

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
September 22, 2022**

***Hybrid meeting**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Charlie Moore
Dave Wulfson Joann Erenhouse
Rick Moulton

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Jason Owen, VTrans
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
Eleni Churchill, VTrans
Toni Clithero, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Bruce King, VTrans
Sasa Dejan, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Dave Pelletier, VTrans
Amy McCaffrey, VTrans
Scott Burbank, VHB
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Mary Anne Michaels, VRS
Christopher Parker, VRAN
Ben Heckscher
Gary Fox
Peter Young
Allison Crowley
Dan Peacock
Lucas Irwin
Bill McDonald
Wendy Harrison
Ethan Pepin
Eric Guyette
Rockingham Development

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Delabruere called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM.

2.0 Approval of Minutes

June 30, 2022

Tabled until next meeting due to lack of a quorum present.

3.0 Passenger Topics

3.1 Ethan Allen to Burlington Update

Dan Delabruere showed pictures of the opening celebration in Burlington of the return of Amtrak service. The train was full. Thanks are extended to the VTrans team, Amtrak, and VRS for the work to return Amtrak service to Burlington and a successful opening day.

Carl Fowler mentioned that the train is often sold out before Albany and asked if Amtrak could block out a train car or add equipment in Albany for Vermonters who want a ticket.

3.2 Ridership

Toni Clithero reported ridership is strong on both the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express, increasing 120% on the Ethan Allen Express between June and July and August showing over 9,000 riders. The Vermonter had nearly 10,000 riders in July and August.

There was discussion of the impact on the Vermonter by the Ethan Allen Express going to Burlington. Dan Delabruere assured Vermonters having difficulty getting a seat on the Ethan Allen Express will be addressed if the problem persists. Chris Natale and Kevin Chittenden said Amtrak has been running less service due to mechanical issues, but is trying to add service.

3.3 Vermonter to Montreal Update

Dan Delabruere and Karen Songhurst reported the meeting in August with all the partners in the Montrealer project covered regaining momentum. Next steps include the scoping study by Quebec and after than the engineering effort. There is support of the project from the highest levels of government on both sides.

Gary Fox asked about a second roundtrip in the eastern corridor and if this is in the Rail Plan. Dan Delabruere said extending service to Montreal will be done first then VTrans will look at expanding service.

3.4 Railroad Labor Strike and Potential Effect on Vermont

Dan Delabruere reported the railroad labor union strike was averted. There are verbal agreements, but the labor agreements are not yet drafted or signed. Passenger service on the Ethan Allen Express will likely not be affected by a strike, but the Vermonter service will be affected because the train will not be able to get to Springfield. The Vermonter would stop in New Haven and there would not be bus service north. NECR should run into Vermont without a problem and VRS is a non-union railroad so no impact there. Internal freight movement in Vermont should not be impacted. How freight is moved around the country is in question if there is a strike.

4.0 Freight and Construction Topics

4.1 Project Updates

Paul Libby showed pictures of rail projects across the state (crossings, capital projects, bridges, girder and abutment repairs). A BUILD grant was received for 29 bridges and 286,000-pound rail capacity. Dan Delabruere noted construction estimates are significantly higher than four years ago when the state applied and received the BUILD grant so there will be a budget gap. VTrans is working on how to address the gap.

4.2 Future Grant Opportunities

Future projects include track improvements (Rutland to Bennington), 22 bridges on WACR (White River to Coventry/Newport), 29 bridges on GMRC (Rutland to Bellows Falls). Dan Delabruere said scoping efforts will determine if the state applies for a grant. Vermont needs to get to 286,000-pound rail capacity.

5.0 Operation Lifesaver

Vermont received national billing by the American Association of State Transportation Officials in their July 15, 2022 publication due to the safety video that was produced. Using a digital delivery system to spread the word is effective. There have been no incidents on the tracks with pedestrians or vehicles since November 2021. Operation Lifesaver was paired with the NMV Model Railroad Association set up at the Champlain Valley Fair this year and the turnout was great. Volunteers are needed so more presentations can be done to get the message out. Contact the Vermont Operation Lifesaver office.

Bill McDonald suggested running the Operation Lifesaver video before movies in movie theatres.

6.0 Public Input

- Carl Fowler suggested an analysis of running times and delays be done for the Ethan Allen and Vermonter trains. Dan Delabruere explained the overrun time on the Ethan Allen train was built in when building the schedule. The schedule will be reviewed.
- Bill McDonald asked about the slow order from Fair Haven to Whitehall. Dave Wulfson said the slow order is due to sharp curves through the ledges there and will remain unless the ledges are removed and the track straightened.
- Bill McDonald asked about going to Windsor Station if the train to Montreal does not come to fruition. Dan Delabruere said Windsor Station is not a viable option because there is no connection to the downtown Central Station.
- Bill McDonald asked about the 10-mph posting on the track at Rouses Point south for the Adirondack. Dan Delabruere said he cannot comment on a New York train, but the intention is to have the Adirondack operational.
- Ben Heckscher said he did a timetable analysis on the Ethan Allen train and it showed that out of Brattleboro the train did not depart on time for 12 months except for three days in December 2021 and on average the train was late by 10-25 minutes. The same situation occurred at the Essex Junction station. VTrans is asked to find a solution.

7.0 Next Meeting

December 15, 2022, 1-3 PM, Dill Building, 2178 Airport Road, Barre.

8.0 Adjournment

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 3:01 PM.

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