

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
BARRE CITY PLACE
219 NORTH MAIN STREET
CONFERENCE ROOM 1
BARRE, VERMONT
September 18, 2019**

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Brian Savage, Legislature
Deb Fox, Finger Lakes Railway
Scott Burbank, VHB
David Saladino, VHB
John Wilson, Jacobs Engineering
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office
Erica Campbell, Sen. Sanders Office
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Allison Crowley Demag, Rail Association of Vermont
Melinda Moulton, Main Street Landing
Ritchie Berger, Dinse Law firm
Jess Cover, Junapr Communications
Selden Houghton, VRS
C.B. Hall, Vermont Business Magazine
Wes Cate, citizen
Chris Parker, citizen

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Joe Flynn called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM and welcomed the attendees to 219 Barre City Place where the VTrans administrative offices are now located. Introductions were done.

2. Public Comments

None.

3. Approval of Minutes

February 20, 2019

MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to approve the minutes of 2/20/19 with the following correction(s)/clarification(s):

- **Item #7, Grant Opportunities, paragraph beginning “There was discussion of passenger rail service...” – change “C&N” to “CN” and delete the sentence reading: “Carl Fowler said passenger rail should not be backed into freight.”**
- **Item #8, State Rail Plan, paragraph beginning “Charlie Baker asked about alignment...”, 2nd sentence – delete the work “passenger”.**

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. Passenger Topics

Ethan Allen Overnight Report

Dave Saladino and Scott Burbank, VHB, gave background information on the study to determine where the Amtrak train should overnight in Burlington (storage and service locations for two locomotives and up to six passenger cars). Potential locations that were studied included the northern urban reserve (ranked #2), southern urban reserve (ranked #3), Union Station (ranked #1), VRS rail yard (ranked #2), Flynn Avenue by City Market (ranked #4). Public meetings were held and comments considered in the ranking of the potential locations. The report on the study was issued in June 2019 for VTrans to decide on the location. Design of the facility would be done in 2019, construction in 2021 with service to begin in 2022.

Joe Flynn stressed the study was a technical analysis and does not represent a decision by VTrans. The Rail Council is asked to advise VTrans of its preferences. Everyone’s point of view should be discussed so members are asked not to recuse themselves.

Charlie Baker, CCRPC Executive Director, said CCRPC commissioned the work, but will not take a position on the location.

COMMENTS

Melinda Moulton, CEO of Main Street Landing, stressed her support of passenger rail coming to Burlington, but spoke against having a second track for the train to overnight eight feet from Main Street Landing residents and office tenants, and impacting access to the waterfront. Safety, quality of life, access to the lake and recreation, access by emergency vehicles will all be impacted. The train should overnight to the north. A picture of the pedestrian platform without the train and the impact with the train was shown.

Ritchie Berger with the law firm of Dinse provided a notebook of information from a public records request on the passenger train overnight location under discussion, and urged the Rail Council to read the information before commenting. Attorney Berger highlighted the following:

- Analysis of the record shows the TIGER grant for passenger rail had nothing on an additional track at King Street and College Street or tearing up the bike path.
- VTrans assumed a high-level platform at Union Street but had to get around the track for freight trains. A waiver from the FRA was secured, but then it was determined an elevated track was not needed. The Ethan Allen Express could overnight at Union Station if a second track is built.
- In June 2018, CCRPC and VHB were ranking the potential locations noted in the study.
- In June 2018 the study was sent to VTrans from CCRPC. Union Station was barely top-ranked with a score of 26. The Northern Urban Reserve and the VTR Railyard were tied for second with scores of 24 each.
- Before the January 15, 2019 final report was sent by Eleni Churchill, CCRPC, there was a memo from Michelle Boomhower to Joe Flynn, dated 12/4/18, regarding overnight train storage and the impact on Burlington, and meeting to finalize the plan to address the likely response.
- The January 2019 final report air quality section addresses diesel emissions from two engines idling at least an hour a day. The air quality analysis in October 2018 for a single locomotive idling up to 60 minutes 50' from the Wing Building balconies showed a risk to human health. The analysis recommended more air quality assessment be done. CCRPC recognized per the report the need for more air quality analysis if Union Station is selected as the site.
- The proposed location of the train is only 8' from the building and there will be two locomotives.
- Before the January 2019 final report was issued by CCRPC, VTrans had already told the City of Burlington that the bike path would have to be relocated and a track built for Amtrak service. A memo from Michelle Boomhower was sent to selected individuals (Chapin Spencer, Eleni Churchill) saying if the train cannot be located in the rail yard then a second track will be built by Union Station.
- The day the report was released to the public someone changed the language in the air quality discussion to try to hide the danger to the public if the train is overnighed at Union Station. The changes said more detailed air quality assessment should be conducted for selected Amtrak storage sites in Burlington. There will be an air quality issue with the train idling as passengers board and debark.
- The VHB report said only Union Station needs more air quality analysis due to excessive carbon dioxide in excess of EPA standards.

Attorney Berger reiterated his request that the Rail Council not make a decision until review of the actual documents. Mr. Berger provided a binder of the records obtained through the public records request.

Dave Wulfson, VT Railway, recalled in the 1980s the agreement was the bike path between King Street and College Street was temporary plus there are two crossings of the track. The path should be on the west side of the track. With the Main Street project, the Wing Building is within inches of the state property leased by Vermont Rail Systems. The bike path was allowed on a temporary basis. Discussions have been ongoing with the city for years about relocating the path due to the safety issue with the train. There is an issue with trespassing all over the waterfront. Keeping pedestrians moving through the waterfront on the west side of the tracks will be a safety improvement and eliminate two crossings of the track. VRS had a need for car storage, some seasonal, and built a new track on the northern reserve on land that is part of the lease with the state. The city moved the bike path along the waterfront and VRS put track by the urban reserve to store train cars, so much has changed since the first discussions of Amtrak coming to Burlington. Overnighting the train anywhere to the north is a good idea. Vermont Railway decided a second track is needed between King Street and College Street for business purposes regardless of the Amtrak train. Also, the dinner train by VRS is a growing part of the business and becoming a part of the waterfront.

Carl Fowler spoke of upgrading the Burlington-Essex line to accommodate passenger trains which is part of the State Rail Plan. All the services provided in Burlington can be provided in St. Albans, and there will be a direct line to Montreal, Middlebury, and Rutland services. The Ethan Allen Express could be terminated in St. Albans. The train could then go on to Montreal in the long term. VTrans is urged to unite the rail network and make it flow. This year there will be substantial federal money available for rail.

Rick Moulton mentioned the cost to overnight the train at Union Station (does not include the second track or moving the bike path) or overnighting in the rail yard (\$50 million). The Rail Council is urged to prioritize going north and improving the rail to Class 2. Amtrak overnighting in Burlington would be short term. If there was more public process with this matter the Rail Council would have discussed this two years ago. There are significant costs. The cost of the second track versus the cost of going north needs to be known.

Chris Andreasson noted if the track is improved there will be continuing costs every year for Amtrak service to Montreal.

Dave Allaire recalled there has been discussion for the past 20 years of the benefit of Amtrak coming to Burlington. The train overnights now in Rutland and there has been no discussion of air quality there. More information is needed before deciding on the

train in Burlington, and there are many dynamics with going to Montreal (border crossing, cost, legislative support).

Charles Hunter said NECR track is involved with the Burlington-Essex line, and there has not been discussion with Amtrak about a train to St. Albans. NECR needs to be engaged in the discussions.

Charlie Baker pointed out the scoring in the report is not a decision. The decision makers will make the decision. There are legal restrictions with the Burlington land not reflected in the report, and upgrade of the Burlington-Essex line has its own issues. Researching whether there is another solution to get passenger service to Rutland that might benefit Vermonters more could be done.

Weston Cate urged tying the rail networks together. There is synergy created in getting people from point A to point B which will be very beneficial. Having the train go from St. Albans to Montreal would be good. Build it and they will come.

Kevin Chittenden said Amtrak is concerned with hours of service and hours of rest for the crew regardless of the location. Also, there may be marketing considerations with arrivals/departures.

Chris Natalie said Amtrak provided VTrans with different options to Burlington but was not asked to provide options going north.

Joe Flynn said VTrans agrees Burlington, St. Albans, and Montreal are all possibilities. VTrans is forging ahead to finish the Middlebury Tunnel and has not discussed going north with the ramifications. Secretary Flynn stressed regardless of the input and testimony, and in deference to the record, a decision on the location has not yet been made.

MOTION by Dave Wulfson, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to table the recommendation to the Secretary of Transportation on overnighting the train in Burlington until another date for a vote.

DISCUSSION:

- **Joe Flynn said the Rail Council members are appointed by the Governor to advise on rail matters. The train must be located somewhere so a decision needs to be made eventually. The decision must be made before the legislature resumes.**
- **Carl Fowler observed if the permanent terminus of the Ethan Allen Express is not Union Station then look north, but if the temporary location is in Burlington then where must be decided. The Rail Council should look at the five options plus going north.**
- **Rick Moulton said VTrans should explore the potential of going north including Essex as a temporary overnight site.**

- **Charlie Baker urged looking at alternative technology with rail cars.**

VOTING: all ayes except one abstention (Carl Fowler); motion carried.

Ritchie Berger said there is a January 6, 2016 memo about upgrade to the Essex line.

Carl Fowler clarified his suggestion to go to Essex and St. Albans was to avoid investing money to create a new service facility.

Joe Flynn said the Rail Council is urged to read the Berger report. Two potential meeting dates will be sent out.

Dave Wulfson requested all information be emailed before the meeting and not received at the meeting.

Charlie Baker urged sending any questions to CCRPC before the meeting so they can be addressed.

MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Joann Erenhouse, that the Rail Council suggest VTrans explore with NECR the potential of the train going north.

DISCUSSION:

- **Dan Delabruere said the hard numbers for going to Essex and St. Albans have been compiled. A storage facility in St. Albans cannot be built in the next two months.**
- **Joe Flynn said a decision must be made. The decision could be an interim suggestion.**

VOTING: all ayes except one abstention (Charles Hunter); motion carried.

Charlie Baker made a motion that was not seconded to request that VTrans examine the possibility and provide feedback on using updated technology (Budd cars) to provide passenger service to Rutland. Joe Flynn said Amtrak will not be replaced with Budd cars. An additional service with Budd cars is a possibility. Carl Fowler said some Budd cars do not have reclining seats or bathrooms, and are approved for one hour trips.

Amtrak Ridership & Revenue

Dan Delabruere reported the Vermonter has modest gains in April (ridership up .8% and revenues up 4.7%). Ethan Allen Express had the second consecutive quarter decline (ridership down 5.7% and revenue down 3.4%). More marketing has been directed to improve the situation.

Carl Fowler urged publishing The Shires of Vermont bus service connection to the Ethan Allen Express, and working with GMT or Addison for bus service from Burlington to Rutland. Mr. Fowler also mentioned potential impact to the Vermonter service by the Greenfield train to NYC and the Valley Flyer train fare.

Dave Allaire requested that the next report on Amtrak look at a five-year window of performance.

5. Freight and Construction Topics

Paul Libby reported on rail work in Salisbury, Middlebury, Leicester, Pittsford, Wallingford, Leicester wye, Rutland, and Middlebury yard rehab.

Dave Wulfson said the extended shutdown for the Middlebury Tunnel project has started. Sidetracks are being used for the trains. Work windows are being extended. The paperwork will be signed for the detour next summer.

6. Operation Lifesaver

Dan Delabruere announced Alan Franklin has retired. Interviews are taking place for the state coordinator position.

7. Other Business/Next Meeting

Next meeting: December 3, 2019 (tentative), Barre City Place.

Agenda: Follow up report on the border crossing.

8. Adjournment

MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Joann Erenhouse, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:22 PM.

Rscy: MERiordan