

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
February 20, 2019**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Jeff Munger
Chris Andreasson Charlie Moore
Dave Allaire Joann Erenhouse
Charlie Baker
MaryAnne Michaels for Dave Wulfson

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation
Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Alan Franklin, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Dave Pelletier, VTrans
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
David Blittersdorf, All Earth Rail
David Mullett, All Earth Rail
Randy Feeley, G&W
Christine Porcaro, VRAN
Deb Fox, Finger Lakes Railway
Scott Burbank, VHB
Jack Madden, Erdwin Anthony & Assoc.
John Wilson, Jacobs Engineering
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Chris Campany, Windham Regional Commission
Chris Parker, citizen

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 and rail project consultants. Dan Delabruere said the rail projects will go beyond 2020 so consultant contracts must be renewed. Regarding preclearance, Brian Searles

and Joe Flynn met with officials in Montreal to discuss preclearance, but no significant steps forward have been made as yet.

- Christine Porcaro, VRAN, announced the Rail Action Network reception on April 9, 2019 at the Capital Plaza.

3. Approval of Minutes

November 14, 2018

MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Joann Erenhouse, to approve the minutes of 11/14/18 as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. All Earth Rail Presentation

Charlie Moore with All Earth Rail introduced the presentation on the All Earth Rail commuter rail project. The company has 12 RDC cars presently. Each car holds 96 passengers. Ten cars are being prepared to run on the main line and two are in storage. David Blittersdorf has invested \$5 million to start the service. The state is urged to support the project.

David Blittersdorf reported the following:

- Testimony was given to the House and Senate Transportation Committees on All Earth Rail and the RDC cars, and to elicit support for the project.
- Four cars are ready for use after being fully refurbished. A two car set was run between Barre and Montpelier. The cars seat 96 people and have two diesel engines, but can run on one. The cars can run on the freight line and get over 2.5 miles per gallon which calculated across the number of passengers is an efficient use of fuel. There are sufficient spare parts for the cars.
- Towns are connected by the rail and highway system. The car and truck system will be phased out with the decrease of fossil fuel use. Replacements will be mass transit, transit, rail, and electric rail.
- Rail is big economic driver. The approach in Vermont is to start with what works, build the system, and replace with new hardware. The system will redevelop and reinvigorate communities. Having a train in town is an important component. Data show where there is transit service the community does better. Bus service needs to be integrated with rail and with walking and biking to reduce carbon emissions.
- Nearly 80% of the population lives near rail. Major employers are next to rail infrastructure. The state has invested in upgrades to track. Cars are a major cost for people. With transportation by rail and integration with bus the need to own a car is eliminated.
- All Earth Rail will partner with the operator of the trains. A transit authority can be established if necessary so all can come together with an integrated system.

Carl Fowler said the proposal has tremendous possibility for Vermont especially the track segments from Burlington to Essex and Barre to Montpelier. These could be the

catalyst. Budd cars are proven technology. The state should find a way to move forward on this.

Charlie Moore said British Columbia expressed interest in leasing some of the equipment. There was further discussion of the quality of the equipment (very high quality). The cars are ADA accessible and bike racks will be installed.

5. FY2020 Governor's Recommended Rail Budget (draft)

Dan Delabruere reviewed the draft FY2020 budget that the legislature received. The budget covers rail work across the state on bridges, surfaces, crossings, culverts, track, FEMA projects, controllers, station platforms, quiet zones, Middlebury tunnel, design and engineering work, property leasing, rail passenger marketing, immediate attention bridges, statewide rail plan consultants, Amtrak, administrative costs, three-way partnership, cross ties, Operation Lifesaver, right-of-way and maintenance, rail trail maintenance, crossing analysis, report to FRA, bridge inspections, load rating, and maintenance. The budget is \$32.8 million, slightly higher than last year's budget of \$29.6 million. State funding is basically level. Federal funding may slightly increase.

6. Operation Lifesaver

Alan Franklin reported two new volunteers for Operation Lifesaver are attending training on 3/14/19. Seven new volunteers were added last year. Last year 2,369 people were reached through 91 presentations and 5,285 people were reached through special events. WCAX did a report on the railroad where the reporter was on the track. Operation Lifesaver contacted the television station to discourage their reporter from standing on the track. There will be more media outreach. Alan Franklin attended the state coordinator summit. Nationally Operation Lifesaver is now fully staffed.

Dan Delabruere said the Operation Lifesaver Program appears to be working because there have been fewer incidents. There are new trespass laws nationally.

7. Grant Opportunities

Chris Saunders from Sen. Leahy's Office noted VTrans received a CRISI grant for \$2 million from the FRA for safety improvements. Amtrak funding is \$50 million.

Dan Delabruere said 31 rail bridges are part of the BUILD grant program. VTrans is working with the FRA on how to get the federal money and how to put the projects out to bid. The Rail Program receives significant federal funding. Rail has many positive ramifications in the state.

There was discussion of passenger rail service to Montreal. Dan Delabruere said the rail on the Canadian side needs some work. A governance model for preclearance is being developed for Central Station. This will be a challenge because of the privately held CN. Investment in infrastructure needs to be determined. Meetings with the Canadian Transportation Minister are scheduled for April in Montreal. The dialogue continues.

There is not much passenger rail work to be done. Dan Delabruere said Vermont has to reduce impediments between St. Albans and Montreal. Joe Flynn added sealing the train is not the concern it was years ago. Cameras can be used inside and outside the train.

8. State Rail Plan

Costa Pappis introduced planning staff to work on the Rail Plan, Zoe Neaderland and Dave Pelletier. By May 2021 the Rail Plan must be certified by the FRA. Update of the Rail Plan is estimated to take up to 18 months. Staff recommends updating the data and looking at recommended projects and reprioritizing in order to be compliant with the FRA and to pursue grant money.

Chris Campany, Windham Regional Commission, mentioned expanded service from Greenfield, Massachusetts to New York City. Costa Pappis requested more information and noted except for safety the FRA has no role in commuter rail. Carl Fowler cautioned the expanded service could draw business off the Vermonter because a traveler will be able to do a day's business in NYC from Greenfield.

Charlie Baker asked about alignment of the freight and passenger rail plans. Costa Pappis said a third of the freight plan is freight rail so alignment is logical and will save money.

9. Passenger Topics

a) Safety Analysis

Chris Natale, Amtrak, said Amtrak has undertaken a safety/risk assessment of routes and filed the preliminary results which have been reviewed with VTrans and the railroads. Amtrak is incorporating switch position indicators to mitigate risk with misaligned switches. Amtrak is interested in the possibility of expanding PTC or "PTC-like" in places.

Dan Delabruere said VTrans met with Amtrak and the host railroads. The safety analysis says the train needs to know in advance of switch points. Seldon Houghton's idea of switch point indicator may be an option in the short term. Immediate items to address include switches, rock slide areas, trees in the right-of-way, PTC as a potential long term solution.

Carl Fowler urged thinking out of the box and investigating different levels of PTC signaling. Dan Delabruere said there will be a new system at some point on both railroads.

b) Amtrak Ridership and Revenue

c) On Time Performance

Alan Franklin highlighted:

- Vermonter ridership remains strong. Revenues are up. The Vermonter had its first \$700,000 month. Station on/off is up slightly. On time performance has increased. Customer on time performance was 92%.
- Ethan Allen Express ridership is down slightly. Revenue is up. Amtrak marketing is trying to figure out the issue with ridership on the service. On time performance is good.

Carl Fowler provided a handout on the impact of Amtrak fares on ridership and suggested VTrans may want more input on fares. Dan Delabruere assured VTrans is very involved with the fares. Both trains have benefited from yield management. Carl Fowler asked the percent of seat occupancy north of Springfield that could be addressed by having a more reasonable fare. Dan Delabruere said these issues are discussed with Amtrak.

10. Freight and Construction Topics

a) Project Update

Paul Libby noted:

- Middlebury platform location was decided by the community. Parking is limited.
- Bridge B.63 in Sunderland has been replaced. Bridge 64 was also done.
- New Haven crossing upgrade will be done this summer.
- Other projects include bridge maintenance, rail upgrades, platforms/stations.

11. Other Business

Chris Andreasson spoke in support of having 286,000 rail capacity through Vermont to handle freight rail traffic from Canada.

12. Next Meeting

Next meeting is May 15, 2019. Location to be announced.

13. Adjournment

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 3:48 PM.

Rscy:MERiordan Minutes done from tape.