything that was in there, we've accomplished a lot of that. So, let's you know see what's next. So, kind of exciting anyway. Thank you, guys. Thank you, Zoe, for leading that charge. Looking forward to this process.

Dan:

Alright, we have about 6 minutes for public input or anything that if not on the agenda, anybody can make a brief statement that we didn't talk about.

Jake Twarog

Hello. I just wanted to make a brief, uh comment about the rail plan update and sort of want to express my thoughts about just the importance of the Winooski Spur, the NECR between Burlington and Essex Junction.

And just if you look at the numbers as we've seen the Ethan Allen Express, especially the extension, it has reason dramatically in popularity, even eclipsing the Vermonter in terms of like passenger growth between last year and this year. I would definitely would like to figure out some way that we can get that as a higher priority in the next row plan compared with the previous one as being able to extend both routes to Montreal simultaneously would be very important and I imagine if you speak with the public and stakeholders, they would love to be able to get to between downtown Burlington and other stations along the Ethan Allen Express directly to Montreal. So, I just wanted to add that early in the process.

Dan: I can tell you that the Burlington Essex piece is definitely in our plan to evaluate.

Jake Twarog: Great. Thank you.

David Wulfson

Hello everyone, I've been listening. It's been an interesting meeting. I just want to second Sheldon's comments from earlier about appreciating how closely that VTrans worked with us on the recovery from these floods. And it's really amazing what we can all do together when we put our heads to it.

Two comments from learning from the experience which I hope can add into maybe possibly some of this rail corridor study and maybe even to total transportation is first, I think it's worthwhile doing now an advance hydraulic study on some of the state's infrastructure so that if and when there is an issue , we don't have to start from scratch on hydraulics because that burns up time and in an emergency. Whether that's part of the transportation plan or the rivers and streams, I don't know. Second, as everyone says, you know, global warming and the storms are getting worse and all this. OK, well, I'm not going to argue about that. However, I do know that our rivers and streams are filling in. And until we somehow can clean them out in proper locations, we are never going to solve our flooding problems. They will get worse and worse and worse. It's just like the fat guy jumping in a full bathtub. That's what's happening and that's the way it is. And with that you can picture what's happening, but what I mean is all the thousands and thousands of tons that we've all put in to fill all these holes all around the state, that's all in the rivers and streams right now and nobody even cares. So, I'm just throwing that out there for the record cause until we deal with that issue, it's never going to get better. Thank you for your time.

Dan:

Probably the best comment I've heard in a long time. Uh, so just briefly on that, we have talked, we have talked to a little bit about just. You were mentioning hydraulic analysis. We have talked about doing some resiliency analysis as far as that of preempting some of this stuff on vulnerable areas.

Dan: Anybody else?

Joe Flynn:

Yes, Dan. I'd like to just say that I think for the record, it's appropriate to just mention Brian Searles.

Obviously, he passed away since the prior meeting. I wasn't able to attend because I had COVID that week, so I don't know what his celebration of life was like. I know, Michelle said it was very nice and I think everybody knows Brian's history and several of you probably know it better than I do. But not only does he go back a long way in service to the state of Vermont, starting with Governor Dean, but Brian from that point forward has been passionate about rail, served as Transportation Secretary twice, among other duties for state government, was still working with us when he died, as some of you know. The Shumlin administration had kept him on as a consultant of Brian's contacts go deep Amtrak at that time was run by a former head of an airline, and Brian knew that gentleman personally when he ran the Burlington Airport as its director.

So anyway, I just think it's the right thing to do. I feel bad that I couldn't attend the gathering. And maybe I'll just leave you with this because I don't know if it was a storytelling affair or not.

And as I thought about it before I got COVID. I thought you know how well are you going to sort of bridle yourself, Joe? But I first met Brian when he was a brand-new cop in South Burlington, and I was in high school at a keg party. I'll leave it there.

And then when I first came to work for VTrans, I was working for Trini Brassard in the corner, and Scott Rogers and I was the new hire for the rail program. It was a guy named Jim Dinehart with Amtrak, and Jim was really firing me up about marketing. So, one day I went to the Burlington airport. I didn't know Brian was the director, and there's this big empty wall right there by the TSA checkpoint where everybody's in line. So, we bought the space, and we put in the Amtrak train on the wall. I think it was Yipes that did it for us and the tagline said: "Leave on your belt. Leave on your shoes. Come on through. Sit back and relax."

Well, I get a call from Senator Mazen. What are you doing? And then I get a call from Brian Searles. Well, Brian reminded me of that when I when he became the Transportation Secretary under Governor Shumlin, and I was just hoping I would still have a job after Governor Douglas left. But we always had a great report that the ad worked well, but the airport didn't like it anyway.

He was a fine guy. As you all know and he will be dearly missed. Officially, you know, especially as a secretary, I think it's strange. I think this way when I walked by the picture of David Dill in the hall out here. And his service to his state had multiple roles, including St. Albans city manager. The head of the police Academy. The head of the criminal Justice Training Council, serving on the criminal Justice Training Council appointed by Governor Scott.

I just feel that that should be said at this meeting, and thank you for hearing me.

7) Next Scheduled Meeting

Next Meeting: November 12th, 2024, 1 PM – 3 PM

Fully intending to have an in-person meeting room for that meeting in this same room.

8) Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 PM.