

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NEW ENGLAND CENTRAL RAILROAD
2 FEDERAL STREET
2nd Floor Conference Room
ST. ALBANS, VERMONT
November 17, 2010**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Trini Brassard for Scott Rogers (Chairperson)
Alan Cook Rick Moulton
Dave Allaire George Barrett
Chris Andreasson Joann Erenhouse
Carl Fowler Charles Hunter
Dave Wulfson

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
J.B. McCarthy, VTrans
Scott Bascom, VTrans
Bill Aswad, legislature
Chris Parker, VRAN
J. Jeffrey Munger, Sen. Sanders' Office
Frank Rogers, PWR
Michele Boomhower, CCMPO

1. Call to Order & Introductions

In the absence of Scott Rogers, Trini Brassard called the meeting to order at 1 PM. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of Minutes

July 14, 2010 minutes were reviewed. Motion to accept by George Barrett, seconded by Chris Andreasson. Motion was passed.

3. Opening Public Input

There was general discussion of the Track II application, service on the western corridor, high-speed rail, and federal funding. Jeff Munger offered that Bernie Sanders was intending to have a conversation with Joe Szabo (FRA) regarding the Track II Western Corridor application.

Christopher Parker of VRAN noted the awards presented to Trini Brassard and Mike Coates by VRAN for their contributions to the betterment of Rail services in VT.

4. Rail Council Membership

New member, Alan Cook was welcomed to the Rail Council. Mr. Cook mentioned his personal experience (very positive) with the public transportation system in Europe.

5. Passenger Subcommittee Report

Rail-Transit Presentation

Chris Andreasson reported on rail-transit options for faster service on the Vermonter to Boston. Presently the 230 mile trip takes four hours by car and seven hours by train. Rail-transit service can reduce travel time by train. Coordinating schedules between the train and bus was discussed. Having the state in control of the White River Jct. station is a benefit. One issue with rail-transit service is the on-time performance of the Vermonter. Dartmouth Coach must leave on time and will not wait in White River Jct. for the train. Amtrak does not want any passengers left stranded.

Carl Fowler noted the Passenger Rail Subcommittee discussed rail-transit service and requests that VTrans, the Rail Council and Amtrak approach Dartmouth Coach and Concord Coach to consider the coordinated service. There was further discussion of the Amtrak train schedule and bus lines serving Boston.

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to endorse the Passenger Rail Subcommittee's recommendation (to jointly approach the bus services regarding rail-transit service to Boston).

DISCUSSION: Jeff Munger noted the bus service will reserve a ticket, but will not reserve a seat. It was noted both services (bus and train) will work together to ensure there are the needed seats for rail-transit passengers.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

6. Freight Rail Subcommittee Report

Joe Flynn stated Mike Coates contacted him to stress that the 286,000 lb. rating Essex to Burlington must remain high on the project list.

Dave Wulfson reported the subcommittee discussed the need for the Rail Council to update the mission of the subcommittee, updating the 286,000 pound track priority map based on ARRA funding, and directing any remaining money from the Parker Hill Road project (Bridge #108) to the bridge assessment on the Green Mountain Railroad. Regarding 286,000 rail, there are 43 rated bridges between Burlington and Rutland of which 17 are rated 286,000, nine are below 286,000 and 17 are yet to be rated. East Alburgh to St. Albans is also a priority for 286,000 rating as is St. Albans to Vernon. The bridges on the Green Mountain Railroad need to be 286,000 rated. Charles Hunter recommended VTrans look into expending the Jeffords earmark on Bridge #219 and determine if that is the best plan of action. The subcommittee is seeking a specific project to work on at this point in time.

Rick Moulton asked about traffic getting to New England Central from the Essex branch with 286,000 lb. rating in place. Charles Hunter explained this would double the cost of transport and there would be a time delay. Rick Moulton suggested a possible project for the subcommittee could be to identify commercial land along the railroad tracks in the state with track access.

Frank Rogers, PWR, noted the subcommittee discussed regional service and the need for all states to improve infrastructure so the system overall is operating at a 286,000 rating.

Upgrade of the Green Mountain Railroad to 286,000 rating is important to support regional service.

Joe Flynn noted there is \$20 million unspent of the Jefford's earmark. Bridge #219 will use most of the earmark and if the bridge work is done now this will allow freight rail to fully utilize the investment in bridges south to Rutland.

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Dave Allaire, that the Rail Council advise VTrans to give the highest priority for bridge work and funding to the Bridge #219 project in Florence.

DISCUSSION: JB McCarthy briefly explained how cost estimates for a project escalate over time.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

MOTION by Dave Wulfson, SECOND by Carl Fowler, to recommend to the Rail Council that any funds remaining for the Parker Hill Project (Bridge #108) be used to do bridge evaluation on the Green Mountain Railroad because that is the priority for 286,000 rating followed by the bridge priority. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

There was continued discussion of potential projects for the Freight Rail Subcommittee. Rick Moulton suggested that the rail yard needs in the state be detailed (i.e. what is needed and how this equates to increased traffic).

7. Property Management Topics

FY10 Financial Review

Joe Flynn reported \$375,000 in revenue from property leases was the state's FY11 target. To date there is \$185,000 in hand and \$131,000 in arrears. Joe Flynn also reported private rail crossing agreements are being modernized with some having fee structures.

Jeff Munger suggested the target may need to be set higher due to the positive results. Dave Wulfson cautioned against allowing more land to be leased or purchased along the railroad because the land may be needed by the state at some point.

Personnel Update

Joe Flynn reported Larry Donna continues to recover from the stroke he experienced in April. There is no firm date of return to work as yet. A replacement worker is in place until May, 2011. There has been a cooperative effort across divisions to handle the work load.

8. Infrastructure Topics

Track I Update

Charles Hunter reported that two trainloads of welded rail have been received. On average one mile of rail per day is installed. Discussion is ongoing of installation in the springtime. Carl Fowler asked if more signals will be installed. Mr. Hunter stated no additional signals will be added, but the timing will be redone.

Trini Brassard reported on bridge inspection and signal work. Bids were \$7 million under estimate. Request for more funding has been submitted to the FRA.

Track II Discussion

Joe Flynn noted discussions with the FRA that included:

- Track II application and awards (it appears the prerequisites of the application are not consistent with the awards as the money was awarded to states, such as Florida and California, with projects not to be done for a decade while Vermont has ready-to-go projects).
- Directing money targeted but not used by other states to Vermont which has projects that are ready to go.
- Completing Ethan Allen Express Amtrak service to Burlington.

Mr. Flynn noted VTrans staff received high praise by Secretary Dill for the work done on the Track II application.

Project Updates

JB McCarthy reviewed the spreadsheet showing the status of rail projects including the list of 2010 projects essentially complete, projects bid by 12/31/10 (mostly crossing and bridge bearing work), and projects under NECR-ARRA grant money (crossings).

Middlebury Spur

Joe Flynn briefly explained the model that was proposed with the Middlebury spur project: OMYA would take on a project management role and direct the railroad to acquire the right-of-way, the railroad is the applicant and OMYA is the backer, OMYA would contract with the state to reconstruct Route 7 as part of the process.

Jefford's Earmark for the Western Corridor

Rick Moulton expressed concern about earmarked funds sitting in limbo for years. Joe Flynn pointed out VTrans can promise to direct the funds, but cannot promise appropriations from the legislature. Jeff Munger recalled the underlying agreement with the Jefford's earmark was that about \$7 million was to be used for the Route 7 overpass/underpass and none of the earmark except that amount would be used on the Middlebury rail spur.

JB McCarthy reviewed expenditures to date and obligations with the earmark for the western corridor project, noting the \$15 million bridge project in Middlebury is not included. Carl Fowler asked if the intent of the earmark was to extend passenger service to Burlington. Jeff Munger confirmed the earmark applied to the entire western corridor. Mr. Fowler asked how much funding is needed to complete and operate passenger service to Burlington and what would the schedule be. Dave Wulfson noted the train has to stop in Middlebury regardless of improvements on the line because of existing conditions there. Mr. Wulfson advised continuing with the installation of welded rail and completing the bridge work before starting passenger service to Burlington. Mr. Fowler commented the earmark money will finally be spent, but only on two projects essentially (bridge and overpass) when

the intent was thought to be service on the entire western corridor. There was further discussion and description of the work to be done in Middlebury.

JB McCarthy reviewed projects on the Green Mountain Railroad using the \$2.375 million earmark.

White River Jct. Station

Joe Flynn announced the state has a lease-to-purchase option on the station. There was discussion of surrounding properties and potential uses.

Rutland Rail Yard

No news to report. VTrans continues to contact FHWA regarding the EIS.

CLP

Dave Wulfson reported rail has been installed on the CLP and ties on the New York project (rehab of five crossings), which will help to slightly increase the speed of the Amtrak train.

Castleton Parking and Platform

Dave Wulfson stated the funds Amtrak was to use to hire Vermont Rail Systems to do the platform and parking area at the Castleton Station have been redirected. Amtrak is looking for funds to do a small parking lot and improvements to the existing platform as a temporary fix.

Washington County Railroad

Trini Brassard reported on the public meetings regarding realignment of the track. Rail traffic is increasing on the line and residents are concerned about the impact of more trains through the community. VTrans continues to supply information and explanation. Federal funding would cover 80% of a realignment project and the project must be done regardless of objections.

9. Passenger Topics

Track III Update

Joe Flynn reported there were six applicants to the RFP. The committee is reviewing the submittals.

Amtrak

Bob Atchinson reported the Ethan Allen Express ridership was down slightly, but the Vermonter was up 10% over last year with revenues up 12%. Carl Fowler noted weather damage and suspended service in New York, which could explain the impact on ridership on the Ethan Allen Express. Also, there was track work that impacted the train schedule.

Bob Atchinson reported promotional video spots of Amtrak service in Vermont will be aired on WCAX, WPTZ, and a sister station in the Upper Valley. The station in Waterbury is featured, produced by Gerianne Smart, directed by George Woodard.

In addition, a lighted sign has been hung in UVM Patrick Gym advertising/promoting Amtrak in Vermont. Joe Flynn noted Vermont indirectly provides the Adirondack service

in New York with marketing and is investigating whether any marketing costs can be recouped.

Amtrak FFY11 Agreement

Joe Flynn reported the Amtrak service agreement is anticipated though six weeks late by Amtrak. Due to good ridership and revenues the agreement amount is \$4.2 million (reduced from \$5.2 million).

Amtrak & PRIIA Sec. 209

Joe Flynn reported the Surface Transportation Board is not taking up the matter unless Amtrak or other states contact them. There is a six month extension between Amtrak and the states. Vermont is working with Amtrak to better define the elements of PRIIA.

Carl Fowler commented on Amtrak's shifting of costs to states because states receive capital money, but not operating funds. Amtrak runs the risk of losing service in states by continuing to increase the cost of service, and this will cause the national service to suffer gravely. Amtrak's failure to recognize these partnerships goes back a long way. Joe Flynn interjected that Drew Galloway who is very savvy and cognizant of the situation is handling the matter well.

Montreal

Joe Flynn reported reinstating service to Montreal is progressing (New York trains are closer than Vermont trains). It is recognized that Vermont is the gateway to New England and the pathway to Boston. Jeff Munger noted the Minister of International Relations communicated his support of New York and Vermont trains connecting to Montreal.

10. Summer Study Review Section 48 Draft Report

Scott Bascom reviewed the objective of the study to produce recommendations on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the transportation councils (rail, air, public transit). Recommendations for the Rail Council include maintaining the Rail Council monthly updates, allowing the Secretary of Transportation to designate a chairperson in his or her stead, having the Rail Council continue to focus on the function for which it was charged via the Executive Order, and removing the requirement of an annual report to the Governor. Trini Brassard noted each agency is required to submit a weekly summary of activities to the Governor. The minutes of the Rail Council meetings are published so the Governor's Office is well informed of Rail Council discussions.

11. Next Meeting/Agenda Items

Next Meeting: January 26, 2011 at 1 p.m., National Life Building, Montpelier.

12. Adjournment

MOTION by George Barrett, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 4 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan