

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
DAVIS 5<sup>th</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
August 17, 2016**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chris Cole (Chair)  
Carl Fowler Dave Wulfson  
Jeff Munger Chris Andreasson  
Rick Moulton Charlie Moore

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Dan Delabruere, VTrans  
Michele Boomhower, VTrans  
Paul Libby, VTrans  
Alan Franklin, VTrans  
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans  
Karen Songhurst, VTrans  
Scott Bascom, VTrans  
Stephen Smith, VTrans  
Mark Fitzgerald, VTrans  
Ludwig Polaski, VTrans  
Rich Tetreault, VTrans  
Bob Fisher, VTrans  
Brian Searles, VTrans consultant  
Bill Hollister, Amtrak  
MaryAnne Michaels, VRS  
Deb Carbin, Northeast by Rail  
Maggie Gendron, Sen. Leahy's Office  
Erica Chabot, Sen. Leahy's Office  
Megan Sullivan, Congressman Welch's Office  
Bob Haight, Town of Windsor  
Ben Heckscker, Trains in the Valley  
Scott Burbank, VHB  
Stephen Whitaker, citizen

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[Note: The minutes reflect the order of the published agenda.]

**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM and announced Herb Russell resigned from the Rail Council because he is moving out of state. Introductions were done.

**2. Public Comments**

Stephen Whitaker, citizen, commented as follows:

- The meeting location of the Rail Council is better at the State House for public participation because the parking is easier. Consideration should be given to moving the meeting.
- The Rail website is not current.
- Using heavy handed politics and exemptions as was done with the Vermont Railways salt shed issue in Shelburne can turn the public against rail.
- If projects are prioritized by being shovel ready when funding is available then how sidings are acquired for trains so light rail can be run should be accelerated. The parking issue by the Randolph Art Center could be addressed by light rail.

Ben Heckscker, Trains in the Valley, spoke of the consistent lack of on time performance by the southbound Vermonter train. The train only departed once on time from North Hampton. The issue being looked at to be addressed is a temporary change of schedule to add time before White River Junction and Brattleboro so the train gets out of Springfield on time. Also, the schedule in play for the past year and a half is not in touch with the reality of the train. Bill Hollister, Amtrak, said Amtrak is trying to rectify on time performance. NECR is addressing slow orders in the north. The railroad owner, Genesee & Wyoming, has been contacted about the matter. Dan Delabruere said the run times work if the train can reach the speed it is supposed to reach. The train is late in both directions into and out of Brattleboro. There have been heat slow orders and construction in Connecticut and Massachusetts. NECR has slow orders that have to come off. NECR falls back on the NTSB order. Alan Franklin briefly described the new tool from Amtrak showing a weekly schedule of each and every delay. VTrans is tracking on time performance and informs Amtrak when there is a delay.

Charlie Moore opined it is highly unacceptable for the railroad to not keep Amtrak on time.

Carl Fowler mentioned the analysis he did of actual elapsed running times. The analysis showed a consistent 20 minute delay in Brattleboro. White River Junction to Windsor is very tight. The schedule should not slow down, but delays are an historic problem. The October timetable should be reviewed and 15-20 minutes pulled out until the work is done. Carl Fowler will send the Rail Council the analysis he did.

Dave Wulfson said nothing can be done with a heat delay, but being 20 to 30 minutes late on a regular basis is a problem the railroad needs to address.

Jeff Munger suggested a letter from the Congressional delegation to the NTSB to accelerate removal of the NTSB order.

Chris Cole invited NECR and Amtrak to present to the Rail Council at the next meeting on what has been achieved to eliminate slow orders of the line. NECR seems reluctant to address rock outcroppings even though the state spends a fair amount of money on the host agreement for the rail line.

Chris Andreasson said there are GPS tracking tools that passengers can use to determine when a train will arrive. Amtrak could demonstrate this when a passenger buys a ticket. Bill Hollister said passengers can subscribe to the Amtrak “train tracker” app. Carl Fowler said the app can pin the train for speed, estimated time of arrival, and such. Dixieland software has train information as well.

Dan Delabruere will organize a meeting with NECR and Amtrak on eliminating slow orders.

### **3. Approval of Minutes**

*May 25, 2016*

**MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Carl Fowler, to approve the 5/25/16 minutes with the following correction(s)/clarification(s):**

**Page 1, Members Present – add Charlie Moore and remove Chris Andreasson;**

**Page 4, paragraph beginning “Carl Fowler commented the business class service...” – add “Mr. Fowler suggested adding a text overlay to the ads to mention the upgraded business class.” to the end of the paragraph, and in the paragraph beginning “Carl Fowler noted both routes...”, 1<sup>st</sup> sentence – insert “due to problems on the northeast corridor” between “shut down” and “on two occasions”.**

**VOTING: all ayes except one abstention (Chris Andreasson); motion carried.**

### **4. Legislative Update**

Maggie Gendron, Sen. Leahy’s Office, announced the five year reauthorization of the Transportation Bill known as “Fast Act” that includes rail programs and appropriations. Sen. Leahy’s Office is working with the state and regional partners to get grant applications.

Chris Cole recognized Senator Leahy’s strong support of rail. With “Fast Act” Vermont received an additional \$20 million per year for five years plus there is a discretionary fund to which VTrans can apply. It will be necessary to continue to fund the discretionary programs created by the reauthorization.

Carl Fowler asked if the reauthorization keeps the northeast corridor revenue in the corridor. Karen Songhurst said the corridor is segregated out with a separate funding stream. New Haven to Springfield has been put back into the system which is good for Vermont.

### **5. TIGER 7 Grant Update**

Paul Libby reported VTrans is working with the FRA to acquire a fully obligated cooperative agreement. It takes time to redevelop the documents as the FRA wants. VTrans received pre-award authorization (\$4 million) for rail purchase this calendar year and installation of continuous welded rail. Some design tasks for assets are being advanced. Crossings, platforms, bridges will be out to bid a year from now. The work will be complete summer/fall of 2020.

Rick Moulton asked if there was a slip of a year. Chris Cole said the timeframe is four years from the grant agreement. VTrans is progressing with all that can be done, but the grant agreement has not yet been received. Staff will find out if the clock starts with the pre-award.

## **6. Operation Lifesaver**

Alan Franklin reported on the presentations being made across the state to inform people of Operation Lifesaver. Over 1,000 people have been reached thus far. A replacement is needed for Herb Russell on the Operation Lifesaver Board. Mr. Franklin mentioned the problem with trespass in Brattleboro that resulted in a fatality. The police will be enforcing the trespass law.

## **7. Rail Section Property Management Update**

Mark Fitzgerald reported a six member team manages the private crossing agreements, lease agreements, master licenses, and leases on 10 state airports. Revenue from the rail leases is \$751,000. Revenue from the aviation leases is \$345,000. Projects include renovation of the historic train station in White River Junction. The second floor space is leased. The first floor space is the train station. A fertilizer building next to the railroad track in Bradford is being renovated for secure storage of railroad inventory. The train station in Vergennes was moved and will be converted to a welcome center. Dan Delabruere noted the annual revenue from rail leases increased from \$250,000 six years ago to \$750,000 today by focusing on encroachments and ensuring all licenses are up to date and at the same rates.

## **8. Freight and Construction Topics**

### *Shelburne Salt Delivery Update*

Dave Wulfson reported the salt project in Shelburne continues to move forward. The court ruled in favor of the railroad in the litigation with the town. Preliminary paving will be done and the environmentally friendly salt building is expected to arrive and be assembled prior to October 1<sup>st</sup>. The salt sheds in Burlington are gone. There is one building remaining in Burlington to be used until the site in Shelburne is operational.

Chris Cole asked if additional permits are needed before salt can be received. Dave Wulfson said the court will be asked for a ruling. The Section 1111 permit has been processed, but not yet received.

### *GMRR Rail Replacement Project*

Paul Libby reported rail was upgraded to 105,000 pound capacity in phase one work. Phase two will upgrade another seven mile stretch which will leave about 7.5 miles in the corridor still at 90,000 pound capacity. Dan Delabruere said the rail upgrade must be done for the ethanol cars.

Carl Fowler asked if the Rutland and Bellows Falls railyards will be done. Dan Delabruere said they will all be done, but the focus is on sections without switches at this time.

*Barton Transload Update*

Dave Wulfson said a partnership has been formed with CIT Bulk. Northern borders grant money was used for the large, level transload site. There are two grain silos and a truck scale. Grain is received mainly from western Canada and shipped all over the country. More silos will be built for uses that are not grain. Chris Cole said the shipper is in Lyndonville. The railyard has expanded business for the malt craft beer industry.

Carl Fowler mentioned discussing at some point the acquisition of the Providence & Worcester railroad by Genesee & Wyoming which will change how freight moves in the region.

*Bridge Load Ratings*

Erin Charbonneau reported there are 178 bridges to be inspected, 140 complete. Load ratings are done on 135 bridges and 38 are scheduled. Five bridges are not scheduled, but will be done by the end of FY2017. Eight bridges will go through project management. Dan Delabruere added the deadline for bridge inspections will be met. One bridge engineer needed to be replaced so additional staff was recruited and trained.

Dave Wulfson commented bridge ratings and bridge fixing are not the same. The state misses out on freight traffic every day due to lack of 286,000 pound capacity.

*Rail Construction Program Update for SFY2016/2017 Budget*

Paul Libby reviewed the spreadsheet of maintenance projects, active construction, projects in design (i.e. project has a budget), and projects that are programmed (i.e. project has a budget in out years). Dan Delabruere said some projects are TIGER 7 related, some are regular projects. There is much to do and staff continues to push forward. Chris Cole briefly explained how VTrans projects move through the process to completion.

Dave Wulfson gave kudos to the Rail Section for the spreadsheet of projects.

**9. Passenger Topics***Vermont Pre-Clearance Update*

Brian Searles briefed the Rail Council on progress to date on the preclearance for the Vermonter into Montreal. Mr. Searles noted the legislation in Congress is not moving right now, but not for lack of effort by Sen. Leahy. On the Canadian side the bill is expected to pass the first quarter of 2017. Most of the money will be spent in Canada by the Province of Quebec. No spending will occur until Congress passes the preclearance bill. Operationally work is being done on diagnostics to build the infrastructure and facility in Montreal. Cost sharing for staffing or the train schedule cannot be discussed until the project advances more. Maggie Gendron said the legislation is there and can be signed into an appropriations bill. Lines of communications are being kept open with Canada. Brian Searles agreed the momentum must be kept going and people need to stay excited about the project. There is good support in both the Senate and House at this time.

Carl Fowler described his recent train travel to Vancouver through customs which was very positive and the train was not delayed.

#### *Amtrak Ridership & Revenue*

Alan Franklin reported ridership was down 5% on the Ethan Allen Express. Revenue was up .5%. On time performance was 89.1%. Ridership was up 8.8% on the Vermonter and revenue was flat (up .05%). On time performance was 66.6%. Vermont stations were up 29% for the Ethan Allen Express and 4.6% for the Vermonter. Bikes on the Vermonter are increasing. There was mention of increasing the number of bike racks on the train to meet increasing demand. Chris Cole challenged VTrans and Amtrak to figure out how to get more bikes on trains during the pilot program. Bill Hollister noted the bike racks are luggage racks that fold into bike racks.

#### *Station Stop in Windsor*

Chris Cole noted from 2009 to the present the on/off passenger number for Windsor is about 1,000 people or 1% of the Vermont ridership on the Vermonter. Windsor is the second lowest stop on a state supported service in the country.

Robert Haight, Windsor Downtown Manager, described the effort to revitalize the businesses and the area along the railroad tracks. The town invested \$800,000 to build a welcome station and on the streetscape. New businesses are locating in the renovated buildings. A park-and-ride was built opposite the Amtrak station. Inns in town are including the train in their marketing to attract people to Windsor. The train is a major focus.

Carl Fowler agreed Windsor is a wonderful day stop with lots to do and see. Further effort should be made to revive the station. Mr. Haight said the railyard investment group now has control of key property around the rail station so there are possibilities.

Chris Cole asked how the train can be marketed differently and more effectively to generate ridership and reduce the subsidy. Vermont has trains for economic development reasons. There appears to be a good partnership with the town investing in improvements

Jeff Munger stated 3.3 people per day at the Windsor stop seems very low.

Bill Hollister said the Vermonter is a state supported route so Amtrak works with the state and will be directed by what the state wants. Amtrak considers itself part of the community where there are station stops and as an economic driver. Amtrak is willing to work with communities and support their efforts. Ridership is low for Windsor. On time performance is an important driver for the train. Every stop takes time. Station stops need to be spaced to maximize on time performance. Also, all train stations must be ADA compliant by 2018 which is a very large investment. All the factors need to be balanced. Mr. Haight noted the parking and welcome center are fully accessible. The platform to the train is the only gap. Bill Hollister said a minimum/maximum cost for ADA compliance can be calculated.

Rick Moulton asked the driving distance to stations in Claremont or White River Junction. Chris Andreasson estimated about 15 minutes, adding there just may be too few passengers to warrant a stop in Windsor. Mr. Haight acknowledged this, but said there is potential to increase ridership with marketing. Chris Andreasson suggested revisiting the situation in a few months.

Further information is needed on the cost of ADA compliance in Windsor and the train speed through the area with a stop and without a stop to determine the time saved/lost with a stop. Chris Cole commented Windsor is rebuilding their downtown in close proximity to the train station and has made an investment in the land around the station. The state supports economic development with rail.

#### *Middlebury Tunnel*

Dan Delabruere reported the project manager will report at the next meeting. The project will be managed through VTrans. Agreements with consultant and contractors are through VTrans rather than Middlebury. There will be no construction until calendar year 2017. Options are being vetted on the schedule. The scope of the project has not changed. The tunnel will replace two defective bridges and create a downtown center green.

Carl Fowler asked if the Middlebury station is a separate project. Dan Delabruere said the station is separate. Potential locations have been narrowed. Ethan Allen Express service cannot start until the project is done. The service is not efficient without the tunnel. The goal is to build town highway bridges and rail infrastructure that last 100 years. Double-stack and oversized vehicles through the gap are not precluded.

#### *Pets on Trains*

Dogs and cats up to 20 pounds can be transported in carriers on the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express for \$25 per pet provided the duration of the train trip is no longer than seven hours. Business class and the club cars prohibit pets.

#### *Connecticut Line Work Window Requests*

Dan Delabruere said the last five of 32 work windows have been requested for the project in Connecticut. No work windows are anticipated for next construction season. There are only two work window dates in foliage season.

## **10. Other Business**

### *Next Meeting*

November 16, 2016

### *Agenda*

- Discuss business class and onboard amenities (food service, reconfiguration of business class)
- Discuss potential change in freight movement due to purchase of Providence & Worcester by G&W

- Information on Windsor stop (ADA cost, slow down/stop of train impact on schedule)
- Information from NECR and Amtrak on eliminating slow orders
- Confirmation of whether the grant clock starts with the pre-award
- Report on Middlebury Tunnel from project manager
- Information on how to get more bikes on trains during the pilot program

## **11. Adjournment**

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 PM.

*RScy: M.E.Riordan*