

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
DAVIS 5<sup>th</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
November 14, 2018**

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

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michele Boomhower, VTrans  
Dan Delabruere, VTrans  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans  
Paul Libby, VTrans  
Alan Franklin, VTrans  
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans  
Costa Pappis, VTrans  
David Tillberg, VTrans  
Karen Songhurst, VTrans  
Kyle Wells, VTrans  
Seldon Houghton, VRS  
Devan Nearn, RRPC  
Deb Fox, VT By Rail/Finger Lakes Rail  
Bill Hollister, Amtrak  
Christopher Natale, Amtrak  
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak  
Brian McClain, NECR  
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony  
Scott Burbank, VHB  
John Wilson, Jacobs Engineering  
Chris Campany, Windham Regional Planning  
Scott Bascom, citizen

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**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

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

**2. Public Comments**

Jack Madden asked for an update on preclearance activity by Canada. Dan Delabruere said there is no news to report.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

*August 15, 2018*

Postponed.

**4. Operation Lifesaver**

Alan Franklin reported the number of people being reached through Operation Lifesaver events and programs has exceeded last year's numbers. Eight new volunteers are being trained in Rutland. Activity and coloring books and rulers will again be provided to the Jingle Bell Express Christmas train. National Operation Lifesaver has a new Executive Director.

## **5. Grant Opportunities**

Dan Delabruere reported no word yet on the \$4 million CRISSY grant for rock mitigation and culvert work on the NECR line. Another application for a CRISSY grant has been submitted to upgrade the 31 bridges south of Rutland to 286,000 pound capacity. Total project cost is \$32 million. The federal portion is \$24 million. The goal is to have the entire western corridor at 286,000 pound capacity.

Costa Pappis said grants are getting more competitive with restrictions on funds so adding more funding to the Rail Program is good.

Carl Fowler urged contacting the Congressional delegation to lobby for approval of the budget.

Jack Madden commented the CRISSY grant work will mesh well with grant money PAN-AM received to improve the interchange at Hoosick.

Chris Andreasson asked about 286,000 pound capacity on the NECR line in Massachusetts. Dan Delabruere said Massachusetts is lobbying to submit a grant application to fix bridges that are not 286,000 pound capacity.

## **6. Passenger Topics**

### **a) Amtrak Update on PTC**

Dan Delabruere reported Amtrak has assured trains will run, but there are five main risks Amtrak wants addressed including misaligned switches, crossing over other tracks, speed, movable bridges, and track blockage hazards (trees, rocks, and such). Amtrak wants PTC or "PTC like" on every line per the FRA directive. A report from Amtrak is anticipated. Massachusetts has submitted an application for exemption for the main track in the knowledge corridor.

Dave Wulfson urged having a formal on the record conversation with the FRA on expanding the Ethan Allen Express to Burlington. Mr. Wulfson asked about the outcome of the study on storage of the Amtrak train in Burlington. Dan Delabruere said the report is still in draft form. The item will be on the agenda for the next Rail Council meeting. Chittenden County Regional Planning is doing the study.

There was discussion of getting the train to Essex Junction, St. Albans, and Montreal from Burlington. The first step is to get the Ethan Allen Express to Burlington.

### **b) Amtrak Ridership and Revenue**

### **c) Amtrak On Time Performance**

*Vermonters*

Ridership up 2.2% and revenues up 2.3% for the year. On time performance has improved slightly (61.6%).

*Ethan Allen Express*

Ridership down .6% and revenues are up 6.8% due to a switch in revenue management. Track work at Penn Station had an impact on the service. On time performance is very good (83.2%).

Chris Natale with Amtrak said the revenue from Albany to New York City is not included in the Ethan Allen Express revenue.

Chris Andreasson asked about the change in ridership compared to the change in ticket revenue. Alan Franklin said the revenue management system on the Ethan Allen Express was changed. Higher revenue could be due to higher ticket prices and no discounts. When there is high demand for tickets the prices are higher and revenues are higher. Less demand means more discounts on ticket prices.

Alan Franklin said he will report on the sign inventory on Amtrak routes at the next Rail Council meeting.

*d) Amtrak Reauthorization*

Carl Fowler said there will be revisions to how federal money is appropriated for transportation. There has been discussion that Amtrak may change to a more state supported model for the national train network, but the cost of Amtrak will not be covered. There has been talk of leasing the northeast corridor to a private entity for 100 years and that entity will maintain the line. To keep federal money for rail, the trains must serve a majority of states. VTrans is urged to support the national network not just parochial corridors.

Dan Delabruere said VTrans is aware of the situation. Vermont is holding its own and protecting its interests. Protecting the national network is in Vermont's interest.

*e) Update on Western Corridor Bus Connection to Albany*

Alan Franklin said "The Shires" bus service makes two runs from Manchester to Bennington to Albany, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, to connect to the train to New York City. There is thru ticketing for the ride. Up to \$17 is added to the train ticket fare with the bus connection. On average a dozen or so passengers per day use the bus service to meet the train. Premier Coach has the bus contract. The cost of service is \$500,000. Fare box recovery is about 8%.

Carl Fowler said the bus service should be part of the train timetable to raise awareness of the service. Vermont should publish its own timetable with connecting services.

Chris Andreasson asked about the subsidy per rider. Alan Franklin said approximately \$100. Mr. Andreasson said it will be hard to advocate for the train service connection on

the western corridor if the results do not improve with the bus service. Vermont Translines (Premier Coach) does not mention the service to connect to the train on their website. Chris Natale said the Amtrak marketing people can look at the timetables. Charlie Baker suggested engaging the Bennington Regional Planning Commission as well.

#### f) Greenfield Shuttle Service

Dan Delabruere said Massachusetts and Amtrak will do a shuttle service from Springfield to Greenfield beginning June 2019. The final schedule is not yet published. Vermont would have to add an additional train set to connect from Brattleboro to Greenfield which would be expensive and NECR would need to be involved. Chris Natale said Amtrak is short on cab cars presently. Cost and crew are issues to go to Brattleboro and the schedule would not be ideal. Amtrak is willing to work with Vermont on extending to Brattleboro, but the results may not be the service Vermont wants. VTrans will keep investigating the bus service. New Hampshire is willing to participate with Vermont to see how far the bus service can extend

Carl Fowler said the shuttles will impact ridership on the Vermonter.

Chris Campany, Windham Regional Planning, spoke in support of the shuttle service for the region as a way to get people comfortable with bus-rail service. Plus there is serious economic development potential long term. Regional Planning is interested in a connection from Brattleboro to Bradley Airport. (Chris Andreasson suggested contacting Peter Pan bus service.)

Michele Boomhower said increasing the population of Vermonters is the Governor's push. The reality of the Boston market bears some thinking about in terms of drawing in residents to the Brattleboro community because this brings in another transportation nexus.

Charlie Moore said his company has 10 RBCs that could be available for service.

Jack Madden spoke of cab cars and locomotives being available and the environment for rail transportation being more favorable in Congress and state legislatures.

## **7. Freight and Construction Topics**

### a) Project Update

Paul Libby noted two projects associated with the Middlebury rail tunnel have been added to the list of projects for the Rail Division. The bridges on the Vermonter north of Proctor are part of the TIGER 7 grant, but are bidding now. Siding in Rutland and switches in the Middlebury yard are bidding now. There are some FEMA projects from 14 months ago. Scope of work is being done for FY19 projects which will go to design and construction next season.

Dave Wulfson asked if Middlebury identified the station location. Dan Delabruere said the Middlebury Selectboard will be voting on a recommendation.

Charlie Baker asked about the status of the Charlotte bridge. Paul Libby said the bridge is a priority. Design work will be done. The headwalls of the stone arch bridge are beginning to fail.

b) Middlebury Project Update

Dan Delabruere narrated a video of the project site in Middlebury taken by an UAV (drone). The project is on schedule. In summer 2019 the 20 hour work windows will begin and the track will only be open to trains for four hours per day. In summer 2020 there will be a complete track outage for 10 weeks then back to the 20 hour work windows until the project is complete in 2021.

**8. Other Business/Next Meeting**

*Amtrak ADA Update*

Bill Hollister, Amtrak, reported the ADA update is mainly done at the Castleton stop. A meeting is scheduled with bidders for the Claremont, Windsor, and Essex Junction ADA projects. VTrans is working on the ADA project at White River Junction.

*Next Meeting*

February 20, 2019

*Next Agenda*

- Capital budget
- Minutes (8/15/18 & 11/14/18)
- Engineering consultant list for rail projects
- Expanding Ethan Allen Express to Burlington (report on storing train in Burlington)
- Report on sign inventory

**9. Adjournment**

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 3:25 PM.

*RScty: M.E.Riordan*