

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
BARRE CITY PLACE
219 NORTH MAIN STREET
CONFERENCE ROOM 1
BARRE, VERMONT
March 25, 2021**

***Meeting held by teleconference**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Charlie Moore
Chris Andreasson Joann Erenhouse
Dave Wulfson Charles Hunter
Rick Moulton Charlie Baker
Art Whitman

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation
Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
Dave Pelletier, VTrans
Toni Clithero, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Mark Fitzgerald, VTrans
Jason Owen, VTrans
Shaun Corbett, VTrans
Sasa Dejan, VTrans
Aaron Guyette, VHB
Scott Burbank, VHB
John Wilson, Jacobs Engineering
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Selden Houghton, VRS
Mary Anne Michaels, VRS
Christopher Parker, VRAN
Andreas Aeppli, Cambridge Systematics
Shawna Kitzman, Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
David Mullett
Ben Heckscher
Richard Lee
Jack Madden

Scott Miller
Randy Holhut
Zane Luemslsky
Adam Goudreau
Bruce King
Colin Bratton, WRC
Al Villa
Gary Fox, Rockingham/Bellows Falls
Peter Young
M. Winslow, ACRPC

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Delabruere called the teleconference meeting to order at 1 PM and explained the procedure to be followed.

Secretary Flynn spoke about the CSX/PanAm purchase and Amtrak restart, noting the state is in active litigation on the CSX/PanAm purchase and a firm date on the return of Amtrak service is close to being announced.

2.0 Approval of Minutes

December 9, 2020

MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Charlie Baker, to approve the minutes of 12/9/20 as presented. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

3.0 Passenger Topics

Ethan Allen Train to Burlington Update

Dan Delabruere reported the majority of work left to do for Amtrak to come to Burlington is in the Burlington area (King St/Maple St., bike path, siding). Amtrak and VRS are working with VTrans on the final documents to the FRA for main line track exemption for Amtrak from Rutland to Burlington without PTC.

Carl Fowler asked about the platform and station facility in Middlebury. Dan Delabruere said the platform project funded by VTrans has been designed and the contract awarded. The parking and sidewalk project is being done by Middlebury.

New Haven Station

Trini Brassard reported Regional Planning is working with VTrans on alternate sites for the structure. The issue is sight distance and proximity of the station to the tracks. Recommendations are anticipated by May 15th. Grants and other funding sources will be identified.

Carl Fowler spoke in support of saving the historic railroad station and asked about using exclusionary gates (i.e. “quiet zone”) at the crossing. Trini Brassard said there are five points of potential entry to the tracks so a quiet zone will not work and the station cannot be pushed back from its current location due to wetlands.

Amtrak Service Suspension Update

Dan Delabruere reiterated the report from Secretary Flynn that VTTrans is working on a date of return for Amtrak service. Carl Fowler stressed the need for marketing before service resumes. Memorial Day weekend could be a good target date. Ethan Allen Express is the only train to New York City from Saratoga. Dan Delabruere said marketing is a large portion of the plan. The restart and extension to Burlington will be advertised. Secretary Flynn added the restart group is aware of the lead time needed to build back business.

4.0 Final Draft State Rail Plan Review and Approval

Zoe Neaderland and Dave Pelletier gave a presentation on the Rail Plan update to be forwarded to the FRA. Once the plan is in place the state will be eligible to apply for certain types of grants. The modeling exercise showed medium growth in rail ridership and the 2020 goals in the plan mirror the goals of prior plans with an updated focus on safety and climate resiliency, prioritization methodology, funding, cost estimates and implementation. The plan also includes public input on environment, multi-modal, safety, and planning. Recommendation in the plan include:

- Safety improvements (1st priority)
- Burlington rail yard project (2nd priority)
- Grants/funding for rail (2nd priority)
- Bridges and track upgrade (2nd priority)
- Connect to regional and Class 1 railroads (2nd priority)
- Improve connection to Amtrak trains (2nd priority)
- Work to decrease delays (2nd priority)
- Main Class 2 freight track and Class 4 passenger track (2nd priority)
- Encourage freight as a good neighbor (2nd priority)
- Use industrial land with access to sidings (3rd priority)
- Upgrade track for Ethan Allen Express passenger train, Albany to Burlington (3rd priority)
- Improve track so Ethan Allen Express can connect to the Vermonter (3rd priority)
- Promote intermodal options and develop more transload facilities (3rd priority)
- Modernize rail yards (3rd priority)
- Increase resilience of rail infrastructure against severe storms (3rd priority)
- More information on safety and greenhouse gas emissions
- Improving passenger service on-time performance

Capital program cost is \$44 million over the next 5 years and \$219 million over the next six to 20 years. Benefits of freight rail include improved safety, increase in the amount and type of freight shipped, increase in system reliability, air quality, and economic development. Benefits of passenger rail include improved safety, convenience, reliability, travel options, improved air quality and environmental benefits.

Carl Fowler mentioned the Amtrak train continuing from Burlington to Essex Junction to Montreal. There could be a second train that goes to Montpelier. The two train model

could have a day train and a night train. Zoe Neaderland said this would be part of the service development plan. Study of station needs and resiliency will be expanded.

Chris Parker spoke positively and in support of the State Rail Plan.

MOTION by Charlie Baker, SECOND by Carl Fowler, that the Rail Council recommends the Secretary of Transportation convey the Vermont Rail Plan with minor modifications submitted by April 8th to the FRA for acceptance.

DISCUSSION:

- **Charlie Baker suggested in the future the draft plan be forwarded for review by the Rail Council prior to being an action item on the agenda.**
- **Carl Fowler mentioned having a different level of passenger service in the state by having a day train from Bennington to Burlington with stops along the way, for example. The track must be improved for freight service first.**
- **Dan Delabruere noted the Rail Plan is a long term planning document that facilitates VTTrans moving projects into the funding state. The comprehensive plan covers all rail lines in the state and seeks to serve businesses and passengers across the state. Many thanks to Zoe Neaderland, Dave Pelletier, Costas Pappis and the rest of the team for their fine work.**

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

Costas Pappis reported rail is at the top of the agenda in testimony in Congress by the Department of Transportation Secretary. Vermont is expecting major infrastructure upgrades to move forward in the next few years as federal funding becomes available.

5.0 Freight and Construction Topics

Project Updates

Kyle Well reported:

- Two additional project managers have been added to staff. The team is fully staffed and solid.
- TIGER 7 projects must be completed this year. Projects include the Middlebury platform (construction this summer), Pittsford Florence siding (construction this summer), and Rutland to Burlington corridor ballast and surfacing.
- BUILD grant covers 31 bridges with two bridges in Manchester out to bid, four more bridges to be bid in April, and the remaining 23 bridges bid out over the next several years.
- General rail projects include Bridges 513, 562 & 522 on the Washington County railroad Connecticut River line, updating load ratings, identifying resources, FEMA PA grants with closeout of Irene projects (six projects), 2017 flood damage on the eastern side of the state (Thetford, Fairlee, Wallingford, Shaftsbury), 2018 flood damage on the Vermont Rail Systems line in Dorset, Danby, Sunderland.
- Additional projects include crossing and signal upgrade work in Dorset and Rutland, runaround track connection to Route 2, Amtrak platform in White River

Jct. for ADA compliance, and crossing work on the Montpelier-Barre line (Berlin Street and US14 south).

Dan Delabruere said the additional siding in Pittsford will keep freight coming out of OMYA off the main line. The surfacing and ballast in the corridor from Rutland to Burlington is to accommodate 59 mph passenger trains (Amtrak). The projects are critical to be done this summer. Being at full staffing is key to achieving this. Two staff members have been shifted to the Bridge Inspection unit to assist with annual bridge inspections and reporting to the FRA.

Al Villa, caretaker of the Essex Junction Amtrak Station, reported on the dilapidated condition of the station (broken windows) and the insufficient space in the station to handle the volume of passengers. The Essex Junction station has the largest passenger numbers in the state. Also, the Central Street crossing is signaled with bells and whistles, not gates, and there have been many close mishaps with cars. Dan Delabruere said the crossing is not in the plan, but can be investigated. The station upgrade is in the Rail Plan. Amtrak will be doing ADA compliance work and the Essex Junction station may be included in this. Trini Brassard clarified there is work planned on the station, but it is not a VTrans project.

PanAm/CSX SALE

Dan Delabruere said the state is not at liberty to say much about the matter. The STB is evaluating the potential sale. The STB website has the filings.

Carl Fowler asked if there is satisfactory service at Newport with freight since CP has taken over the line. Seldon Houghton said the service is working for the volume on the line.

6.0 Operation Lifesaver

Toni Clithero reported Operation Lifesaver has been doing virtual trainings and presentations. The upcoming focus will be the western corridor with Amtrak and the resumption of service. Marketing will be done using television, radio, social media, print. Dan Delabruere added there will be additional outreach with education between Rutland and Burlington to promote safety in anticipation of Amtrak.

Carl Fowler urged printing a timetable for train service to include the bus connection (The Shires).

7.0 Public Comment

None.

8.0 Next Meeting

June 24, 2021 at 1 PM. Remote meeting.

9.0 Adjournment

**MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Charlie Baker, to adjourn the meeting.
VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:44 PM.

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