

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
May 27, 2015**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Cole for Sue Minter (Chair)
Carl Fowler Dave Allaire
Joann Erenhouse Alan Cook
Charlie Baker Charles Hunter
Charlie Moore Herb Russell
MaryAnne Michaels for Dave Wulfson

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Scott Bascom, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Stephen Smith, VTrans
Alex King, Parsens Brinkerhoff
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Allison DeMag, RRAV
Elizabeth Cooper, VCE
Chris Parker, VRAN
Marzena Zwolen, VRS
John Wilson, Jacobs
Scott Burbank, VHB

1. Call to Order & Introductions

In the absence of Sue Minter, Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM. Introductions were done.

2. Public Comments

Chris Parker provided copies of the Rutland Herald newspaper article on the recent tragedy of a man walking on the tracks and being hit by a train, stressing that safety is everyone's business and the tragedy was preventable.

3. Approval of Minutes

February 4, 2015

MOTION by Carl Fowler, **SECOND** by Joann Erenhouse, to approve the 2/4/15 minutes as written.

DISCUSSION: Positive comment was made on the minutes.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. TIGER 7 Grant Update

Dan Delabruere reported VTrans will submit a TIGER 7 application for the western corridor to continue the work that has already started for Amtrak service to Burlington. TIGER 6 project covered continuous welded rail (CWR). TIGER 7 project will complete the remaining 11 miles of CWR plus crossing switches, power switches, upgrade of the wye in Rutland, upgrade of passenger platforms in Vergennes, Middlebury, Burlington, and some track resurfacing. The cost of the work is approximately \$26 million. The grant will be \$10 million to \$12 million. The application is due June 2015. Costa Pappis stressed it is a big project to get the corridor ready for passenger rail and eliminate freight track issues. The state is committing a lot of money to the project (\$26.4 million). TIGER funds will be \$12 million and other federal funds will be \$4 million. Chris Cole noted the difference with this TIGER application is the state is committing the funds for the passenger element for service to Burlington, not just freight.

Carl Fowler announced tickets are available for a roundtrip passenger train on June 18, 2015 from Rutland to Burlington and on June 20, 2015 from Rutland to Bennington as part of the National Railway event.

Joann Erenhouse asked if the subsidy to Amtrak will be impacted once the track work is done and passenger service is in place to Burlington. Chris Cole explained with a single engine train there will be \$350,000 in additional cost. With two engines the additional cost is \$1 million.

Dave Allaire stated passenger rail service is a top priority for Governor Shumlin. Mr. Allaire asked about the timeline for the project. Chris Cole said the application has a four year timeframe for the state's portion of investment. There are some variables that could require re-examining priorities, but VTrans is comfortable with the existing budget priorities. Bonding was \$6 million in cost for about \$20 million in borrowing on a 20 year bond.

Rep. Herb Russell said he had a resolution from the legislature to go with the application, but due to health circumstances beyond his control he was not able to see the resolution through. Chris Cole noted letters from Rutland and Burlington mayors and the chambers of commerce were received in support of the project.

5. Rail Program Update

FY2015 Budget

Dan Delabruere reviewed projects in the FY2016 Rail Transportation Program including:

- Crossing work – Clarendon Pittsford
- Upgrade to 105,000 capacity and crossing work – Green Mountain Railroad
- Crossing projects, bridge rehab and replacement (Bridges 69, 74, 239, 64, 63, 91, 219), track work (CWR and TIGER 5 work), quiet zone signal and crossing maintenance, and interior work on the Vergennes station – Vermont Railway
- Crossing on VT62 and lease subsidy – Washington County Railroad in Barre (“Little WACR”)
- Crossing in Barton and Bridge 541 engineering – Washing County Railroad Connecticut River line (“Big WACR”)

The \$35 million budget passed by the legislature also covers:

- 3-way partnership
- Administration
- Marketing
- FRA bridge inspection requirement
- Crossing inventory per FRA requirement
- Projects in development
- Right-of-way building maintenance
- Operation Lifesaver

- Amtrak contract for Ethan Allen Express and Vermonter (2 year contract for \$7.7 million)
- Crossing resurfacing
- Rail trail maintenance
- Bridge maintenance
- Crossties
- Right-of-way property leases
- FEMA projects still underway

MaryAnne Michaels thanked the Rail Division for having the Green Mountain Railroad items in the budget so the work can be done. The next goal is money for bridges on the rail line so freight business is not lost. Recently ethanol train cars were turned away because the bridges would not handle the weight (270,000 pounds). Green Mountain Railroad needs to be at 286,000 capacity. New England Central also lost out on the freight business.

Carl Fowler asked if track work is needed at the quarry in Barre so rock can be transported by rail rather than trucks. MaryAnne Michaels assured the necessary track work has been done. There was brief discussion of the work on the line to the quarry. It was stressed there is enough being invested to keep the product moving by rail and the line safe.

Chris Cole commented past and current governors and administrations had a penchant for purchasing short lines the private sector could not make work. Some lines were converted to rail trails. As a small state there are not the resources to bring all lines “up to snuff”. The goal is to keep rail open and freight moving. The rail budget is \$35 million with user fees from the highway sector thanks to the legislature. Herb Russell mentioned there was overwhelming support from the legislature for the rail budget. Representatives are asking about improving rail in their part of the state. Support for rail by the legislature will likely continue.

Personnel Changes

Dan Delabruere reviewed the organizational chart for the Rail Program and announced two of the four vacancies have been filled to date (employees to begin mid-June).

6. Passenger Topics

Bill Hollister reported on the meeting with the Southern Rail Commission with representatives from Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi to discuss state corridor service in the southern region. The representatives visited Maine and Vermont to discuss how the state deals with passenger rail issues.

Amtrak Ridership

Bob Atchinson reported ridership on the Vermonter is up 3% for the year. Ridership on the Ethan Allen Express is down slightly (.7%) for the year. On time performance improved on the Vermonter and declined on the Ethan Allen Express. Mr. Atchinson mentioned information to explain changes in on time performance is available, but staff did not have time to compile the information for the report. Chris Cole noted Amtrak has seven employees managing the Amtrak contract with Vermont. VTrans has not assigned a staff member to the contract, but now there is a position which will manage the Amtrak contract and the Operation Lifesaver Program. Staff will be able to analyze the data and get the best value out of the contract with Amtrak.

Carl Fowler mentioned Norfolk Southern purchased the line below Saratoga. VTrans may want to meet with the railroad to discuss the line since there could be impact on the Ethan Allen Express. **(NOTE: At the 08-26-2015 meeting, corrected this statement to be the Canadian Pacific, not the Norfolk Southern.)**

Costa Pappis suggested ridership numbers from individual stations in Vermont be included in the Amtrak report. Bob Atchinson confirmed this information can be provided. Bill Hollister mentioned the crew on the

Vermonters said ridership is being added North Hampton to Greenfield and north on the route the numbers are greater than ever seen. Also, the National Railway Historical Society will be in Rutland and will take the train from Rutland to Saratoga so there will be an extra 400 riders in June this year.

Charles Hunter asked if Massachusetts provides a subsidy for the Vermonter service. Chris Cole confirmed this, adding Vermont has a close working relationship with the partner states.

New In-State Fare Structure

Dan Delabruere reported the new in-state one way fare is \$18. The fare is fully implemented and on the website. Online booking with three-day advance notice is available. It is anticipated call center costs will decrease because it will take less time to find/book the fare.

PRIIA 209-2015 Contract Negotiations

Dan Delabruere reported the contracts are signed. The Amtrak contract expired in October and was extended to March, but now the contract has been fully executed on both ends for two years retroactive to October 2014. The contract includes performance measures, customer satisfaction, cleanliness, station agent performance. The contract is based on actual costs and will be reconciled quarterly. Connecticut and Massachusetts are also paying for what is used which should help contain costs. The cost of the contract for Vermont over two years is approximately \$7.5 million. The cost decreased the first year due to the move to the Knowledge Corridor, but will return to what it was in Year 2 of the contract.

Carl Fowler mentioned discrepancies between the published timetable and the wall schedule have caused people to miss the train. Mr. Fowler urged posting the current timetables in all stations and to have extra copies available at each station. Bill Hollister said he will investigate the discrepancy between the timetable and wall schedule. Chris Cole asked what customer service Amtrak offers for passenger complaints due to scheduling. Bill Hollister said if the passenger contacts Amtrak there is a chance a refund or service voucher will be provided. Each complaint is handled on a case-by-case basis.

7. Freight Topics

Bridge Management Program

Erin Charbonneau reported:

- Twenty-eight of 165 bridge inspections are scheduled, 20 are done.
- Ninety-one load ratings are done and accepted, 10 are scheduled in FY15, nine will be done as part of rail projects, and 23 remain to be done by 2017 (most of these are on the Green Mountain Railroad “Big WACR”).
- Snooper truck will be on the rails next week.

Dan Delabruere said the consultant contracts are negotiated. Contracts over \$1 million need approval from the Secretary of Administration first. Existing contracts end June 30 and new contracts need to be executed within a month.

Charlie Moore mentioned having a railroad person working with the snooper truck crew for safety reasons. Dan Delabruere said there will be a Vermont Rail Systems flagger. VTrans workers are trained in safety while working on rail lines.

Rail Construction Program FY2015 Budget

Dan Delabruere reported construction projects are moving out as scheduled and on time.

WACR Rail Traffic

Dan Delabruere reported Vermont Rail Systems is moving 42 cars per week of rock from the quarry in Barre to Owego, NY via NECR (650 cars on the contract).

Operation Lifesaver

Dan Delabruere reported Operation Lifesaver is moving forward with needed improvements. More details need to be worked out. Chris Cole stated VTrans is committed to a position that includes managing Operation Lifesaver. The state will be investing money and anticipates having a program moving forward in short order, but is doing so quietly until control is gained on the rights and the name.

MaryAnne Michaels said VRS supports the program by doing seminars and education (i.e. in-kind contributions).

Charles Hunter said G&W will support the program in some appropriate manner.

Dave Allaire said he is personally committed to seeing the program move forward.

Bill Hollister said Amtrak supports Operation Lifesaver on a national and regional basis.

8. Report on State Rail Plan

Alex King, Parsens Brinkerhoff, presented the following:

- To increase passenger numbers from 100,000 to 400,000 by 2035 will require new services, such as extending Ethan Allen Express to Burlington, having a new Albany-Bennington-Manchester-Burlington train, and extending the Vermonter to Montreal.
- The first step is extending the Ethan Allen Express to Burlington with Class 3 track (60 mph). The TIGER application is addressing this. Incremental subsidy of \$1 million is hoped to be reduced to \$350,000.
- Next service is the Vermonter to Montreal on Class 3 track already in place. Subsidy is \$2 million.
- New service Albany to Burlington via Bennington and Manchester will cost \$88 million for the service and associated improvements. Subsidy by Vermont is \$4 million.
- Additional frequency on the Vermonter will also be necessary and in the long term upgrade to Class 4 track (79 mph) will be needed. The cost for the Vermont portion is \$177 million.
- The cost of the short term needs (Burlington route, Bennington route) is \$114.4 million. The cost of the long term needs (79 mph Class 4 track) is \$370.3 million.

MaryAnne Michaels commented \$2 million seems to be a high number for a few miles of track for the Vermonter to Montreal connection. Costa Pappis said crossing an international boundary is expensive.

Charlie Baker asked if the ‘missing link’ from Burlington to Essex is included in the plan. Costa Pappis said there are capital improvements on the freight side (286,000 compliant track) so the link is being addressed indirectly.

Carl Fowler suggested rather than having two trains to Montreal there should be a train connection from Burlington to Essex at least as part of the long term plan. Herb Russell noted a legislative study of the train connection from St. Albans to Montreal includes study of the connection to Burlington.

Regarding the 286,000 capacity priority, VTrans wants to hear from the rail operators on what lines are their priority so an approach by the state can be decided. Bridges are limiting the state owned lines. Of the 214 state owned bridges, 76 are 286,000 capacity, 21 are problematic, 28 are 263,000 capacity, 40 are not rated, and 49 are the responsibility of Vermont Rail Systems. Burlington to Rutland line is in good shape relative to bridges,

but south of Rutland there are problem bridges on the Vermonter route, Green Mountain Railroad line, and the little and big WACR lines. Once the load ratings are determined on the Green Mountain Railroad the state will know how much money is needed to keep the line open. VTrans does not have dedicated federal funds. The bulk of the money for rail is from user fees from the highway sector and there is a limit on use for rail at the sacrifice of highway. Alex King noted the costs is \$163 million for the bridge superstructure to 286,000 capacity and \$40 million for substructure repair. Costa Pappis added the cost of the track work for freight is \$90 million for the full system build-out to a state of good repair, but this does not take into account passenger improvements. Crossing upgrades will be targeted to those with passenger rail or the upgrades will be planned. The crossings will be gated which is the safest treatment. It is not known if earmark funding and discretionary grants will continue. Federal funding has been averaging \$15 million per year. Total need for freight and passenger to Class 4 is \$665 million. Need outpaces funding.

The 20-year capital plan for passenger rail (2016-2035) is to do the Burlington route first then Bennington-Manchester followed by capacity upgrades to 79 mph on the Vermonter and the western corridor. For freight the 20 year capital plan is to do the bridge upgrades across the 20 year space on the Vermonter and Green Mountain Railroad then do track upgrades for the next decade. Cost estimate is \$300 million.

Chris Parker asked why the WACR Connecticut line is pushed out. Costa Pappis said the higher density railroads on the freight side are being addressed first.

9. Other Business

Next Meeting

To be announced.

10. Adjournment

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

The meeting was adjourned at 3:07 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan