

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
5th FLOOR BOARD ROOM
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
February 29, 2012**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Cole (Chair in the absence of Brian Searles)
Dave Allaire Joann Erenhouse
Dave Wulfson Carl Fowler
Chris Andreasson Arthur Whitman

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
J.B. McCarthy, VTrans
Krista Chadwick, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Guy Tapper, VTrans
Larry Donna, VTrans
Erik Filkorn, VTrans
Joe Segale, VTrans
Peter Whitney, VTrans
John Read, TransSystems Corp.
Daniel Stein, VHB Engineering
Bridget Schoffelmeiser, Morris&DeMag – Vt. Rail Assoc.
Michele Boomhower, CCRPC
Chris Parker, VRAN
Matt Levin, Vermonters for a Clean Environment
Caroline Mael, Amtrak
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Deb Sanderson, Amtrak
J. Jeff Munger, Sen. Sander's Office
Chuck Bohi, legislature
Bill Aswad, legislature

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM. Introductions were made.

2. Public Comments

None.

3. Approval of Minutes

November 30, 2011

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to approve the 11/30/11 minutes as written.

DISCUSSION: Request was made that staff send the minutes and monthly performance statistics to the Rail Council in advance of the next meeting to allow time for review. Staff noted this is current practice.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. Rail Personnel Update

Chris Cole reported the following:

- Joe Flynn is now the Vermont Emergency Management Director.
- Dan Delabruere is the Interim Rail Director.
- Request has been made to fill four positions in the Rail Section – three engineering positions (permanent) and one temporary position.

5. Grant Update

Costa Pappis reported the following:

- TIGER IV applications are being completed (due in two weeks).
- The ‘state of good repair’ project on the Green Mountain Railroad to rehab track and do bridge work between Rutland and Bellows Falls will use \$10 million in TIGER funds and \$3 million in state funds.
- The ‘state of good repair’ project on New England Central Railroad for 286,000 pound rail capacity from St. Albans to the Canadian border for freight and passenger rail will use \$8 million in TIGER funds and \$2 million in NECR funds.
- TIGER grant average award is about \$10 million. There are strict parameters for the grant.
- Regarding the Burlington-Rutland connection, freight is the highest need at this point in time.
- The preliminary report from the Track III Planning Study of NY-VT inter-city passenger rail is available, but clarity is needed on ridership numbers to better reflect existing conditions, and then the full tactical report will be released. Recommended alternatives to have more detailed analysis in Phase 2 of the study are Alternate 4 – new service to Rutland and Alternate 5 - rerouting the Ethan Allen Express. The technical report will have more detail on the alternatives and rationale for moving forward. There will be opportunity for public input before seeking FRA approval.
- Scope of work for the Rail Plan update is being finalized. The last rail plan was adopted in 2006 with data from 2004. The current update will take 18 months to complete. There will be ample opportunity for public input. There are prescribed elements by the FRA for inclusion in the state plan, but the list has not yet been received. FRA funding will be tied to the state rail plan. The FRA is seeking to have a national rail plan through adoption of state rail plans. VTrans is seeking to have the plan look at economic investment in rail lines and how that translates to economic development in a region and in the state. The Rail Plan is on the website.

Rep. Aswad asked the target date for passenger rail service to Canada. Chris Cole replied three years. Pre-clearance issues are being resolved presently. Costa Pappis added the targeted speed for passenger rail is between 59-79 mph and the Canadian National cannot handle that right now.

Carl Fowler expressed concern that the assumptions used for the Track III Planning Study of NY-VT inter-city passenger rail were false or exaggerated, and the result will be unnecessary construction. Costa Pappis explained the rationale for factoring all the assumptions used in the study and the process that was followed. VHB is the prime consultant on the project.

Rep. Aswad asked about the status of the detailed construction plan for the ABRB connection (Albany-Bennington-Rutland-Burlington) that was done several years ago at a cost of \$50 million (Clough Harbour report). Chris Cole stated a Sperry car must run the western corridor line to determine the track condition since Tropical Storm Irene. The last Sperry test was 10 years ago and needs updating. Jeff Munger mentioned the Amtrak report done in 2002 that had very detailed construction, ridership, and revenue projections.

The Rail Council will review the outline showing the proposed contents of the Rail Plan and email comments to Costa Pappis.

Chris Levin, VCE, requested a description of the public process and meeting dates for the rail plan update at the next meeting. Mr. Levin urged doing regular public announcements about the plan update.

Chris Andreasson suggested the Hoosick south section of rail being upgraded to 286,000 pound capacity in Vermont should be in the five year plan.

Dave Wulfson advised including the railroads in discussions throughout the entire plan update. Mr. Wulfson noted 286,000 pound capacity is the priority in the rail industry. Dave Wulfson suggested the consultant update and maintain the plan for four years and then go out to bid for the next update two years prior to the scheduled update.

Carl Fowler suggested holding a “committee of the whole” work session in the morning prior to the next regular Rail Council meeting to review the current rail plan and set and/or affirm priorities. Mr. Fowler requested that staff provide a report on the 2006 Rail Plan prior to the meeting as to what was accomplished in the plan and what remains to be done. Staff will provide information on what has been accomplished in the plan.

6. Governor’s Recommend Rail Budget Highlights

Chris Cole reported:

- There is a substantial reduction in the rail budget due to the ARRA project on the New England Central line (Track I) which will be complete this construction season.

- Federal audit of the Track I grant had no findings. Recommendation was made with regard to staff signing off on the documents.
- The \$25 million rail budget contains a variety of projects.
- Changes from the Governor’s Recommend proposed to the legislature include Bridge 219 not advancing in August and moving the \$5.1 million in funding to do continuous welded rail on the western corridor and backfilling B.219 with earmark funding from the OMYA project and federal highway funds for the road work. B.219 will still advance, but at its own pace.
- House Transportation Committee supports securing the rail bridge inspection truck 2012-2013 if funding is available. Rail staff and outside consultants will do the work.
- Additional staffing is requested to handle the “bubble of work” caused by Tropical Storm Irene.

Chris Cole advised that the Rail Council can provide advice and comment on the budget process at the April meeting and at the fall meeting.

Rep. Bohi urged staff to follow through on evaluating the economic impact of railroads in the state.

Carl Fowler asked if the transportation bill reauthorization will be continued. Jeff Munger said a decision will be made by March 31, 2012.

7. Legislative Update

Private/Farm Crossings

Trini Brassard reported private crossing agreements must be in place for private or farm railroad crossings. Elements in the agreement include duration and marketability of the agreement. Homeowners need to have liability insurance. The legislature is attempting to craft a solution so people can sell their property that is accessed via a private crossing. The recent summer study identified issues and stakeholders. Language drafted by the railroad in the 1800s for the crossings is different for each crossing. With the arrangements the railroads basically purchased the development rights for the land on the other side of the tracks. When the state purchased the rail line the state purchased the land as is and paid for the landlocked property. There is discussion of the situation of a town taking over a private road with a rail crossing and that crossing becoming public with the town assuming liability. Railroads on the national level want fewer crossings. The state needs a clear definition of “farm crossing”.

8. Rail Project Programming Update

Staff reviewed the spreadsheet of projects scheduled in the upcoming construction season.

9. Freight Topics

Repair work continues on damage from Tropical Storm Irene. There is a volume of paperwork to complete for FEMA funding. There was mention of the cooperation between many entities that resulted in a speedy recovery from the storm.

10. Passenger Topics

Amtrak Marketing & Ridership

Deb Sanderson (Amtrak) is replacing Jim Dinehart and will be assisting Erik Filkorn (PPAID) with marketing of Amtrak service in Vermont. The website will be improved and made easier to utilize. There was discussion of the \$12 fare. Bob Atchinson explained how to access the fare. Carl Fowler mentioned making connection with the Lakeshore Limited and establishing a connection with the Vermonter which would allow connection to the national network. Further research into making this connection should be done. Mr. Fowler also mentioned the success of the Virginian train with ridership and covering all costs, and urged researching to determine what makes the train so successful. Carl Fowler urged the railroads to work together to make the necessary connections for long distance rail travelers.

Bob Atchinson reported ridership on the Ethan Allen Express is up over last year. The Vermonter, however, is still lagging. On time performance has improved over last year for both the Vermonter and the Ethan Allen Express. Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak, explained the delay on the north bound routes (due to track speed on the CP at Whitehall) which hopefully will be addressed this construction season. Dave Wulfson mentioned speed restrictions on the line in Castleton to Fair Haven that will have an impact on performance. The track is worn out and needs replacement. Work is planned in New York which will benefit Amtrak and Vermont Railway.

Chris Andreasson asked if the state must make up the shortfall in revenues for Amtrak. Chris Cole confirmed that per the contract the state pays the net difference.

New Initiatives

The new approach being taken by VTrans is to advertise Amtrak service in conjunction with ski area ads, for example, so there is not a duplication of effort or spending. Continuing to partner with the VT Department of Tourism and Marketing is intended to result in co-marketing ventures throughout the year. Most of the marketing money has, traditionally, been spent in-state, but the focus will expand to out-of-state to show there are trains coming to Vermont. The goal is a balanced marketing approach to get Vermonters to use the train service and out-of-staters to come to Vermont by train.

Announcement was made that the Vermonter has been selected to do a pilot project for Amtrak in terms of carrying bicycles on the train. Brackets to hold bikes will be installed on some train cars.

E-ticketing pilot program has been a success. E-ticketing should be nationwide by summer, 2012. WiFi service on the train is operational and functioning well. There was brief discussion of covering the cost of service in the fare.

11. Other Business

Bus Connections

There was mention of bus connection with the western rail corridor (Ethan Allen Express). The Mega-Bus from Burlington to Boston runs twice daily and there is now a Mega-Bus from Burlington to New York City. VTrans Public Transit has contracted a consultant to analyze inter-city bus connections. Federal Transit Administration funding opportunities may be available for this service. Carl Fowler encouraged Amtrak to consider Amtrak-bus connections where practical.

Container Traffic

There was mention by Chris Andreasson of positioning the state to handle increased container freight traffic to be more attractive for doing business. Clearance for double stack containers and having 286,000 pound rail are major issues. VTrans is doing a freight study.

Rail Council Meeting Locations

There was mention of having the Rail Council meetings at different locations throughout the state. The next meeting will be in Montpelier to link with the Vermont Rail Association meeting and on the tracks legislative luncheon.

Next Meeting: April 4, 2012, 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM, Montpelier

Agenda Items (email suggested items to Bob Atchinson)

- Presentation on 2006 Rail Plan and what has been accomplished to date

12. Adjournment

MOTION by Dave Wulfson, SECOND by Carl Fowler, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 4 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan