

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
5th FLOOR BOARD ROOM
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
June 27, 2012**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Brian Searles (Chairman)
Dave Allaire Charlie Moore
Jan Eastman Carl Fowler
Chris Andreasson Alan Cook
Charles Hunter Michele Boomhower
Mary Ann Michaels for Dave Wulfson

OTHERS PRESENT: Chris Cole, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Scott Bascom, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Mladen Gagulic, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Guy Tapper, VTrans
Mike Fessel, VTrans
Kyle Daniels, VTrans
Daniel Stein, VHB Engineering
Chris Parker, VRAN
Matt Levin, Vermonters for a Clean Environment
J. Jeff Munger, Sen. Sander's Office
Ted Brady, Sen. Leahy's Office
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Brad Worthen, VRAN
Herb Russell, legislature

1. Call to Order & Introductions

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

2. Public Comments

There were no comments from the public at this time.

3. Approval of Minutes

April 4, 2012

MOTION by David Allaire, SECOND by Michele Boomhower, to approve the 4/4/12 minutes with the following correction(s)/clarification(s):

Page 2, Item #6, Track 1 – change “70 mph” to “79 mph” and “telemetry car” to “geometry car”;

Page 3, first paragraph – change “FAA” to “FRA”.

VOTING: all ayes except one abstention (Michele Boomhower); motion carried.

4. Rail Personnel Update

Chris Cole reported:

- Advertisement is being done for a GIS technician, rail bridge engineer, and project manager in the Rail Section.
- J.B. McCarthy has accepted a position in Operations to work on FEMA and federal highway projects.
- Dan Delabruere accepted the permanent position of Rail Director.

5. Passenger Topics

Amtrak Montreal Rail Connection

- Momentum is picking up on the Montreal connection. Several meetings in Washington, DC in support of the preclearance facility have been held. Thanks are extended to the Congressional delegation for the support.
- July 10, 2012 is a conference call with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding the customs clearance process in Montreal and types of businesses in and out of the facility.
- DHS report due by July 30, 2012.
- VTrans is working on the issue of crew changes with the partners in Quebec.
- Track speed is mostly 50 mph with some sections faster and other sections slower.
- The schedule will likely be an extension of the current Vermonter schedule. Amtrak has proposed a night train which has good performance, but low ridership.

Amtrak Marketing

- The on-board survey will be out late summer/early fall for feedback on Amtrak service.
- Destination based marketing and coordinating marketing with functions in downtown areas is being done.
- Escape Maker had 18,000 hits in the last six weeks so the site is working.
- A long term plan for VTrans and Vermont Tourism and Marketing money to avoid duplication is being developed.
- A photo campaign of what is being done with Amtrak and towns on the route is being pulled together.

Carl Fowler mentioned his positive experience with Amtrak e-tickets, but noted difficulty in linking to the Vermonter fares from the Amtrak website. Chris Cole noted Erik Filkorn is working with Deb Sanderson on a promotional page.

Amtrak Ridership and Revenue Report Highlights

- Ethan Allen Express ridership and revenues are up over last year's numbers. Vermonter ridership numbers are down slightly from last year.
- On time performance for both trains is good. Construction in New York is impacting the later Ethan Allen Express train.

Kevin Chittenden reported there is a 12 mile section with a speed restriction on the CP railroad scheduled for repair in July after which there should be an improvement in travel time.

Amtrak Personnel Update

- Amtrak is doing a 13 month reorganization to be complete by October, 2013.

Vermont Schedule

- Amtrak is still working on the train schedule. There will be time taken out of the schedule when the track work is complete.
- Amtrak is looking for a slot in the Metro North corridor.

Carl Fowler mentioned reducing the delay time on the westbound train of the Lakeshore Limited. Eastbound there is not much flexibility.

Vermont Products on Amtrak

- As of June 10, 2012 the Vermonter café car will sell Long Trail Ale and Madhouse Munchies.

6. Grant Updates

Track I

Charles Hunter, NECR, reported the Track I high speed rail project is on schedule and on budget. Tie work is done. Ballast, surfacing, and bridge upgrade work (286,000 pound) to be done.

Track III

The consultant will be sending the Phase 2 Alternative Analysis in July. There will be a link on the website. Feedback is needed now. The FRA approved the tactical memorandum. NEPA document is anticipated.

TIGER IV

Charles Hunter reported NECR received a Tiger IV grant for ties, rail, bridge upgrade, and speed upgrade. Heavy freight shippers in Vermont will benefit from the work. NECR put in \$3 million matching funds for the local share.

Brian Searles mentioned only 3% of the TIGER applications were approved nationwide and NECR's application was in that group. Both freight and passenger rail service will benefit from the upgrades. Chris Cole recognized the work on the grant by Costa Pappis who worked with all partners to create a roadmap to success.

7. Rail Construction Program Updates for 2012

A handout was provided showing projects under construction, on-going repair work from Tropical Storm Irene, and projects to go out to bid. Mladen Gagulic noted:

- Repair work from Tropical Storm Irene continues, including work on Bridges 130, 114, and 501.

- Regular projects in the construction phase are proceeding as planned.
- Western corridor funds have been adjusted into this year's budget for continuous welded rail work (location to be determined; there is 38 miles of stick rail between Rutland and Burlington that need upgrade). The project will go to bid this year for construction next year.
- Filling vacancies in the Rail Section will be very helpful.
- There are eight projects from the Pavement Program addressing nine railroad crossings.
- Staff is proactively working with the railroads and towns on public at-grade crossings so the conditions are known.
- On the D&H rail trail projects the abutments are brought to minimum design to hold a fire truck.

Dan Delabruere stated the approach by the Rail Section is to deliver better, quicker, and use funds more efficiently so more projects can be done. There was discussion of Bridge 219. Dan Delabruere said the project is being reviewed to target resources to meet goals which include a safe and secure surface for freight and passenger service on the western corridor at 286,000 pound minimum, and bringing passenger rail service to Burlington. Actions by Congress and the state legislature with regard to funding can impact programs. Costa Pappis mentioned there is uncertainty with smaller recurring grants for rail realignment, stabilization, and FHWA crossings.

Matt Levin asked about traffic on the rail line in Montpelier. Chris Cole said discussion is ongoing with the railroad on plans to move product (stone). Plans are being developed jointly. There are no contracts in place presently that require immediate action.

It was noted the Amtrak geometry car is expected to assess the rail line in July, 2012. The results could cause a shift in the rail project programming.

8. Bridge Management Program Update

- There is \$50 million in projects.
- FRA requires annual safety inspection of bridges or there is a \$100,000 fine. The state has over 200 bridges.
- A bridge management program must be in place by September. VTrans will manage the bridge program with a bridge inspector and engineer.
- A consultant will be hired to compile data on bridges. An FRA inspector will review the data.
- Evaluation of the inspection data could cause some shifts in programming.

9. State Rail Plan Comments

Feedback from the Rail Council is requested on the draft scope of work for the rail plan update. The 2006 Rail Plan needs to be updated with current data and conditions. Staff did not apply for FRA planning funds to cover the cost to update the state rail plan to avoid jeopardizing grants for larger projects.

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charles Moore, that the Rail Council offer services to advise on the development of the state rail plan.

DISCUSSION: Costa Pappis noted a few more consultants may be added to the advisory committee.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

Jan Eastman suggested adding a plan objective to address economic development issues.

10. PRIIA 209

Chris Cole reported:

- In April, 2012, the Surface Transportation Board accepted the methodology and in May, 2012, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Vermonter operations cost share until October 1, 2013 when the shift is to the Knowledge Corridor.
- If the plan does not transpire as prescribed there are agreements for continued cost sharing (operating costs).
- Amtrak's handbooks are being reviewed for operation in the Knowledge Corridor.
- Vermont's subsidy increases \$3.3 million for a total of \$7.7 million for both the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express.
- A \$1.7 million increase for the Vermonter train operating costs is expected. Capital costs are still to be discussed.
- Arrangements with New York are under discussion.

Chris Parker asked about revenue to Vermont. Chris Cole explained any rail passenger origination or destination in Vermont provides the state with a revenue credit.

Matt Levin commented the train to Canada must be known as the "Vermonter to Montreal" not the "Montrealer to Vermont" because Vermont has earned the name and should be able to use it. The same applies for the Ethan Allen Express.

11. Other Business/Next Meeting

Coordinating Bus and Rail Services

Scott Bascom will evaluate each Amtrak station and survey transportation assets to identify needs.

Next Meeting: To be announced.

Agenda Items: Email suggested agenda items to Bob Atchinson.

12. Adjournment

MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 PM.