

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
5th FLOOR BOARD ROOM
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
November 30, 2011**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Brian Searles (Chairman)
Dave Allaire Joann Erenhouse
Charlie Moore Dave Wulfson
Chris Andreasson Arthur Whitman
Carl Fowler Charles Hunter

OTHERS PRESENT: Chris Cole, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Joe Flynn, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
J.B. McCarthy, VTrans
Scott Bascom, VTrans
Krista Chadwick, VTrans
Mladen Gagulic, VTrans
Susan Clark, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Rick Scott, VTrans
Peter Whitney, VTrans
Larry Donna, VTrans
Neil Schickner, Joint Fiscal Office
Chris Parker, VRAN
Matt Levin, Vermonters for a Clean Environment
Tony Flynn, Amtrak (via teleconference)
Caroline Mael, Amtrak
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Jim Dinehase, Amtrak
MaryAnne Michaels, VRS
John Read, TranSystems Corp.
Allene Rieger, TranSystems Corp.
J. Jeff Munger, Sen. Sander's Office
Tom McGrath, UVM Transportation Research Center
David Simpson, Iowa Pacific Railroad
Bridget Schaffelmeijer, Morris & Demag
Aaron Seaman, Jacobs
Mark Colgan, VHB
Brad Worthen

1. Call to Order & Introductions

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

2. Public Comments

Plaque of Appreciation

Dave Wulfson on behalf of Vermont Rail Systems presented a plaque to Brian Searles expressing appreciation to VTrans for the help, leadership, and participation with recovery from the impacts of Tropical Storm Irene. Secretary Searles, Chris Cole, Trini Brassard, Mladen Gagulic were especially commended. Brian Searles recognized Scott Rogers and Rich Tatro as the “masterminds” who organized the response by over 3,600 people. ICS was followed. Secretary Searles advised when there is chaos surround yourself with engineers.

UVM Transportation Research Center

Tom McGrath mentioned projects by the Transportation Research Center including the Vermont Clean Cities Coalition looking at opportunities and barriers for more promotion of rail service to move freight, and Workforce Development Program looking at opportunities in rail operation and track development/maintenance.

3. Approval of Minutes

April 6, 2011

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to approve the 4/6/11 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. Director Update

Chris Cole reported Joe Flynn who was instrumental in the state’s response to Irene has been deployed interdepartmentally to the Irene recovery effort long term. Dan Delabruere is the interim Rail Director. Mr. Cole commended the accomplishments by Rail Section staff with their quick and effective response to the damage from Tropical Storm Irene.

Carl Fowler mentioned recent travel by his clients vacationing in Vermont and traveling by rail. Nothing was cancelled and track conditions were very good on the Vermonter. Mr. Fowler pointed out re-establishing all rail service within three weeks following the storm is phenomenal, especially when other states are still completing work. Brian Searles echoed the commendations, noting 3,600 individuals, over half from the private sector, were involved in the cooperative effort facilitated by VTrans, but dominated by the private sector.

5. Issuance of Executive Order #13-11, October 20, 2011

Chris Cole reported the Executive Order was updated per the request of the Governor’s Office. Membership was broadened is one change to the order.

6. Track III Grant Update

Costa Pappis reported the grade crossing grant of \$2.2 million was awarded from FHWA discretionary highway-rail crossing hazard elimination funding to cover 15 crossings on the Vermonter route.

Tiger III grant application was submitted by Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut for the New England gateway (326 miles of 286,000 pound rail from Canada to Port of New London, Connecticut including 17.4 miles of continuous welded rail on the western corridor in Vermont). The grant award will be announced December 31, 2011.

Approximately 14 miles of rail remain to be replaced with continuous welded rail on the western corridor after completion of the 17.4 miles in the grant. In addition to CWR to increase train speed crossing work is needed.

Charles Hunter, New England Central, was commended for his efforts in coordinating support for the grant application from the political delegations of three states. Vermont was the first in the country to complete the Track I project and is on pace to finish first with other grant projects.

The New York/Vermont intercity passenger rail study is reviewing five build and one no build alternatives, Albany to Manchester to various loop scenarios with different combinations of stations and track. Costs are order of magnitude. Previous ridership and revenue projections on the western corridor will have to be redone. Agreements with the rail companies involved need to be in place. Public meetings will be held on December 13 and 14, 2011.

7. Asset Management Database

Mladen Gagulic and Rick Scott reported the rail GIS database is compiled. The “clickable” map of the state shows all assets and conditions at any location point. State owned and privately owned rail and rail trails are included. Property management shows valuation and conditions on the ground as well as supporting documentation. Work done in the field can be noted followed by update of the database. Release date for the database system is 1/1/12. Access is web based and mobile. An account is needed to access the system and then VTrans will make the URL available. Peter Whitney, VTrans, is the contact person.

8. Freight Topics

Programmed Projects

J.B. McCarthy reviewed the list of projects completed in 2011, under construction, and read to go to bid in 2012. In addition repair work from Tropical Storm Irene will continue.

Flood Related Projects

Dave Wulfson and Charles Hunter narrated a photo presentation of damage and repair work due to Tropical Storm Irene that occurred on Vermont Rail Systems and New England Central Railroad rail lines.

9. Passenger Topics

Track 1 Update

Charles Hunter reported despite the impacts of Tropical Storm Irene work on the track is nearly 70% complete and is on target to be the first done next year. Prior to the start of service Amtrak will run their geometric car.

Amtrak Marketing & Ridership Update

Bob Atchinson reported ridership on the Ethan Allen Express has increased 20% over the last year. The Vermonter is still recovering from the switch to bus service. Marketing ads continue to be run for both services. On time performance is good. Ethan Allen Express showed .2% improvement and the Vermonter showed 5.6% improvement. Vermont Railway addressed slow orders and rail conditions on the CLP resulting in a reduction of 15 minutes from the run schedule for the Ethan Allen Express. Vermont Rail Systems is commended for making the investment and doing the work while also doing repairs from Tropical Storm Irene.

Carl Fowler urged ensuring connections are in place between train routes to avoid having to bus passengers which adversely impacts train ridership. Chris Cole explained bus service was used to guarantee arrivals and connections for passengers.

WiFi on Vermont Trains

Bill Hollister with Amtrak reported WiFi service was available on Amtrak trains nationwide effective October 30, 2011. There are glitches in areas without cell phone service (mainly rural areas). Both the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express will have WiFi service.

Amtrak Presentation on E-Ticketing

National Amtrak Director, Tony Flynn, gave a presentation on e-ticketing on Amtrak trains that included a comparison of the paper ticketing process (takes up to 15 days) to e-ticketing (real time and provides a real time manifest and revenue accounting). Access to ticket information is via current technology (Smartphones, I-phones, Droids, and such). With the system conductors can confirm tickets that are lifted and not lifted. The real time manifest will accurately list who is on board. Information on e-ticketing will be available on trains and posted on the Amtrak website. An aggressive customer communication campaign is planned after all the conductors are trained on the system. Rail passes at this point in time are still issued at station ticketing offices and reservations booked through a travel agency cannot be e-ticketed. Regarding linking to bus service, there are dedicated throughway services in California, but the Amtrak system does not presently connect to commercial bus service (Greyhound); paper ticketing model is used. Next generations of the Amtrak system will address these services as well as the ability to report on route delays.

10. Other Business

Next Meeting: To Be Announced. Staff will coordinate the meeting date with the Transportation Secretary's schedule.

Agenda Items (email suggested items to Bob Atchinson)

- Burlington-Boston via White River Jct. bus connection

- Integration of bus and rail service
- Rutland rail yard

11. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan