

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
December 16, 2015**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Cole (Chair)
Carl Fowler Dave Wulfson
Charlie Baker Jeff Munger
Dave Allaire Charles Hunter
Charlie Moore Herb Russell
Chris Andreasson Rick Moulton

OTHERS PRESENT: Richard Tetreault, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Scott Bascom, VTrans
Larry Donna, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Stephen Smith, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Erik Filkorn, VTrans
Nick Van Dan Berg, VTrans
Josh Martineau, VTrans
Ludwig Polaski, VTrans
Mike Fessel, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Alan Franklin, VTrans
Barb Donovan, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Brian Searles, VTrans
John Weston, HDR
Ron O'Blemis, HDR
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Mariah Morales, Amtrak
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Caroline Mael, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Chris Parker, VRAN
Scott Burbank, VHB
Scott Magnuson, Claremont Ad Hoc Committee
Charlene Lovett, Claremont Ad Hoc Committee
Gary Fox, Destination Bellows Falls & WRJ

Chris Davis, Charlotte Fire Department
Sallie Mack, Charlotte Citizens for Responsible Railroads
Allison Crowley Demag, RRAV

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM and suggested the report on bridge emergency repairs and the update on the state rail plan be advanced on the agenda.

2. Public Comments

- Chris Davis, Charlotte Fire Chief, commented on the current practice of leasing side rail space in towns across the state to store propane and the lack of opportunity for the towns to have input or be part of the process. Mr. Davis said Charlotte does not have an emergency plan or preparedness training for storage of such a large volume of propane on the side rail. In fact, Charlotte has local ordinances and emergency plans that prohibit storage of these types of materials. Local review would have covered the details for the town. Mr. Davis suggested a secure rail yard as a better place to store the materials. Chris Cole, VTrans, explained the state's role is limited. The rail operator holds the lease to operate on the rail infrastructure in conformity with state and federal law, and that is being done. Regarding safety on rail lines, federal regulations and law pre-empt state jurisdiction. The state's highest goal is safety. The FRA was contacted to ensure all sidings had been inspected to meet FRA and EPA standards for storing propane on side tracks. Federal guidelines, Vermont haz-mat, and EPA requirements must all be met. In terms of planning, the plan must be filed per federal regulations. Vermont haz-mat is satisfied with the plans submitted. Dave Wulfson, Vermont Rail Systems, said VRS submitted all the required paperwork and offered to help with improving the emergency action plan and needed resources, but nothing has been heard back yet from the town.

3. Approval of Minutes

August 26, 2015

MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Charles Hunter, to approve the 8/26/15 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. Bridge Emergency Repairs

Dan Delabruere reported:

- Bridge 502 (Hartford) was completely replaced.
- There are four bridges in the “immediate response” category and included in the budget.

Chris Cole noted funds are proposed to be added to the rail budget to meet load rating deficiencies.

5. Update on State Rail Plan

Costa Pappis reported:

- Comments received on the rail plan fell into three categories: safety, more service/innovative routes, and commuter service.

- Citizens for Responsible Railroads submitted a petition on safety and the rail line. The section on safety in the rail plan has been expanded to explain the roles of different parties.
- There were comments saying there is not enough passenger and freight being provided. Suggestions included double frequency, adding new service, and connecting to Burlington.
- There were comments on commuter rail service in the I-89 corridor.
- Additional recommendations from staff include:
 - Extending the Ethan Allen Express to Essex Junction and having Burlington to Essex as the second priority to match the priority along the western corridor. There is a TIGER grant to finish the Burlington connection.
 - Add \$10 million to the capital plan to address needs statewide.
 - Put the Burlington rail yard enterprise project in the capital plan and use discretionary funding if possible.
- The state rail plan must be transmitted to the FRA under the new surface transportation bill that was approved and the plan must be PRIIA compliant. The public comments will be appended to the rail plan including the concerns from Charlotte on safety and training for haz-mat incidents.

Carl Fowler mentioned the difficulty in getting approvals to construct a new freight yard in Rutland and reconfiguring rail yards on state owned north-south rail lines. Dan Delabruere said there are no specific projects planned and it is difficult to move a rail yard or create a new one. The rail plan is updated every five years so rail yards could be included in the next update. Carl Fowler mentioned the TIGER 7 map shows a projected location for a wye in Burlington. Dan Delabruere said a location has not been determined, but would be south of the rail yard. Jeff Munger interjected the Essex connection was added for turning around the train.

Gary Fox mentioned having customer service for the public on Amtrak and having the state coordinate with Amtrak to improve the travel experience. Costa Pappis said the state will participate in the coordination of this, but is not the leading party. There is a partnership of different entities. Dan Delabruere added performance measures in the Amtrak contract cover customer satisfaction. Station caretakers should report any issues.

Dave Allaire asked for an update on Operation Lifesaver. Dan Delabruere introduced Alan Franklin who will assist with Amtrak operations and help with Operation Lifesaver. The state has been in contact with the national organization to reactivate Vermont's Operation Lifesaver program. A plan will be laid out in January. Amtrak has begun outreach to remind people not to trespass on the tracks. Chris Cole added VTrans is doing a public service announcement on the dangers of trespass on railroad property.

Costa Pappis said the Rail Council needs to approve the rail plan with the changes. The plan will be posted on the website after FRA approval unless there are substantial changes.

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charlie Baker, to approve the Vermont State Rail Plan with the four suggested changes as presented by Costa Pappis. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

6. New Rail Staff

Dan Delabruere introduced new Rail staff members: Paul Libby, Kyle Wells, Alan Franklin, Ludwig Polaski, and Josh Martineau.

Dave Wulfson recognized the work by the rail team on the successful TIGER grant application and the state aggressively pursuing the grant. Chris Cole acknowledged the team effort and working with the Congressional delegation.

7. TIGER 7 Grant Update

Dan Delabruere reported of the \$12 million in federal grant funding the state will receive \$10 million leaving a gap of \$2 million. The amount of continuous-welded rail and crossing and bridge work to be done for service to Burlington is estimated at \$26 million. A worksheet with details of the work to be done was reviewed.

There was discussion of train stops on the route. Jeff Munger questioned having a stop in Vergennes and spending \$1.2 million on a platform when the goal was speed of service between Burlington and New York City. Chris Cole noted Vergennes has an information center/station, but the state does not have operating funds to support this. The towns of Shelburne and Brandon have both asked for train stops. Input from the Rail Council will be sought as the service develops. Carl Fowler stated it needs to be justified whether the revenue generated from a train stop justifies the loss in running time unless there is coordinated bus service to connect to the train. Mr. Fowler asked about the cost of the stations. Dan Delabruere said there are only platform costs, not station costs in the projections. VTrans is working with towns to build the stations. Chris Andreasson stressed minimizing the number of stops is essential. Parking availability is also important. Herb Russell stated input from the towns early in the process is vital. Following further discussion, the consensus of the Rail Council is to limit the number of train stops and have through service with excellent connecting bus service.

[Chris Cole left the meeting at 1:52 PM. Deputy Secretary, Richard Tetreault, facilitated the meeting.]

Dave Allaire mentioned concern in Middlebury about the impact of the rail tunnel on the town. Richard Tetreault said VTrans has been working with the town on the project which is gaining momentum at the local level. Local concerns have been identified and the duration of construction and cost have been outlined.

Dave Wulfson stated until the station location and proposed schedule is known it is difficult to determine the wye location, passing sidings, and power switches. Dan Delabruere said VTrans has been working with Amtrak on alternative schedules and running time. The train will have to turn around in Burlington or Essex or have power on both ends so a turnaround will not be necessary. There are many details to work out.

There was a question on crossings on Route 7. Dan Delabruere noted not all crossings that need work are on the list. There are 11 crossings between Rutland and Burlington and five are on the grant list.

8. Passenger Topics

Amtrak Ridership

Bob Atchinson reported ridership and revenue are down on both the Ethan Allen Express and Vermonter for October. Business class was strong on the Ethan Allen Express. On time performance on both services for the year was 72.5% for the Ethan Allen Express and 79.3% for the Vermonter.

Dave Wulfson noted the railroad spent \$1 million to upgrade rail in Castleton which will have a positive impact on the schedule.

Gary Fox said the slow orders on the train impacts arrival times and suggested Amtrak post information on slow orders so passengers will know the actual arrival times. Bob Atchinson said there is a cellphone app with train arrival/departure information by station. Caroline Mael said Amtrak issues passenger service notices if Amtrak is aware of an ongoing project. The app will tell the passenger if the train will be late. The Dixieland app also tracks trains.

Chris Parker asked if the slow orders are due to rock slides. Charles Hunter said there was one slow order for rock conditions. The railroad is working with VTrans on how to address rocks.

Carl Fowler said the national timetable schedule still shows a 30-minute speedup of the Vermonter on the track in Massachusetts. Caroline Mael said there have been meetings with Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont on the schedule through the Knowledge Corridor. With a year of operation, the schedule is now better known. The timetable is effective January 11, 2016. The timetable is published once a year. Carl Fowler urged Amtrak to re-issue a route specific timetable with correct times if the existing schedule is not correct. Caroline Mael said the timetable will only be reprinted if there are significant changes.

NNRE Wrap Up

Ron O'Blemis and John Weston, consultants from HDR, reviewed the results of the route study connecting to Montreal including preferred alternative, investment options, daily service and full service. Total cost is up to \$1.2 billion (\$721 million for infrastructure, \$527 million for equipment, \$26 million for operations). The final draft of the study is with the FRA. Findings of no significant impact is anticipated in January 2016.

Amtrak Staff

Moriah Morales was introduced. Ms. Morales will provide legislative and network updates from Amtrak every other month via email.

Christopher Natalie reported on the \$18 Advance Usage Fare inside Vermont. Usage of the fare has increased and revenues have increased, but ridership on average decreased by 10 riders per month.

Vermont Service to Montreal Update

Brian Searles reported:

- Restoring service to Montreal has been a priority for Vermont. (Year 2015 marks the 20th anniversary of not having train service to Montreal.)
- The overall goal is Vermont service to Montreal. The current project paves the way for a preclearance facility in Montreal to be used by the Vermonter, Adirondack, and other train services. The purpose is to enhance border security and provide travel options people want.
- There is a preclearance agreement between Canada and the United States (Quebec and Vermont). Further tasks include;
 - Passage of enabling legislation by the US Congress for preclearance.
 - Ratification of the approval by Parliament (perhaps in April or May).
 - Preliminary plan approval for the facility drafted by New York, Vermont, Quebec, and Amtrak. Border Protection will review the plan after the legislation is passed. Canada has already reviewed and approved the plan.
 - Secure continued support of the partners and stakeholders.
 - Firm up the status of labor agreements.
 - Support Amtrak's plan for operation of the train.
- There has been discussion of launching service prior to the facility being built, similar to the Adirondack to Vancouver model, but the discussion at this point is not active to avoid impacting the facility in Montreal.
- Support exists across the board for the service.
- Planning and permitting before construction will take a year.
- Preliminary engineering shows two year construction of the project at least.
- The cost of the project is high and budgets across the board will be impacted. Legislation must be passed on both side of the border and then discussion of how to pay for the project can occur.

Bus/Train Connections

Barb Donovan, Public Transit Division, reported:

- The fixed route bus system converted to an electronic system so trip planners can be used. Connectivity to rail can be shown. Amtrak has a similar tool.
- There is bus service from Colchester to Albany, NY and Rutland to White River Junction. Marketing has been expanded for Vermont Translines routes (Route 4 and Route 7 services).
- Automatic vehicle locators (AVL) are installed on buses so people know where the bus is at all times.
- Bus-train connecting information should be posted on the VTrans website. Local transit services should post information on their connectivity to trains.
- Maps with directions to local bus service and links should be posted on websites and in bus and train stations.
- Connection information should be included in the trip planners.

- VTrans needs to work with providers on routes where trains can be accessed.
- Private operators providing service at train stations could receive free advertising of their bus schedule.
- Data on the number of passengers using train-bus connections is needed. Presently, Vermont Translines goes to Albany and to the airport which is on the way to the bus station. The train station is across the river. Currently, federal funding pays to connect to inner city bus service, but not inner city rail. Connecting the bus station to the train station in Albany will exceed driver hours.
- Transit initiatives include Bridj which is like Uber for mass transit, but in a rural setting.

Dan Delabruere said the need to improve bus-train connection is recognized, but there must be a bus route that makes sense since there cannot be a bus at every train station. There can also be taxicab service (on demand) at train stations. There will be a service implemented soon with Amtrak issuing a through ticket to Killington using a private bus service. The same arrangement is being considered with a Waterbury to Stowe connection. To make the connections work with trains there must be reliable on-time performance.

Bill Hollister said Amtrak can help with publishing information on private on-demand services meeting trains, but there must be a guarantee the provider will be there once the passenger buys a train ticket.

Carl Fowler submitted an analysis of rail-bus connections in Bellows Fall and Essex Junction. Mr. Fowler urged a private contract for connections at Waterbury to Sugarbush and Stowe, and at Bellows Falls to Okemo and Brattleboro to Mount Snow. Also, the Route 4 Vermont Translines service should coordinate with the Vermonter. The train station at Albany has a full bus station on the lower level so effort should be made to make a better connection between bus and train there. It was noted there is a legislative study being done on a bus shuttle connection in Albany and Bennington. There are 50,000 boardings at train stations in Vermont and 5,000,000 transit boardings.

CT Work Window Request Update

Dan Delabruere reported Connecticut does not know when the next set of work windows will occur. Work will continue as long as the weather allows. There were no issues with the past 32 work windows. Customers were served well.

9. Freight Topics

Bridge Topics

Erin Charbonneau reported on the bridge inspection summary and load rating work to date. Nicholas Van Den Berg and Mike Fessel gave a presentation on the bridge inspections using the snoop truck. Efficiencies have been gained and it is anticipated money will be saved by doing inspections in-house. Dan Delabruere noted there is \$500,000 in the budget for bridge maintenance. Some will be used for immediate attention issues and some will be used to wash bridges.

There was a brief description of the process followed when an issue is found on a bridge. Dan Delabruere said there are many factors to consider before the work is fit into the schedule including what is cause and the impact, what is the short and long term fix. Richard Tetreault added with data, training and equipment the curve on bridge repair decline.

Carl Fowler asked about trimming vegetation on rail lines with passenger service. Dan Delabruere said the railroad understands the importance of keeping the track clear as part of maintenance.

10. Other Business

Next Meeting

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Jeff Munger, that beginning with the February 17, 2016 meeting the Rail Council will meet the third Wednesday every three months thereafter in May, September, December. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

Next meeting of the Rail Council is February 17, 2016 at 1 PM.

Transportation Appropriation

Carl Fowler announced there is an increase in the TIGER grant funding in the federal transportation appropriation to \$500 million. Costa Pappis noted the rail capital assistance programs were stripped out though. Additionally, it is unlikely VTrans would receive four grants in five years.

RRAV Meeting

Allison Demag announced the RRAV meeting on April 13, 2016 in the railcars behind Capital Plaza.

Kudos to Rail Director

Herb Russell urged promoting and highlighting the good work done by the Rail Director and staff.

11. Adjournment

MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to adjourn the meeting. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 PM.

RScy: M.E.Riordan