

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
August 15, 2018**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Dave Wulfson
Chris Andreasson Charlie Moore
Dave Allaire Jeff Munger
Arthur Whitman Rick Moulton

OTHERS PRESENT: Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Alan Franklin, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Seldon Houghton, VRS
Clem Bissonette, Legislature
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Gary Fox, Amtrak station attendant, WRJ & BF
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony
Scott Burbank, VHB
John Wilson, Jacobs Engineering
Dan Currier, CVRPC
Charlene Lovett, Mayor of Claremont, NH
Jeff Albright, Claremont, NH, station host
Larry Lewack, VRAN
Chris Parker, consultant

1. Call to Order & Introductions

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

2. Public Comments

VRS Dinner Train

Individuals who have taken the dinner train complimented VRS on the quality of service and quality of the train ride.

Update on Preclearance Status

Dan Delabruere said the Vermont Governor and the Quebec Prime Minister are continuing conversations on preclearance. Actions are on hold until after the election in Canada.

3. Approval of Minutes

May 16, 2018

MOTION by David Allaire, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to approve the 5/16/17 minutes with the following correction(s)/clarification(s):

- **Globally correct the reference to PTC as “Positive Train Control”.**
- **Page 2, sentence reading: “There is an agreement between the state, City of Burlington, and Main Street Landing...” – insert “Vermont Rail Systems” before “Main Street Landing”.**
- **Page 3, paragraph beginning “Carl Fowler said the impact is significant without a waiver.....” – rewrite to read: “Carl Fowler said the impact of Amtrak’s reluctance to operate over track with a PTC waiver is significant because substantial portions of the Amtrak system could be fractured.”**

VOTING: all ayes except one nay (David Wulfson); motion carried.

4 Operation Lifesaver

Alan Franklin reported on the number of people being reached through the events and programs of Operation Lifesaver. An abbreviated version of the Operation Lifesaver presentation was viewed by the Rail Council. There was mention of giving the presentation to law enforcement agencies especially in places with heavy train activity to fully inform them on the law.

5. Grant Opportunities

Dan Delabruere reported there is no word yet on the BUILD grant application (\$31 million project to bring the track from Rutland to Hoosick up to 286,000 pound capacity and including 31 bridges) and it is hoped to hear soon on the CRISSY grant for the NECR rock ledge and culvert project (\$4 million). The state will be submitting other CRISSY applications. Other grant opportunities that were mentioned included the seven mile segment from Burlington to Essex (upgrade to 286,000 pound capacity). The detoured traffic with the Middlebury tunnel project needs 286,000 pound track as well.

Carl Fowler asked about the safety management review committee report on the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express services, expressing concern about the direction Amtrak management is taking with saying PTC is needed on lines with PTC exemption. Clarification is needed. There is concern the exemptions will not hold. Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak, said the report will not be finalized until all the routes are done. Amtrak has looked at the major points to address. Dave Wulfson, VRS, said it is likely there will be a modified exemption.

6. Passenger Topics

a) Amtrak/PanAm PTC Update on Knowledge Corridor

Dan Delabruere reported Vermont has been talking to Massachusetts DOT on a regular basis. Pieces are coming together for the waiver. September 1 is when the waiver will be submitted.

b) VRS Update on Switch Point Indicator Technology

Seldon Houghton gave a presentation on the switch point indicator technology employed by VRS. The technology which uses cell service, the cloud, and a database server shows the position of main line switches. The system is solar/battery powered.

Dan Delabruere said full PTC for the trains in Vermont would cost \$300 million. The VRS system is much less costly and Amtrak is willing to look at it. Seldon Houghton noted Amtrak's signal and safety people have seen the system and agree it is a good system.

c) Amtrak Ridership and Revenue

d) Amtrak On Time Performance

Vermont

Ridership down 1.8% in the 3rd quarter (YTD up 3.2%) and revenues down 2.3% (YTD up 3.5%). On time performance is in the 60% range.

Ethan Allen Express

Ridership up 4.9% in the 3rd quarter (YTD up 1%) and revenues up 10.7% (YTD up 7.6%). On time performance is in the 80% range.

e) Claremont, NH Station Update

Claremont Mayor, Charlene Lovett, and Station Host, Jeff Albright, briefed the Rail Council on the very successful train stop at the Claremont, New Hampshire station. Ridership continues to increase (17% growth in ridership). The station has been upgraded using donations and includes a waiting pavilion and a platform. The station is two miles from the center of town. Taxi and Uber service is available. There is a station host program with 16 active volunteers and two alternates who meet the north and southbound trains. The response to the station stop has been overwhelmingly positive. People are donating and posting reviews. Next steps will be to use the information that is gathered to promote Amtrak in the region and provide information on the area to visitors. A welcome hut will be built with long term parking and a food truck/café onsite. Goals include increasing the ridership to 4,000 passengers per year by FY20, providing growth in tourism and economic development opportunities, and making train travel as good an experience as possible so people choose trains over other modes of transportation.

Dan Delabruere said staff will work with Vermont Tourism and Marketing for tourism packets on Vermont for the Claremont station, and meet with Mayor Lovett to help choose one or two stations on the Vermont side of the border to improve the customer experience and increase ridership.

7. Freight and Construction Topics

a) Project Update

Paul Libby reviewed the project list for crossings, bridges, platforms, sidings, and inspections. The list includes FEMA, TIGER VII, and Middlebury tunnel support projects. If the state receives the BUILD grant other projects will be added. VTrans website provides information on advertised projects, a map showing the project locations and details on each project and inspection.

8. Rail Bridge Inspections

Erin Charbonneau gave an update on the rail bridge inspection program (174 bridge inspections on active rail lines are done annually). Rail trail bridges are inspected every five years. There will be expanded use of unmanned aerial systems (drones) to help with inspections. The Aviation Division currently operates the drones during inspections. There will be drone teams in different parts of the state.

9. Other Business/Next Meeting*Amtrak ADA Platforms*

Bill Hollister, Amtrak, said ADA platform upgrades are being done at Castleton, Windsor, Claremont, Essex Junction, and Brattleboro.

Next Meeting

November 14, 2018

10. Adjournment

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Rick Moulton, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan