

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
5<sup>th</sup> FLOOR BOARD ROOM  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
August 14, 2013**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Brian Searles (Chairman)  
Joann Erenhouse Carl Fowler  
Chris Andreasson Dave Allaire  
Charles Hunter Charlie Moore  
Alan Cook Rick Moulton  
Chris Andreasson MaryAnne Michaels for Dave Wulfson

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Chris Cole, VTrans  
Dan Delabruere, VTrans  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans  
Costa Pappis, VTrans  
Mladen Gagulic, VTrans  
Stephen Smith, VTrans  
Lawrence Donna, VTrans  
Christopher Bolen, VTrans  
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans  
Erik Filkorn, VTrans  
Mark Fitzgerald, VTrans  
Aaron Wiener, VTrans  
J. Jeffrey Munger, Senator Sanders Office  
Charles Hunter, G&WRR  
Christopher Parker, VRAN  
Matt Levin, VCE  
Jan Okolowicz, Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Caroline Ducas, Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Lisa Destro, Cambridge Systematics  
Andreas Aeppli, Cambridge Systematics  
Evan Lowell, Transsystems  
Allison Demag, Lobbyist/RR of Vermont  
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak  
Bill Hollister, Amtrak  
Kath Tart-Whelan

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**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

Chairman Brian Searles called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM. Introductions were made.

**2. Public Comments**

Chris Parker invited all to attend the Vermont Rail Action Committee meeting on October 23, 2013 at 5:30 PM at Hotel Coolidge in White River Junction. Dave Allaire disclosed he is the treasurer of said organization.

### **3. Approval of Minutes**

*May 7, 2013*

**MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to approve the 5/7/13 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

### **4. Track III Updates**

The Track III bi-state passenger train study advocates consolidating grade crossings between Bennington and Rutland. Vermont has indicated that this will be very controversial because the area is rural. The FRA is fine with the crossings, but there are many crossings operationally. There was discussion of the route into Albany, Mechanicville or Schenectady (Schenectady is the route) and the future relationship with the railroads involved.

### **5. TIGER 5 Grant Application**

No news from the Department of Transportation on TIGER grants. The state applied for a grant for the continuous welded rail project on the western corridor (\$8.2 million). The TIGER program will continue under a continuing resolution.

### **6. Report of Kick-Off of State Rail Plan**

A presentation on the procedure to be followed with update of the state rail plan was given by Jan Okolowicz with Parsens Brinckerhoff, consultant doing the plan update. Sub-consultants include Cambridge Systematics and Fitzgerald & Halliday. Mr. Okolowicz noted the following:

- Vermont has a state rail plan and a rail capital investment policy plan.
- Vermont was visionary in prioritizing programs and policies.
- Work on the plan is proceeding on suggested guidelines from the FRA in light of no receipt of FRA guidance.
- Forty-two states have done or are in the process of doing a rail plan. The FRA wants lots of data and performance metrics as well as coordination with other states.
- A state rail plan is mandated for federal funding.
- Challenges include:
  - Changing priorities
  - Improving short line railroads (the number of short lines is increasing)
  - Coordinating with other states with planning efforts
  - Emergency plans for storm events
  - Integration with state freight plans
  - Prioritizing projects and identifying benefits
  - Coordinating with other state/local planning
  - Implementation plan and leveraging resources
  - Funding sources
- Issues include;
  - Impacts on rail service (transportation, economic, environmental)
  - Homeland Security safety/security requirements
  - PRIIA funding for passenger rail service

- Rail property leases
- Marketing rail services
- Capital priority initiatives (286,000 pound rail capacity, double-stack clearance, passing tracks)
- Determination regarding maintaining and sustaining state owned lines and what are the options (sell, public/private partnership, other)
- Data will be compiled for freight and passenger service from the Surface Transportation Board, Federal Highway, Amtrak, Vermont studies and survey, stakeholders, and economic information.
- Public meetings and reportings will be held.
- Target completion date is September/October 2014.
- Vermont Agency of Commerce will be involved with the rail plan because there is a significant economic development component in the plan.
- A national rail plan is not expected to be complete any time soon.

Carl Fowler observed ridership north of Springfield is different than south of Springfield (northern connection to the Connecticut River line) and asked if the plan assumes the extent and shape of the rail network as the basis for discussion. Jan Okolowicz confirmed this.

Charles Hunter urged involving the railroads in the plan update. Costa Pappis stated there are meetings and interviews set up with the railroads to find out what is important to operate the freight business and what is needed to maintain competitiveness.

Rick Moulton commented the Connecticut state plan synergy is good. Massachusetts should also be included. Jan Okolowicz said Massachusetts has a plan. Costa Pappis clarified Massachusetts has lots of plans for commuter service, specifically linkage to the New Haven route. The upgrades will benefit Vermont. New York is also doing lots of work which will dovetail with work on the western corridor. Jan Okolowicz mentioned the northeast corridor future planning process will be looked at as part of the Vermont state plan.

Carl Fowler noted the plan sets up future funding requests, but is not exclusionary so future corridor design can be mentioned, but there are short term plans to address. Chris Cole stated the Rail Council needs to weigh in on the best way to achieve the mission and the vision of the plan for freight and passenger rail and whether it is best for the state to continue to own all or some rail lines.

Costa Pappis said there will be a website with updates on the progress of the plan. Feedback is needed from the advisory committee which is the Rail Council.

## **7. Passenger Topics**

*Amtrak – Ridership & Revenue Report*

Bob Atchinson highlighted:

- Ridership on the Vermonter is up 2.57%. Revenues are up 5.8%.
- The Ethan Allen Express ridership is lagging behind a bit. Revenues are up 2%.

- On time performance for the Vermonter is 63% and 75% for the Ethan Allen Express. On time performance is slightly better than last year.

Carl Fowler commented there has not been a single day since March 2013 that the southbound Amtrak train from Essex Junction to Brattleboro has been on time until the train gets to Springfield. Mr. Fowler submitted a suggested timetable change that will produce on time performance with the train and suggested staff work with Amtrak on the matter. Bill Hollister, Amtrak, noted Amtrak has a scheduling group that can review the information and communicate with the host railroad (New England Central). The consensus of the Rail Council is to provide the information to Amtrak via Bill Hollister for consideration.

#### *Bikes on Trains – Amtrak Demo*

Dan Delabruere reported a bike demonstration train was run on the Vermonter on July 17, 2013 and the Ethan Allen Express on July 24-25, 2013. Good feedback was received. Amtrak is compiling the information into a report. Bill Hollister explained the retrofitting of the café car for the bike service demonstration in Vermont, and New York (Albany to Canada train and Albany to Niagara Falls). A financial analysis will be done on the cost to equip baggage cars with bike racks on the Adirondacks. Amtrak will meet with the state to discuss implementation and cost. Carl Fowler suggested baggage cars rather than the café car be retrofitted for bikes and checked baggage at stations should be reinstated rather than carry on into the cars. Dan Delabruere said the survey responses said the same.

Chris Andreasson asked if the ticket system can handle bikes. Bill Hollister replied there are some Amtrak routes with bike trains in operation now.

#### *PRIIA Update*

Dan Delabruere reported:

- Progress is being made, though slowly. The process is complicated. Each line item is being reviewed.
- The October deadline is looming.
- Vermont continues to work with Connecticut and Massachusetts on the language in the agreement.
- Negotiations on a draft agreement continue with New York for the Ethan Allen Express train.

Carl Fowler mentioned the work on the six car platform in Waterbury. Chris Cole said this is part of the Amtrak nationwide program. Bill Hollister added a waiver from the FRA was received because the platform is on a freight line and the work is rehabilitation, not new structure. Carl Fowler asked if the same will be done in Brattleboro where the platform is no longer safe. Jeff Munger stated ADA mandates control Brattleboro. More funding will not be forthcoming. Carl Fowler interjected the law needs to be changed, but it was noted Federal Transportation takes a broad view to civil rights with states who accept transportation money.

Joann Erenhouse asked for an update on Operation Lifesaver in Vermont. The item will be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

## **8. Freight Rail Topics**

### *Bridge Management Program*

Staff reported:

- Inspection of 147 of 165 bridges is complete. Load ratings are done on 45% of the bridges. By FY2014 another 15% will be done. The information will be incorporated into the state rail plan and posted on the website.
- Compliance to the FRA mandate for annual inspection is required or fines will be incurred. Rail lines can be shut down with repeated noncompliance.
- A “snooper” truck with an arm and basket allows inspection of the bridge from the truck on the track above. The 2013 budget included a snooper truck. VTrans is in the process of obtaining a snooper truck for the bridge inspection team within the Rail Section. Doing inspections in-house will save money. VTrans will be able to assist Vermont Rail Systems and other rail companies with inspections as well.

### *TIGER IV Project Updates*

Charles Hunter, G&W, reported on progress with the TIGER IV project between St. Albans and the Canadian border. The agreement is signed. A load of welded rail is on route for delivery August 19, 2013. There will be 31 miles of welded rail (18,500 cross-ties and bridge timbers are ordered). The project should be complete by next year.

Carl Fowler asked about service to other freight lines, such as WACR. Charles Hunter said help was offered by the railroad.

## **9. GIS**

Stephen Smith demonstrated the GIS interactive map and data tool providing information on rail lines, crossings, and bridges in the state. The “dashboard” tool allows real time data analysis from the field to identify suboptimal assets or damage from storms. The tools are vital for effective asset management. Property management can use the dashboard software and with the interactive maps see where encroachments are occurring. The technology will be used by rail and highway.

Charlie Moore asked about liability exposure if there is a picture showing poor sight distance at a crossing. Aaron Wiener, VTrans, explained approaches to improve visibility of a crossing include advance warning signs, additional warnings, material for the crossing surface, and reflectivity of signage. Mladen Gagulic added when deficiencies are encountered follow up is done with the responsible party.

A test run of the GIS system in a storm emergency was done to determine how quickly data can be sent to the appropriate people and how quick the response is. Vermont Rail Systems assisted in the test. Dan Delabruere commended the Rail Section for implementation of the technology which has been developed in only a year and will continue to be used going forward.

**10. Rail Construction Program Updates**

Staff reported the following:

- Mark Fitzgerald and Chris Bolan from the Property Management Division are handling 400 leases throughout the state. It is hope to increase the revenue generated (\$405,000) as encroachments are identified and more leases written.
- The 2014 budget includes proceeding with the purchase of the White River Jct. station.
- Bridge Maintenance work includes 27 bridge projects for 2013-14, crossing maintenance work from complaints received (cost of approximately \$400,000), FEMA projects, LVRT work, power washing bridges and abutments to remove accumulated material and extend the life of the bridges.

**11. Legislative Update**

Brian Searles mentioned staff is thinking about priorities, changes to policies and statutes for the upcoming legislative session. Forward comments to Chris Cole.

**12. Other Business/Next Meeting**

Next Meeting: November 13, 2013 in Montpelier, 1 PM – 4 PM.

Agenda Items: Update on Operation Lifesaver

**13. Adjournment**

**MOTION** by Rick Moulton, **SECOND** by Charlie Moore, to adjourn the meeting.

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:36 PM.

*RScty: M.E.Riordan*