

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
February 15, 2017**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Dave Wulfson
Jeff Munger Chris Andreasson
Rick Moulton Charlie Baker
Dave Allaire Charles Hunter

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Bob Fisher, VTrans
Alan Franklin, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Dave Pelletier, VTrans
Larry Donna, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
MaryAnne Michaels, VRS
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony
Rep. Clem Bissonnette, Legislature
Deb Sachs, VRAN
Larry Lewack, VRAN
Scott Burbank, VHB
Allison DeMag, RRAV
John Zicconi, VT Transportation Board

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Delabruere called the meeting to order at 1 PM and mentioned staff is working with the Governor's Office on appointments to the Rail Council. Introductions were done.

2. Public Comments

Dan Delabruere referred to the email from Ray Tylinki regarding the state reporting rail carload information. The state does not require this information at the state level. Dave Wulfson with Vermont Rail Systems had no comment and Charles Hunter with Genoese & Wyoming Railroad said the stock held company reports carloads on an aggregate basis. Rick Moulton mentioned data on truckloads taken off the highway was collected with the Middlebury spur. Dan Delabruere said with projects the information is required, but the request by Mr. Tylinki was for annual reporting. Carl Fowler said closely held corporations do not have to report this information publicly. Larger railroads report for the industry.

Jeff Munger commented with regard to truckloads being removed from roads due to rail, there is a difference between state roads and interstate roads. At one time information on state roads was collected for clearance issues. Dan Delabruere said the information may have been collected and analyzed, but is not required. Dave Wulfson noted there have been some projections in the State Rail Plan. Costa Pappis stated the railroads submit carload information to the Surface Transportation Board and a formal request for the information can be made to the STB which the state does when doing an update to the Rail Plan, but the carloads on a specific rail line cannot be pinpointed. The information is also used to create state profiles. The STB or American Association of Railroads can be contacted for further information.

Bob Atchinson noted *Progressive Railroading* magazine provides quarterly reports on commodity information.

Following further discussion the Rail Council concurred on not responding to Mr. Tylinki's email. If there is a response it will come from Dan Delabruere.

3. Approval of Minutes

November 16, 2016

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to approve the 11/16/16 minutes with change to the bullet on Page 5 reading: "Cost to passengers would be \$14.10 daily to Montpelier...." to read: "Operating support per passengers would be \$14.10 daily to Montpelier....." relative to commuter rail service. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. Operation Lifesaver Update

Alan Franklin reported Operation Lifesaver held its first board meeting and approved Al Franklin attending the state coordinator summit in May in New Orleans for Operation Lifesaver national training. The board also authorized the purchase of swag to hand out at presentations and events. Over 3,300 people were reached last year at presentations and special events. The same events will be held this year. Schools and organizations in rail areas are targeted for presentations. Upcoming presentations include the St. Albans Rotary Club and Spaulding High School. Over the next two months over 1,000 students should be reached. Brattleboro schools are also being contacted.

Dan Delabruere applauded Alan Franklin and Charles Hunter for moving the Operation Lifesaver Program forward. VTrans has discussed doing PSAs and there are national PSAs that can be used. The message of rail safety is being heard.

Carl Fowler mentioned people parking on the platform in Brattleboro which is very dangerous and needs to be stopped. Dan Delabruere said VTrans is working with the local police on the matter.

MaryAnne Michaels acknowledged the outreach work for Operation Lifesaver done by Perry Martell with Vermont Rail Systems, and urged getting more people trained. Alan Franklin said there are three more qualified people since the last meeting. MaryAnne Michaels asked if law enforcement is involved with the program. Dan Delabruere said Mark Perkins with the Vermont State Police is a member of the Operation Lifesaver board. Officer Perkins is forwarding the program information to the police training center. Also, Amtrak police have contacted some local police departments. Dave Allaire said informal outreach was done with the Rutland City Police to raise awareness in the Rutland area.

5. Commuter Rail Study

Dave Pelletier summarized the scope of the commuter rail study for service to/from St. Albans, Essex Junction, Montpelier and connecting service to Burlington. The following was noted:

- There would be two lines of operation with stations.
- Two schedule options include Limited Peak with six roundtrips from Burlington with two to St. Albans and two to Montpelier and Comprehensive with 11 roundtrips from Burlington with four to St. Albans and 7 to Montpelier.
- Operating and maintenance cost is \$3.7 million for the Limited Peak service and \$6.5 million for the Comprehensive service.
- Infrastructure improvements (track and stations) are needed to meet FRA and ADA requirements.
- Capital cost estimate is up to \$363 million.
- Diesel Multiple Units (DMU) may cost less than a locomotive driven train set per passenger capacity level, but there are few in operation and crash worthiness is a concern. It may be worth some further investigation though, especially the smart service DMUs used in California. Each unit cost is between \$4 million and \$7 million per car which is about a third less than a locomotive driven train set.
- Infrastructure improvement expenses do not change if DMUs are used versus locomotive driven train sets.
- Implementation details need to be settled (train operator, operating agreements, funding sources for capital and operations, and labor requirements).

Dave Wulfson took issue with the operating cost figure noting the \$450,000 for corridor access does not cover the dispatch on the lines.

Charles Hunter pointed out only one more train trip to St. Albans can be added without causing PTC. Having additional passenger or freight trains will trigger PTCs.

Carl Fowler described differences in DMU train sets and the ability to add capacity/cars. Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony, said the Transportation Research

Board did an analysis of DMU operating cost in North America. Mr. Madden will forward a copy of the paper and the presentation.

Charlie Baker asked about ridership estimates on the commuter service. Dave Pelletier said the estimate is just under 1,000 passengers per day for the Limited Peak service and just under 2,000 passengers per day for the Comprehensive service.

Carl Fowler distributed a copy of his comments on the commuter rail report and his objection that the analysis did not include high level platforms and the DMU option. Additionally, the study ignores potential passenger traffic from industries on the rail line, such as Global Foundries, and the Burlington-Essex Junction branch (needs upgrade) that goes by Fort Ethan Allen, St. Michaels College, and Fanny Allen Hospital. Mr. Fowler requested the report be reconsidered and resubmitted to the legislature with cost comparisons including DMUs and correction of technical errors in the report, such as overstated project fare from St. Albans to Burlington, including upgrade of track to 79 mph which is impossible and will not happen, not considering traffic south of Burlington going through Burlington, and locating stations at an insufficient number of places. Mr. Fowler said his recalculation of the cost of the service is \$172 million.

Dan Delabruere said there are many different ways to analyze the data, but regardless the dollar figure is still large. Also, the question remains as to whether ridership and demand can be served by buses. Carl Fowler urged refocusing the effort not on commuter rail, but on the Vermont State Rail Plan and fixing the Burlington-Essex branch. A regional approach should be taken. Running a DMU with a one man crew and 150 passengers is less costly than running three buses.

Chris Andreasson pointed out unlike trains buses go to many stops and take people to their destinations. Passenger rail is expanding regionally with service from Rutland to Burlington to Montreal eventually.

Rick Moulton added the service has always been known as ABRB-E (Albany-Bennington-Rutland-Burlington-Essex).

Charlie Baker agreed with looking at commuter service with DMU cars again, adding Green Mountain Transit is already running commuter bus service and updating their bus transit service and their plan and could provide some information. Mr. Baker said there has been mention of the state spending money to widen I-89. A cost effective solution needs to be considered in dealing with peak hour traffic.

Michele Boomhower noted VTrans is looking at technology for autonomous vehicles to reduce congestion and increase safety.

Dave Wulfson said there are 12 DMU cars coming to Vermont and the private purchaser is looking for a place to run them. There may be opportunity to do some live testing with light rail vehicles.

Dave Allaire asked if the legislature is serious about moving people by train or just collecting the data. Dan Delabruere said the legislature wants to investigate what it will take to have a commuter rail operating. It is acknowledged there are other options. Discussion will continue.

Charlie Baker commented the reason Vermont does not have a commuter rail is lack of population density. Jeff Munger recalled the previous head of the FTA advised starting with buses so LINK was started. The FTA wants to see the bus numbers before funding commuter or regional rail service. Michele Boomhower noted there is also a significant parking issue in Montpelier. The state is subsidizing 50% of the LINK fare for state employees and National Life is funding 50% of the fare for their employees. Carl Fowler said the subsidy for LINK in 2006 was \$30,000 and \$140,000/year in 2015.

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Rick Moulton, that the Rail Council advises VTrans to continue study of regional passenger rail in northern Vermont including upgrade of the Burlington-Essex branch line. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

6. Freight and Construction Topics

Annual Crossing Report

Bob Fisher reported on the results of the rail crossing inventory that looked at safety, condition, and errors in data. The following was noted:

- There are 399 public at-grade crossings owned by the state that were inspected between August and November. Of this number 47 were labelled poor, 161 labelled excellent, and 191 labelled good/fair.
- There are 3,000 crossing signs in the state with 2,222 in excellent conditions, 75 that are missing, and 457 that are in poor/fair condition.
- Emergency Notification Sign (ENS) is posted at each crossing.
- In addition to the inventory of condition an FRA report on crossings is done each year.
- VTrans began the inventory in 2012 and now has pictures of every crossing in the state.

Carl Fowler mentioned the lack of sidewalk to the train station in Brattleboro from the long term parking area at the top of the hill. There is no safe way to walk to the station.

Dave Wulfson said his railroad does not know about crossing surface issues until complaints are received so the information compiled by VTrans is very useful. It should be noted which railroad has poor crossing surfaces to see what is happening with the track so the railroad can focus its work and not undo work

that has been done. Dan Delabruere agreed there should be coordination. The list of the 15 worst crossings will be addressed first. Dave Wulfson advised against installing rubber crossings. Dan Delabruere said concrete is used for high volume crossings. Asphalt is also commonly used.

Bridge Management Annual Report

Dan Delabruere reported four state owned rail lines are leased to Vermont Rail Systems. The lines cumulatively have 214 active bridges. The state reports to the FRA on 178 of the bridges and Vermont Rail Systems reports on the remainder. All bridges must have a load rating by September 2017. To date 148 are done and the field work is done on the remaining 30. There are two kinds of inspections: capacity (how much weight the bridge can hold) and condition (piers and such). Having below a 'poor' rating is a critical issue. The data collected show the bridges on each rail line, the history of the condition of the bridges, and which bridges are below 286,000 pound capacity. Of the 178 bridges the state is responsible for 103 meet 286,000 pound capacity, 45 do not, and 30 have not yet been calculated. Not having 286,000 pound capacity restricts rail traffic. Some bridges are on rail lines that are not a priority to bring to 286,000 pound capacity. Next steps now that the scope of the matter is known is to determine the cost and make a plan that prioritizes the lines then begin work. TIGER 7 grant money will be used.

Dave Wulfson noted today's weight capacity standard is 263,000 pounds. Bridges that do not meet 286,000 pound capacity are flagged and a plan is made. The bridge is still meeting the current standard of 263,000 pounds.

Carl Fowler asked if the New England Central line is 286,000 pound capacity. Charles Hunter said NECR will fix bridges on the line in Massachusetts so freight can proceed to Canada. Dan Delabruere said the state submitted a grant application to address 23 bridges between Rutland and Hoosick that need repair.

7. "Living with Rail"

John Zicconi, Executive Secretary for the State Transportation Board, reported on the public forums the STB held on rail. There were 270 people who participated in the forums. Support was stated for expansion of passenger rail on the western corridor to Montreal, the tunnel in Middlebury or at least getting the service to Middlebury, having a timely connection to Albany, NY and Springfield, MA, and train shelters in Vermont. Commuter rail was supported between Rutland and Burlington and transportation for people in the Northeast Kingdom. Ways for a more cooperative approach with the railroad is needed and state regulations need to work within the federal laws. There was also discussion at the forums of helping the railroad move more freight so there is less truck traffic on the road, and the state helping identify land for rail side economic development (i.e. current use program for land used for rail purposes). People were critical of the fines issued by the railroad for trespass and wanted to find ways for the railroad to work cooperatively. People also spoke of the train station

in Essex Junction and working with NECR on the multi-use path in the rail right-of-way to the high school. Having the state work with the railroad on these types of projects was encouraged. Also, people want more oversight over materials being transported by rail through the state.

Mr. Zicconi provided copies of the rail report submitted to the House and Senate transportation committees and urged everyone to read the Executive Summary in the report especially the conclusions. Mr. Zicconi read some of the conclusions from the report.

Dave Wulfson mentioned the issue of “NIMBY”, noting it is good to bring federal, state, the railroads, and the community together, but it goes both ways. John Zicconi said in general the people at the forums were supportive of rail. Rick Moulton said as use of rail is resurrected people are becoming more aware. Dan Delabruere said the forums he attended were positive overall. People wanted more rail, particularly passenger service, and to learn how to use rail to help the community.

Carl Fowler said a better way needs to be found to show people that freeing up land in the downtown that is occupied by rail means the rail function has to go somewhere else.

John Zicconi said the state should do a cost-benefit analysis of how much is spent to subsidize cars and trucks versus rail.

Chris Andreasson spoke positively of the public forum that was held in White River Junction.

Rick Moulton said it is encouraging to hear a good swell of people support passenger rail from Rutland to Burlington. John Zicconi said people liked the idea of commuter rail. The potential ridership in Vermont is the same as Nashville, Tennessee. The Nashville service has a heavy subsidy.

8. Passenger Topics

Amtrak Ridership and Revenue

The Vermonter showed strong growth in the first quarter with ridership up 9.3%. Revenue was up 12.4%. The Ethan Allen Express showed a slight increase of .7% in ridership and .6% increase in revenue.

Middlebury Tunnel

Dan Delabruere reported community members in Middlebury suggested re-evaluating the project based on environmental concerns. An EA will be done on the entire project which will cause an estimated year delay to the start of the project (hope to now start in 2018). The project is being managed by VTrans and Middlebury will be involved. Major disturbance to downtown Middlebury will be for a year. The total project will take four years. The rail shutdown remains at 10 weeks. The

portion of the project funded with federal and TIGER 7 funds will be completed on time, but the trains may not be running then.

On Time Performance

The Vermonter had on time performance of 68.5% in December due to the number and kind of delays on the line. The trend is decreasing for slow order minutes.

Carl Fowler stated if some of the permanent slow orders are not lifted than a performance improvement plan is needed. Dan Delabruere announced on 2/27/17 Amtrak will implement a temporary timetable that has the train leave St. Albans 10 minutes earlier and restores the stations where there are slow orders in Vermont so passengers are not left standing on the platforms. Hopefully these changes will increase customer satisfaction. Charles Hunter said NECR has only three remaining slow orders, one is a crossing and two are culverts.

Food and Beverage Service on the Vermonter

Work continues on getting more Vermont products on the train. Local logos have been added to the menu. Hot entries are being discontinued.

9. Other Business

Next Meeting

April/May timeframe TBA (Doodle poll will be done)

Railroad Association of Vermont Luncheon

VRAN luncheon is April 6, 2017 on the railcars behind Capital Plaza in Montpelier. All are invited.

Add “Councilor Comments” to the Agenda and Send Materials Prior to the Meeting

Jeff Munger requested adding time for comments from Rail Council members as a regular item on the agenda and forwarding relevant documents for the meeting in advance of the meeting so members have time to prepare. Dan Delabruere assured materials are forwarded as soon as they are available.

10. Adjournment

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 3:50 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan