

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
5TH FLOOR BOARD ROOM
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
April 7, 2010**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Scott Rogers (Chairman)

John Cook	Rick Moulton
Dave Wulfson	Dave Allaire
George Barrett	Chris Andreasson
Charles Hunter	Joann Erenhouse
Mike Coates	Carl Fowler
Rep. Bill Aswad	Rick Moulton
Arthur Whitman	

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, VTrans Rail Operations Section
Bob Atchinson, VTrans Rail Operations Section
Scott Bascom, VTrans
J.B. McCarthy, VTrans
Mladen Gagulic, VTrans
Doug Zorzi, VTrans
Mary Anne Michaels, VRS
Chris Parker, VRAN
Matt Levin, VCE
Brian Gallagher, Amtrak
Dave Crawford, Essex Junction Village Manager
J. Jeffrey Munger, Sen. Sanders Office
Paul Craven, consultant
Peter Richter, Jr., URS Corp.
Berta Maginniss, Manchester Chamber of Commerce
Bill McDonald, Woodstock
D.E. Low, NECR
Peter Snyder, VRAN
Charlie Moore, VRAN
W.A Klinger
L.W. Maginniss
Brandy Reynolds, SVRCC
Wendy Rae Woods, SVRCC
Erik Bohn, OMYA

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Scott Rogers called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of Minutes

February 3, 2010

MOTION by Mike Coates, SECOND by George Barrett, to approve the 2/3/10 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

3. Reappointments to Rail Council

Scott Rogers announced reappointments to the Rail Council include Rick Moulton, Joann Erenhouse, Carl Fowler, Mike Coates, and Chris Andreasson. Appointments are extended to state residents only. There is one remaining vacancy on the Rail Council to be appointed by the Governor's Office. Former members of the Council (Erik Bohn, Byron Hathorn, Charlie Moore) were thanked for their service. A round of applause was given for Charlie Miller who attended the rail luncheon prior to the Rail Council meeting.

Carl Fowler recommended Chris Parker, VRAN, as a candidate for the Rail Council, citing Mr. Parker's experience and knowledge of rail issues.

4. Rail Property Management Section Report

Joe Flynn reported there are thousands of abutters to hundreds of miles of rail in the state which creates many issues. Revenues of \$312,000 in 2009 from leases or new utilities represent 30% of the rail operating budget. Revenue from leases goes to the state. Property Management works closely with the railroads on right-of-way issues. There are evaluation sheets on every foot of state owned property. Legislative approval is needed in order to sell any assets. Larry Donna has been working with Byron Hathorn on acquisition of the White River Jct. station.

5. Infrastructure Topics

a) Middlebury Spur

J.B. McCarthy reported meetings are scheduled on how to move the Middlebury spur project forward. Funding on the state side has been opened up for engineering. At the next meeting there will be discussion of the Uniform Act relative to purchase of right-of-way. VTrans is doing the crossing on Route 7 (the rail will go under Route 7), the crossing on Lower Foote Street which is a state road, and the at-grade crossing on Halladay Road. Money from the Jeffords earmark is used for the state's work. Dave Wulfson mentioned Vermont Railway and OMYA are working with the state economic development division regarding use of stimulus (ARRA) infrastructure bonds. Jeff Munger added the federal infrastructure bonds are low interest and have a time sensitive obligation. Using a RIF loan is also being investigated, said Mr. Wulfson. Financing should be known by January 2011. Vermont Railway is working with OMYA engineers to finalize the unloading system at the plant to get the material to the crusher.

Mike Coates noted the \$7 million for the Route 7 crossing project now is a \$16 million placeholder with two other crossings and an overpass. Mr. Coates asked if these projects are part of the original Jeffords grant. Joe Flynn said the Route 7 crossing was, but the bridge at Foote Street was in the Record of Decision which was a surprise. It was known that Halladay Street would have to be crossed at some point. The state is doing due diligence to explore all options. Mike Coates expressed concern about losing \$16 million in funding. Joann Erenhouse asked if the concern is all the Jeffords money will be used

up by the project. Joe Flynn explained \$16.5 million is held as a placeholder for the project. The state knew the cost was more than just that of the Route 7 crossing. The additional pieces will add more expense, but it is not known if the total will consume the \$16 million. The Infrastructure Subcommittee wants to take whatever is not necessary for the Route 7 work and move on, but the state needs to determine who owns Foot Street and Halladay Street first. A preliminary estimate for the work is needed in order to program the project. Presently only design and engineering funds have been released for the project. Carl Fowler asked if the decision to stray from the design is due to the environmental statement or community input. Joe Flynn said the direction came from the Record of Decision. Scott Rogers added the state is obligated to the design.

Carl Fowler asked if the Halladay Road crossing will be gated. Dave Wulfson said the environmental impact statement says Middlebury has to apply for a quiet zone crossing. The state is not going to get involved in quiet zone crossings. Mr. Fowler spoke against quiet zones, citing safety reasons (people need to be loudly made aware a train is coming).

George Barrett asked about impact on employment. Dave Wulfson stated the environmental impact statement covers employment and the tonnage of stone transported.

Charles Hunter asked about the anticipated start and finish of work. Dave Wulfson said the track will be done in the spring/summer timeframe. It is not known when the tunnel will be done.

Rick Moulton asked if the grade crossing and Foote Street work qualifies for bonded funding. Joe Flynn said this has not been investigated. The spur will be private. Funding the grade crossing and Foote Street as part of the spur (private funding) is being investigated.

Bill McDonald asked if a trans-load site was researched as an alternative to the spur. Dave Wulfson confirmed this. Mr. McDonald questioned the concern about grade separated crossings, noting major highways have crossings at grade. Joe Flynn assured study of the topography and engineering was thorough.

b) Rutland Rail Yard Relocation

Mr. Flynn reported the consultant is reviewing comments and will attest the issues are addressed otherwise new information will be applied to the process that led to the preferred option, Alternative 5, for the rail yard relocation. The information will be forwarded to FHWA for a decision. VTrans has concern with the viability of the project, and wants to suggest the project which the community embraces. VTrans does support the project, but is concerned as to whether the project can proceed on the current path. If all parties cannot agree then the \$2 million in federal funds expended to date must be returned. The involved parties need to draft an alternative. Dave Allaire assured all the partners are trying to decide if and how the project goes forward.

Mike Coates asked if any of the Jeffords money is being held for the rail yard project. Mr. Flynn said only a small amount of consulting money is being held. The cost of the project cannot be estimated until an alternative is known. Scott Rogers clarified the investment is significant and where the funding will come from is not known so the state's share is not known at this point in time.

Dave Wulfson stated all rail traffic goes through Rutland which is the hub and at capacity now. Rutland is basically bisected by the railroad. Trains disrupt the flow of the crossing and impact the traveling public. The rail yard needs to be relocated. The project can be done in phases over time. A plan is needed. Scott Rogers agreed the project must be phased to be viable. Earmarked money is needed for rail projects because the state does not have dedicated money which makes it difficult to do a plan. Also, a clear definition of the project (the alternative) is needed before a plan can be drafted. Jeff Munger explained 'transportation project' is the railroad's view and 'economic development' is the federal view. The railroad portion is transportation. Relocation of the rail yard is economic development. Having Rutland town and city come together in agreement is a monumental task, said Mr. Munger.

Bill McDonald asked about the percentage of bridge versus local traffic and if there are ethanol trains. Dave Wulfson said about 20% is bridge traffic and the rest is local to state lines. The number of ethanol cars is not known. Mr. Low with Rail America said a carrier from the mid-west (with the ethanol cars) expanded their route farther to the east. Mr. McDonald questioned how the situation in Rutland would be resolved if only state resources were available. Carl Fowler stated traffic through Rutland exceeds what was ever envisioned. Relocating the rail yard will return the investment. A "politics aside" decision will be needed if the state's investment is jeopardized. Joe Flynn said with respect to the FHWA process local opposition is not a consideration, but rather the science and process used by the engineers which show support of the preferred alternative. Rutland town is upset because the town was not well consulted throughout the process. Also, the town has a tract of land along old Route 4 that could be considered, but the consultant said the land was already considered.

c) Project Status Report

J.B. McCarthy reviewed the Rail Project Status Report which provides the project name and manager, scope, cost estimate, federal funding source, and current status. Project status dates have been updated as necessary. A demonstration was given of software used by management to track the critical path of projects. Financial software shows the funding source(s) for each project. The Rail Council will receive a rail project status report at each meeting. Scott Rogers and Joe Flynn credited Mr. McCarthy and other staff members for logging all VTrans projects on the critical path software and moving the Rail Section and its accountability to a new level which will hopefully expedite projects.

J.B. McCarthy gave a brief update on the continuous welded rail project (12 miles in Middlebury) and the Middlebury 'tunnel' (the tracks will be lowered and the street will remain at the same elevation). Both bridge projects must be closed out first. The western corridor bridges (88 of them between Bennington and Burlington) are inspected every 24

months to confirm the load rating. Thirty-one of the 88 bridges are at or above 286,000 pounds, 23 bridges do not meet the threshold, and 34 bridges remain to be inspected and rated. For the 23 bridges with deficiency (do not meet 286,000 pound capacity) \$23 million will be needed to reach the load rating. VTrans will meet with the railroad to discuss the bridges. The crossings in New Haven (Route 7) and Rutland City (West Street) need work. Staff is trying to get the rail crossing program back into the Rail Section. Additional staff is being hired to help with the work load.

d) Training

J.B. McCarthy reported the recently attended two day seminar on track engineering was very informative. Other staff members will attend a rail bridge course. Bob Atchinson reported Operation Lifesaver has three new presenters to visit communities. A grade crossing collision investigation course is being offered in May.

e) Infrastructure Subcommittee

Mike Coates reported at the last meeting (March 15, 2010) there was discussion of the 286,000 pound track capacity which still is not available on the lines from Rutland to Bellows Falls or Rutland to Manchester. Also, the bridge bearing work is being delayed again. Doug Zorzi explained work on bridge bearings on the Green Mountain line is funded under the FY2011 budget. Regarding 286,000 pound capacity there is one section on the New England Central line north of the trestle in Alburgh and the Essex to Burlington spur that needs to be brought up to capacity. Improvement on the sections should have an economic benefit.

Dave Wulfson explained the ‘excepted track’ status from Barre to Montpelier and Rutland to Manchester to allow maintenance work by the railroad.

6. Freight Topics

a) Bridge load ratings

Mladen Gagulic reported on the load rating effort on eight bridges on the Barre-Montpelier line. Tools are being developed to compile data on load ratings in order to do better planning and projects. The report will show the load rate as built, bridge inspection of current condition, and assessment to determine needed improvements. The results of the investigation will determine the number of granite rock loads and the weight of the loads the bridges will support. The bridges are 100 years old.

7. Passenger Topics

a) Amtrak

Joe Flynn announced the Amtrak train leaving Rutland on Saturday afternoon (4:45 PM departure) mirrors the Saratoga train due to work on the rail lines in New York City.

Bob Atchinson reported on the increase in revenue and ridership on the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express. Boardings at Castleton seem to be better than at Fair Haven. Walt Klinger expressed skepticism of the Amtrak ridership numbers, cautioning that Vermont is not receiving revenues due to the accounting method by Amtrak for the trains. Joe Flynn volunteered to pass the question to Bill Hollister with Amtrak. Carl Fowler

commented Mr. Klinger is a former conductor on the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express trains so there is a basis for his observations. Mr. Fowler concurred it would be worthwhile to audit the ridership numbers.

Bob Atchinson reported on-time performance of the Amtrak trains is up from last year (83% versus 72%). A gentleman in the audience interjected his experience is the train is not on time and travel is painfully slow.

Bob Atchinson stated Smart Marketing is handling the marketing of Amtrak train service with magazine, radio, and television advertising targeting the Vermont lines. Carl Fowler suggested doing a brochure highlighting activities in the area (day trips) and posting the pamphlets at station stops, museums, art centers, and such.

b) National Train Day 2010

A train ride on the Vermonter from Essex Junction to St. Albans and back on May 8, 2010 will celebrate National Train Day. North Bennington, Rutland, Brattleboro, and Randolph will hold celebrations as well.

c) Track I and Track III Project Status

Track I

Paul Craven gave an overview of the \$55 million track project from Vernon to St. Albans (192 miles). The project involves installation of continuous welded rail, ties, ballast, and crossings. Track load capacity will be 286,000 pounds. Bids are going out and work is anticipated to begin in May to be complete in a two year timeframe. The FRA will supply guidelines. Carl Fowler asked about the block signal system between Vernon and White River Jct. being rebuilt and new passing tracks. Mr. Craven said what is there now is being fixed. The track will remain Class 3. The speed is being increased in one section in New Hampshire. Mr. Fowler asked if there will be an impact on the Amtrak schedule. Mr. Craven said the intent is not to disrupt the schedule if possible. Matt Levin asked if notices are sent to abutting property owners regarding the construction. Paul Craven said the contractors will work with towns and local newspapers regarding the construction. Signs will be posted. Charlie Moore suggested doing the crossings as well as the rail. Mr. Moore acknowledged the track work is a great project for the state and New England Central Railroad. There was mention of work to be done in Massachusetts. Joe Flynn explained the project starts once the FRA documents are received (that is when the two year time clock starts). Pete Richter asked about the Bellows Falls Bridge and raising grades to increase speed. Charles Hunter confirmed there is much happening on the line. Travel time between Vernon and St. Albans will decrease by 30 minutes. Peter Snyder asked about gated crossings. Paul Craven said gates are the responsibility of the public entities. VTrans is in consultation with the railroad. Jeff Munger noted the FRA wants at-grade crossings eliminated due to safety factors. Mr. Munger asked if any at-grade or farm crossings will be eliminated. Paul Craven said the focus is on improving existing crossings, not eliminating crossings. Suggestion was made to have better signage at crossings to get people to stop and think before crossing. Mr. Craven noted all crossings go through the MUTCD process.

Track III

Joe Flynn gave an update on Track III. There is \$500,000 in federal funds and \$250,000 in Vermont and New York State funding for the project. Scope and statement of work must be done for FRA approval and then work can begin. The mission is to render opinion on how best to serve passenger rail needs in southwest Vermont (Albany, Hoosick, Bennington, Manchester, Rutland). Joe Flynn will investigate if the statement of work is available for public review, acknowledging the interest by the Bennington County Regional Chamber of Commerce. Carl Fowler asked if there is application or money for high speed rail. Mr. Flynn said most of the money is for planning, not construction. Joann Erenhouse urged the Rail Council to review the statement of work for Track I and III before submitting the document to the FRA to ensure getting ‘the best bang for the buck’. Joe Flynn said the applications are on the VTrans website. Awards are based on what has been submitted to the FRA. Track III is strictly planning. The partnership is between Vermont and New York, and there will be opportunity for local input. Feedback from the Rail Council would have to be given now or via email in the next few days. Rep. Aswad mentioned the analysis of the western corridor done by Clough Harbour five years ago. Joe Flynn explained the Track III planning grant looks mainly at the New York infrastructure inventory, service plans, and proposed alternatives. Jeff Munger mentioned that Amtrak did a study of ridership and revenue projections on different routes.

d) Passenger Rail Subcommittee

There are three nominations for the vacancies on the Passenger Rail Subcommittee. The Rail Council will handle appointments at the next meeting. At the last subcommittee meeting there was discussion of linking train service with public transit subsidized lines, and suggested Greyhound be queried regarding bus-rail coordinated service and the cost. Fiber optic lines are being installed which will support the Amtrak ticket machines. Any work on the rail line must avoid damage to the fiber optic line.

Carl Fowler urged VTrans rail staff to attend the National Tour Association convention in November in Montreal to discuss passenger rail service in Vermont, and to do so jointly with Vermont Rail Systems (VRS) so the two entities can save expenses..

8. Next Meeting/Agenda Items

Next Meeting: July 14, 2010 at 1 p.m., National Life Building, Montpelier.

9. Adjournment

MOTION by George Barrett, SECOND by John Cook, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 5 PM.

RScTy: M.E.Riordan