

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
DILL BUILDING A
2178 AIRPORT ROAD
BARRE, VERMONT
March 24, 2022**

***Hybrid meeting held in-person and by teleconference**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Charlie Moore
Joann Erenhouse Dave Wulfson
Charles Hunter Chris Andreasson
Charlie Baker

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Jason Owen, VTrans
Eleni Churchill, VTrans
Toni Clithero, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Adam Goudreau, VTrans
Bruce King, VTrans
Erica Mongeon, VTrans
Aaron Guyette
Scott Burbank, VHB
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Selden Houghton, VRS
Christopher Parker, VRAN
Richard "Hank" Lee
Deb Fox
Gary Fox
Peter Young
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office
Erhard Mahnke, Sen. Sanders' Office
Dan Peacock
Maggie May
Allison Crowley
Kurt Ostebo
Kate Skinner
John Wilson
Mike Winslow, ACRPC
Charlene Lovett
Charles Poltenson

Wes Cate
David Bittersdorf

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Delabruere called the teleconference meeting to order at 1 PM. Introductions were done.

2.0 Approval of Minutes

December 16, 2021

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to approve the minutes of 12/16/21 as presented. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

3.0 Passenger Topics

3.1 Ethan Allen to Burlington Update

Dan Delabruere reported progress is being made on Amtrak coming to Burlington in July. The rail yard project and sidings are coming along.

Seldon Houghton, VRS, gave a brief update on the progress of the rail work. Two-thirds of the switch point indicator devices are out and to be functioning in the next three months. Qualifying crews are testing run times. A timetable will be printed in the press release for the service to Burlington.

3.2 Ridership

Toni Clithero reported the Ethan Allen Express and Vermonter ridership is showing a strong rebound.

Chris Andreasson noted bus transit ridership is down to 40% and is not seeing the same rebound as Amtrak.

4.0 Freight and Construction Topics

4.1 Project Updates

Paul Libby gave a brief project update, noting frozen ground has held up some work, but progress continued in most other areas. Platform work is coming together with the canopy and lighting remaining. Signal systems at some crossings are being finished along with surfacing/paving and other finish work. The Pittsford siding is 80% done. Paul Libby reviewed the list of projects being worked on and those in the FY23 budget. Projects include 29 bridges, crossings, platforms, track improvements, FEMA work.

Dave Wulfson, VRS, thanked VTrans for all the rail work and asked if the Shelburne Harbor Road crossing is tied into the highway crossing signal work. Dan Delabruere said VTrans is aware of the Harbor Road crossing and figuring out the funding for this.

5.0 Operation Lifesaver

Toni Clithero stated there is a lot of work to do to get the message out that the Amtrak train will be coming from Rutland to Burlington and moving very fast on the track as of July 2022. Television, social media, presentations to schools, colleges, newsletters,

message boards are all being used to get the word out to the general public on track safety. Educational materials and presentations are available for no cost. The public service announcement will be sent to Rail Council members.

Dave Wulfson said VRS will send a list of towns that seem to have lots of trespass on the railroad tracks.

6.0 FY23 Governor’s Recommended Budget - Rail

Dan Delabruere reviewed each line item in the FY23 budget, noting VTrans will be seeking design grants and construction grants. Scoping must be done so projects are ready to go. The projects in the budget cover Amtrak stations, switches, sidings, bridges (rehab, 286,000-pound capacity, inspections), culverts, FEMA work, platforms, track work (continuous welded rail, 286,000-pound capacity), right-of-way leases, crossing resurfacing, rail passenger marketing, rail trail management/maintenance, Amtrak contract, administration (salaries, benefits), 3-way partnership, cross ties, Operation Lifesaver.

Erhard Mahnke, Senator Sanders Office, reported the Congressional omnibus funding included \$800,000 plus \$2 million for ancillary improvement on the Lamoille Valley trail and \$3 million for the Essex Junction multi-modal facility (including rail). The work of Sens. Leahy and Sanders for earmarks was acknowledged.

Comments/questions:

- Update on Brattleboro station project – project is moving. The upcoming meeting is on 100% design.
- Station standardization addressing parking – the standardization is about amenities and upgrading the customer experience. Parking will be considered as well.
- Upgrading to 286,000-pound capacity – upgrading one line puts pressure on other lines to increase capacity to 286,000 pounds including in Canada. The Quebec budget includes money for improvements to increase capacity.
- VTrans takeover of 149 miles of rail trail and rail bed – this will allow for the possibility of converting back to rail use in the future if warranted.
- Little WACR grant application to replace the rail – the grant is for rail. The project is being done in phases.
- Charlotte and Shelburne train stations on the Amtrak line to be addressed – these stations will not be Amtrak stops. VTrans is looking into the condition of the stations.
- Rail trail controlled by VAST – VTrans does not own the trail.
- Roll over of 3-way match money – state funds generally do not roll over.
- Study of facility at Central Station and track conditions – the study must be done in order to get to Montreal. A meeting on the Montreal extension with stakeholders is being scheduled.

7.0 Public Input

Costa Pappis announced Chris Saunders, liaison to Sen. Leahy’s Office, is leaving that post after 20 years for the position of federal co-chair of the northern borders regional

commission. Mr. Saunders has been a constant advocate for rail and Vermont benefitted greatly from his work.

Dan Delabruere announced VRS will be receiving the “Short Line of the Year” award. The focal point was the Middlebury tunnel project. Seldon Houghton said the award will be accepted on behalf of all the team members.

Charlie Moore and David Blittersdorf spoke about leasing bud (RDC) cars owned by All Earth Rail to operators outside of Vermont and the opportunity Vermont could be missing by not integrating these cars into the state’s transit system. Now is the time for a rail renaissance.

Gary Fox spoke about the Bellows Falls tunnel not having enough height to accommodate doublestack cars, and the opportunity for VTrans to explore having this issue corrected with the work being done to remake the post-industrial area at each end of the tunnel.

Gary Fox mentioned VRS collaborating with Amtrak on ski service to Okemo Mountain on the track being improved by VTrans.

Dave Blittersdorf noted the four short lines that will lease bud cars from All Earth Rail are all tourist based, ski based, rail biking based. Vermont could do the same.

Chris Parker announced he is a new employee of the Connecticut Department of Transportation Rail Office.

Charlene Lovett requested time on the next meeting agenda to provide an update on the work on the Claremont stationhouse and observations after the improvements.

8.0 Next Meeting

June 23, 2022, 1 PM – 3 PM

9.0 Adjournment

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3 PM.

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