

MINUTES SUBJECT TO CORRECTION BY THE VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL. CHANGES, IF ANY, WILL BE RECORDED IN THE MINUTES OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE COUNCIL.

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
DILL BUILDING A  
2178 AIRPORT ROAD  
BARRE, VERMONT  
December 15th, 2022**

**\*Hybrid meeting**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Carl Fowler	Christopher Anderson, Advance Transit
Arthur Whitman	Charles Hunter
Charlie Moore, All Earth Rail	
Dave Wulfson, VRS	

**ATTENDEES:**

Amy McCaffrey, VTrans	David Tillberg, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans	Deb Fox, VRAN & Finger Lakes
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak	Luke Irvine, Amtrak Govt Affairs
Paul Libby, VTrans	Selden Houghton, VRS
Kyle Wells, VTrans	Renee Layton, VTrans
Bruce King, VTrans	Bill McDonald, Retired Conrail
Toni Clithero, VTrans	

**ATTENDEES VIA TEAMS:**

Jack Madden	Neaderland, Zoe	Charbonneau, Erin
Mary Anne Michaels	Scott Burbank	Peter Young (Guest)
Ben Heckscher	Kane, Megan	Chris Saunders
Parker, Christopher	Wilson, John	Natale, Christopher M
Allison Crowley	(Manchester, NH)	Rockingham
(Guest)	David Lazarovich	Development
Dejan, Sasa	Ryan Forbes	
Searles, Brian	Eleni Churchill	

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**1) Call to Order and Introductions**

Meeting called to order at 1:02 pm and introductions made.

**2) Approval of Previous Minutes – 09/22/2022**

Dan D. - One member short of quorum, so skipping over approval of previous minutes. If get a quorum during meeting may return.

Carl Fowler asked for correction to item #6, to change "Rouses Point *South*" to "Rouses Point *North*". Dan D. said change can be made but not approved since no quorum.

### **3) Passenger Topics**

#### **3) a) Ridership Report & 3) d) Vermonter OTP**

Toni C. got ridership numbers for FY 22. Ethan Allen up 25.4% since FY 2019 (best performing year in recent member memory). Middlebury – Vergennes extension only in place since July 2022, so is doing very well. Vermonter, not as robust but doing very well. Definitely towards top of pack in terms of performance.

Q: where Vermonter is down as far as station?

Toni – don't have that info. Impact of Essex Jct far less than anticipated.

Service out of Greenfield impacting boardings in Brattleboro?

Toni – Could be

Dan – We were losing on average 10-15 per day in Essex, but picking up 50 per day in Burlington on average.

How about Middlebury?

Toni – Closer to a dozen per day

Carl Fowler – Burlington put on more. Overall Ridership for Oct. Ethan Allen did 7,800 in contrast to Aug. which was approx. half. Vermonter .... Neither train seems to be impacted the other. Both are distinct. October Ridership numbers overwhelming positive. Can go to Amtrak.com and find monthly reports at the bottom. If need to know Nov. report alone, need to subtract out of the Yearly report. Ben ~~Heckscher~~ Heckscher produces an attractive report of this data.

Dan D. – I think overall message is that COVID is hopefully starting to become thing of the past. We're pretty happy with numbers so far and hopefully it continues.

Toni C. – For October, Amtrak Monthly report compares FFY 22 to FFY 21. Vermonter up almost 16% and Ethan Allen up 86 % from what was last year.

Ben ~~Hexter~~ Heckscher raised issue last meeting, we've been having difficult time with Vermonter, particularly SB train, in departures timeliness. So Toni has tried to compare 10 day period from months, Dec, Nov, Oct and chart how late train was departing Brattleboro. Shows terrible time since Nov then things began to improve. Internet has longer view. Can see Brattleboro delays peaked in Sept & Oct, there has not been one day departed on time. Determine vast majority of delays caused by slow orders for infrastructure and most of those are behind us for this construction season and departure times have improved, at most a few minutes late. The good news is that the problem we were having for most part is resolved. Is Charles Hunter going to speak about this now?

Dan D. – If you have anything to add go ahead.

Charles H. – One of the maps that will be shared were taking place in 2022. Large ties, resurfacing projects. FRA has a requirement: Until you've run certain amount of time/tonnage are not allowed to go back to full speed.

Dan D. – Bad news had problem. Good news we are back on track.

Chris F. – Timetables show time is supposed to depart station, but busy stations train can arrive on departure time but actually be late because how busy & time to board passengers. Would we get penalized if we update the timetables and make slight changes to account for this?

Dan D. – We have 10 – 20 year commitment on those grants.

Chris F. – Example is minor at individual station upwards of station with departure problem, but this compounds down the line and then it is bad performance for those stations. If we could do analysis to see if there is small fix to timetables to pad, we might be able to improve. Is bad perception if train is always late. We're doing pretty good overall, and train arrives at appropriate departure time but losing bit with when it actually leaves station.

Dan D. – We can look at it because it may still work overall. Might not work seasonally and don't want to adjust it every 3 mo. But if there's a reason to adjust to make more accurate & reliable for passengers is good and we may be able to do that.

Drops one track class due to temperature. So you're ~~down to~~ down from 79 in our zone.

Carl F. – Probably help with temperature increase during the day / periods of extreme heat.

Is there any physically can change in infrastructure to mitigate it?

Charles H. – Nothing can do physically to mitigate it.

Dan D. – Is interesting thing to look into. We can look at moving a minute here or there to string them together better.

Toni C. – Is heat order issue something want to start tracking?

Dan D. – is this tracked?

Luke Amtrak - Yes. Is WTR weather code so easily trackable.

Bill - Q: What do railways in southwest do to mitigate 100 – 112 F temps in southwest

Dan D. – Same issue we have here. Is safety issue everywhere.

### **3) b) Vermonter to Montreal**

Dan D. – Not a lot of new stuff to report. We had a great meeting with Amtrak. Amtrak has put together new division or section focused on added routes & frequencies and they've assigned some folks (Joe Barr, Karen Fusage). We gave them background on all the work back to time of Ed Kutamarche and they took it and Dan thinks they're excited about it. They hadn't had someone before to pick up ball and run with it, but now they do. We have the old Ed Kutamarche enthusiasm again.

Amtrak is the common denominator for all the different services in the region. We now have champion at Amtrak and applaud them for this. Going to start having monthly meetings. We have shared contacts on both sides all the way up through. We kinda made a large stride. It was a great meeting and important to mention here. Karen anything to add.

Karen – Everyone knows series of elections in Quebec. Same premier. We have raised up a tier in our access. Secretary has written letter to her. They have let us know they are working through full briefing expect to hear something soon. Dealing with station inside Quebec.

Dan D. – We still have Brian Searles on our end helping. We have a great team and now that have Ethan Allen to Burlington this is next goal.

Carl F. – Is NY going to fund ? Any update?

There is pot of money in Bill law for investing in infrastructure . Could possibly be used across Canadian border as pot can be used for opening previously closed routes. May be subject to change in management. Would be good if could get some understanding with CN for their goals. Whatever is needed as made to Richelieu River. Okay to have all that built but if we can't get that built there won't be a point. Would be good to have some direction from CN for what they want to do.

Dan D. – With you on that and we have all these items laid out for what we're looking for. We're talking with FRA on what routes are identified and should help us to get what you're looking for Carl. That swing bridge is important because it has to be lined. Border protection say rail is not moving unless that bridge is lined.

Next agenda item.

### **3) c) RR Labor Strike**

Dan D. – Railroad labor strike averted. Thankfully nothing more to report on this. This would have had effect on everything we buy across country. Good news – we don't have to talk about this one.

Carl F. – Handed out copies of Dan Peacock's wonderful timetable and it shows Ethan Allen and our Buses. We have in effect 3 times service in Burlington. This is wonderful except that Amtrak will not display disparate services as if they were part of the same route. This is because the station codes are different, so does not so these as part of the same route. So, passenger must know this themselves. If enter station code or enters bus codes, will only get one or other. We should have the bus go to the station so that it does show that they are contiguous. There's no reason for bus not to go by station in Burlington. Can't be fixed in Middlebury, but should fix in all the other stations. We need Amtrak website to fix this issue and show this information. Carl distributed himself and they disappeared from station. Would like to give station the timetable copies via a link. We should print these and would cost few thousand dollars a year.

Dan D. Maybe we get something behind glass case so cannot be taken and references this timetable.

Toni C. – We have provided to our transit ops folks and are trying to get it into the VT Let's Go app.

Chris Natale – Dan, we will work with you on this.

### **4) Freight and Construction Topics**

#### **4) a) Project Updates**

Dan D. – Start with VTrans then do Railroad projects updates. Start with Paul.

Paul L. – A lot of our focus on FRA Build Grant VTR Benn – Hoosick. Five bridges. Bridge 61 approach work replacing ties & rail. Some slope work stabilizing embankments. This one is done so don't have to come back to now and it's at 286K. Many other bridges covered in previous presentation.

MVRT – Bridge 846 in Sheldon. Old beat-up structure done by Bruce K. We removed structure and replaced. One of most simple projects we do with no trains and no cars.

Shaftsbury Br 57.5 – Bridge we're going to replace in Shaftsbury. Is box culvert replacement 60 feet down and needs to be done in short amount of time Selden has given us. One of our more challenging.

Dan D. – 25, 000 CY have to come out and go back in (Paul – in 21 days).

Paul L. – Drone shots by E. Robinson. Renee's project, one of our new project managers from our construction section.

Q: - Does that mean shut down for 21 days?

A: Selden – We'll have access to get around from the North.

Paul – 18 more structures to build by the end of 2024. So we've been looking at it all as one big picture to see how this will affect Selden. Where we can overlap or not. We usually do one at a time, but there's usually not so many so need to look at them all together.

Some other projects seen before. CWR upgrade project on VTR B&R replacing any Jointed Rail or CWR in bad shape and updating. Is 60 mile-long project. Another is Bridge project on Conn River Line. 22 Bridges looking to upgrade there as well. Learning from lessons on our BUILD projects. GMRC 29 Bridges to get up to capacity. Wide range in amount of work needed. Patching for some, or Partial to Full Replacements. Again, working with Sheldon on how to get this all done.

Fun pictures, so holiday train pics from Selden. Internal nod with a VTrans snowplow with holiday lighting.

Q: This will bring all those lines to class 3?

Selden, on VTR yes, but other projects are just bridge projects.

Paul – Should get us to Class 3 from Brattleboro to Rutland.

Dan D. – Can see project section does not stop and just laid out next couple years. Next, let's do VRS update.

#### **4) b) Project update from RR's for next Construction season – NECR/VRS**

Selden (VRS) – Dan asked to go over day to day maintenance activities and statistics regarding them. We had talked early about CWR and heat and should cover some of that. Finished up bypass track in Montpelier to get around 2 bridges along RTE 2. There are lot of FRA regs. Few pertaining to infrastructure FRA Part 213, Part 214, Part 234, Part 243. Last is new documentation requirement for

Training. This year did 10 classes which have to be done annually. 3 classes with Part 213 classes of what need to look for in the track. 2 classes on welded rail. Needed to be compliant with FRA. Every railroad gets inspected at least twice per week. More inspection on adverse weather events. We bring in contractors to do ultrasonic / microscopic testing. Do track geometry testing several times a year which is automated. Using this data, we can follow trends. All the data is online. We can focus in more if is in capital program project. This year in 2022, over 400 regular track patrols, 150 from weather events, 40,000 miles track patrolled, over 2700.

Example of modern signalized track control.

Q: don't sue insulated joints.

Selden – Yes, we do. Still have some of older insulated joints out there.

Have presence detector superseded ?

Selden – Shunts in the track do detection in modern systems. We do automated inspection with “geometry car”. Company out of MA started this company. Tremendous benefit for staying on top of track geometry. For ultrasonic, car moves around 5 mph and takes several days. Crews behind the car changing out defective rail.

Every switch gets looked at monthly for bolts, cross.

Roughly 7600 new ties put in. Pic of tie crew. Machines pull spike & tie, put new tie in and then spike them up.

We surface j100 mi of track with about 15K tons of ballast.

We have two types of rail, the older jointed rail – bars that have cracks, stripped joints, bolts broken out, or head web separation. Bolts also need to be retightened. Ones that can't be tightened are torched and replaced.

The CWR, great ride quality. Certain parts of maintenance go down but requires a lot of engineering to deal with. Balancing compression forces when heats up, tensile forces when cools. Pick based on regional temperatures. Out west they have higher temps. We put in at a lower temp so doesn't all pull apart in the Winter. The type picked leads to temperature restrictions you have. So CWR is all about maintaining those forces. Our rail installed at around 100 F degrees. Would contract about inches in cold, and expand about 10 inches on a hot day in summer. We have to train on this every year on engineering to understand issues with CWR. Maintenance for CWR: break in welds occur. Have to either heat to install temp or pull with a stretcher before can replace a section. On cold day may be heating & stretching it with a hydraulic stretcher to close the gap. Close to within 1" then anchor and come back in Spring (if repair in winter) and redo it. We have to document each repair and write it on the rail to meet FRA requirements. Pack with a thermite when due a weld to fix the CWR. Frog, switch points portions of rail that fail also need welds.

Re-decked three bridges this year in advance of Ethan Allen Express extension. Have to clean flanges from snow and ice. Is a battle every time snows, freezes and thaws.

Storm Patrols go out and survey rail and take care of trees.

In summer there are floods, rain and thunderstorms. Slope failures occasionally. Usually when all done reestablish should before put ballast down.

Lot of culvert work.

Dan D. Charles let's pull up your maps. Do 2022 map first then 2023.

Charles Hunters – Selden laid out great presentation of what really takes to maintain these to the higher class. We did 16000 ties on Palmer this year. Have to have 50K tons over that track before can open to full speed. We keep running total every day until temporary speed restrictions can be lifted. That's why slow orders last few days after the job is done. Had culvert that caused outage, and coordinated with VTrans to bus around the closure for a few days. Nobody seems interested in doing that, but that's an option for some of these larger jobs. Project in Essex Jct. redid the three crossings at 4 corners. Raised track to equal platform height. A lot of work. The west river siding, a passing track in Brattleboro in anticipation of new passenger track on other side. New ballast and track. 2023 will also be big project year. 2 tie jobs, so even more than this year. 10K tons of ballast. Large project for upgrades to warning devices and to add warning devices on Vermonter passenger. Will be similar work to this year, but larger projects. More frequent communications with Amtrak & VTrans to make them more aware. May be option to put out temp schedules to better reflect transit times as they are affected by these projects. We got CRISI grant 4 years ago. Several slow orders tied to this for rock slopes and culverts. Shaun Corbett still waiting for final signed copy from FRA. They will go into purchasing as soon as get that back.

Dan D. – That's great. Reason asked for presentation from you was takes lot to run a railroad and to keep track speed up 24/7. We have short const window in VT and need to cram that in. If you look at list of late time and look at list of work to be done, is no wonder there were some slow orders. Next summer will have to plan around those slow orders again. This is the reality of construction for railroads in Vermont. That's the reality and why asked for these guys to show what they do because there is a lot that is sometimes not noticed. This is a team effort all the way around. And want you to get credit for what you do on a daily basis and doesn't get said enough how much investment you guys make into the railroads in VT.

## **5) Operation Lifesaver**

Dan D. – Operation Lifesaver is last agenda.

Toni C. – Doing fine. Not a lot of in person events anymore. Appearing virtually. Circulating VTrans Rail Safety video which has been very well received. AASHTO journal actually covered this video in their July monthly publication. Open to new ideas. Was suggestion to get it played in movie theatres before previews.

Chris Q: - Any problems with extension of passenger service to Burlington?

Toni C. – Knock on wood. Haven't had any issues yet. Think video went a long way because were able to get it out to every school in the state.

Dan D. – Big thanks to Toni and she did a great job. We now have a quorum and can vote on minutes.

## **2) Approval of Previous Minutes follow up with quorum now present**

Seconded by Carl as amended earlier. With one word change. All those opposed raise your hand. Minutes were approved with no objections.

## **7) Next Scheduled Meeting – Thursday, March 16, 2023**

Next meeting schedule for March 16<sup>th</sup> a Thursday. We're going to have larger room seating 75, and will also be virtually.

## **6) Public Input**

Chris – Time savings if able to suspend rail passenger service and put people on busses and have a full closure? Busses might be able to keep schedule pretty well. Interesting to see analysis how much time saved on const project if passenger service suspended.

Dan D. – Controversial because not just passenger but freight as well. So, trains may need to run anyway so might as well run passenger trains. Not as easy as stopping Amtrak and putting on busses but we can look at that. Is interesting to look at.

Carl F. – Depends how long duration, 3 days it may be. Might also depend on how long it extends commute time. Depends how far. Might be deterring for passengers.

Dan D. – Probably depends on project and distance have to bus. Too many scenarios almost.

Charles – maybe at least worth looking at when have a particular project.

Carl F. – I think did good job being balanced to keep project and train running. Any new 2023 projects under CRISI, BUILD. New projects?

Dan D. – With all money coming out to be most competitive really need to almost have preliminary design, some NEPA, beginning legwork. Paul pointing out those projects, working with SLR on another grant project. Don't have anything right now, but working on and have potential. Problem we have is our current BUILD project working on now, that project COVID meant supply chain issues and engineer issues through roof (double) so amount in grant is not enough to build project. So how do you fill the grant just to build what we're already committed. Working for grant to fill the gap on what already won grants for. Upgrading tech at stations and unified Amtrak look is another area for grants to work on. Would be nice to have updated displays and WiFi. Similar comfortable look. That is something we're working on too with the grant. WRJ & Bellows Falls platforms are potential grants. We have a lot going.

Carl F. – Would like brief explanation about new equipment. Outcry over uncomfortable seats and equipment out West. May be able to learn from that on new cars being built.

Dan D. – Toni, Are we at a point we can share that?

Toni C. – Yes, consultant working on that and we could share next time.

Carl F. – Amtrak out west doing poor classification of business class. We do not want vending machines. Means no beer no booze. Was one thing railroads used to make money on is the food service. This is what they're doing out West.



Q – What about T bill?

Dan D. – Little early to talk about legislative but can probably do at next meeting.

Dave Laz. – From Stowe VT, 28 years old. This is first meeting he's joined. Wanted to say thanks for good meeting. In regards to funding to grants, any to increase passenger NECR to FRA Class 2?

Dan D. – direct you to VTrans website and Rail plan. Not immediate, but in the future is in plan. Just not next focus.

Dave Laz. – Would like to point out lot of focus on getting Vermonters out of Vermont instead of providing passenger rail within Vermont. Upgrading NECR would provide that benefit.

Dan D. – Direct you to website. This has been studied and that has been looked at.

### **8) Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 2:34 PM. Have a happy Holiday. See you in March.