

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
June 30, 2022**

***Hybrid meeting**

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Jason Owen, VTrans
Eleni Churchill, VTrans
Toni Clithero, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Bruce King, VTrans
Amy McCaffrey, VTrans
Jackie Cassino, VTrans
Charlene Lovett, Clarmont, NH
Scott Burbank, VHB
Jane Brophy, Amtrak
Selden Houghton, VRS
Peter Young
Mike Winslow, ACRPC
Bill McDonald, Woodstock
Ben Heckscher
Richard "Hank" Lee
Deb Fox
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office
Dan Currier
Jack Madden
Allison Crowley
E. Mahnke
Devon Neary
Dan Peacock
Dan Tillberg
Sasa Dekam
Alex DePillis
Henry Epp

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

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

Jackie Cassino, VTrans Rail Trails Program Manager, explained the rail trails program noting VTrans is the first department of transportation to house this type of program which is a great opportunity for the state and preserves the rail corridor for the future if needed. Four rail trails (149 miles of rail banked line) will be managed and maintained by VTrans with signage, access, marketing, promotion. These four season trails used by many are economic drivers for many towns.

2.0 Approval of Minutes

March 24, 2022

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charlie Baker, to approve the minutes of 3/24/22 as presented. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

3.0 Passenger Topics

3.1 Ethan Allen to Burlington Update

Dan Delabruere reported Amtrak service from New York City to Burlington will return on July 29, 2022. There will be a “launch event” at the station in Burlington. The train will leave on schedule at 10:10 AM. There will be a public announcement when tickets are available on the website.

3.2 Claremont, NH, Station Update

Charlene Lovett, President of the Claremont Station Association in Claremont, New Hampshire, gave a presentation on the improvements to the Claremont train station including upgrades to the platform, lighting, drop off area, warming pavilion, and other amenities. Ms. Lovell explained the host program made up of volunteers who greet Amtrak passengers seven days a week. The Association also publishes a newsletter, maintains a Facebook page, has a food truck at the site. The goals of the Association are to increase train ridership, expand marketing, inform VTrans of maintenance needs at the station/platform, ensure a high degree of customer satisfaction, work on a parking solution, and safety education.

Bill McDonald urged doing what is being done at the Claremont station at all Amtrak stops with competent people, and distributing the newsletter to chambers of commerce and travel agencies in the region. Ms. Lovett advised if other communities are interested in improving the Amtrak station in their town, they should first form an ad hoc committee with train enthusiasts from the community, create a station host association, and get support of the idea from the local government.

Carl Fowler gave a brief history of the first short platform at Claremont built by Central Vermont Railway. Also, the information page on what to do in Claremont is being done for all the stations on the route with similar type of information being provided. Regarding caretakers at stations, some caretakers are very informative, others are not. There are many stations without a caretaker. The Downeaster train has a caretaker who rides the train to highlight points of interest along the route.

3.3 Amtrak Ridership

Both the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express trains are performing well. Ridership on the Vermonter is at 77% of FY19 levels. Ridership on the Ethan Allen Express is at 100% of FY19 levels.

4.0 Freight and Construction Topics

4.1 Project Updates

Paul Libby announced the VTrans project team received the ACEC Excellence Award for the Fairlee Slope Stability Project. The team has been doing crossing maintenance throughout the state. Projects that were done over the last 15 years to bring Amtrak to Burlington included track improvements with continuous welded rail (67 miles), crossings (26), bridges (9), platforms/stations (3), turnouts, sidings, yard upgrades. Funding for these projects came from FHWA, FRA, TIGER grants, and state funds. The total investment was \$117 million, state and federal funds. There were also other projects done to accommodate Amtrak, such as the Middlebury Tunnel Project and highway projects.

Carl Fowler commented that the state is restoring Amtrak service from Burlington to New York City after 69 years (service halted in 1953) and is using the original Burlington and Vergennes stations on the route.

5.0 Operation Lifesaver

Toni Clithero stated lots of effort is going into getting the message to the public about the Amtrak train to Burlington traveling on the tracks at 59 mph including PSAs, social media, safety video sent to town clerks for posting on town websites, meeting with schools, doing interviews, information at town and state fairs.

6.0 Public Input

- Bill McDonald, Woodstock, asked about a train to Montreal crossing the border at a location other than Rouses Point to provide faster travel. Dan Delabriere assured all parties involved in resuming service to Montreal are engaged in conversation.
- Carl Fowler gave a personal tribute to Jeff Munger and his efforts with transportation in the state.
- Dave Wulfson said Jeff Munger was a rail advocate and will be missed. Mr. Wulfson applauded the work of the VTrans team, the contractors and engineers for all the rail work that has been done. The work of VRS in keeping the freight trains running through all the projects was also acknowledged.

7.0 Next Meeting/Adjournment

Next Meeting: September 15, 2022, 1 PM – 3 PM

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

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 PM.

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