

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
DAVIS 5<sup>th</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
November 16, 2017**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Carl Fowler Dave Wulfson  
Rick Moulton Chris Andreasson  
Joann Erenhouse Charlie Moore  
Art Whitman Rep. Clem Bissonnette, VT Leg.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michele Boomhower, PPAID  
Dan Delabruere, VTrans  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans  
Paul Libby, VTrans  
David Tillberg, VTrans  
Alan Franklin, VTrans  
Kyle Wells, VTrans  
Larry Donna, VTrans  
Cos Gardner, VTrans  
Tanya Miller, VTrans  
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans  
David Tillberg, VTrans  
Costa Pappis, VTrans  
Seldon Houghton, VRS  
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony  
Jeff Sinclair, AECOM  
Allison DeMag, Railroad Association of VT  
Martin Bloedt, Siemens  
Ryan Barnes, VHG  
Eric Law, USDA-RD  
Scott Bascom

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**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

Dan Delabruere called the meeting to order at 1 PM. Introductions were done.

**2. Public Comments**

*Statement on Amtrak Storage and Service Location*

Rick Moulton read a statement from Melinda Moulton, dated 11/15/17, on One Main Street and the proposal to install a storage and service location for Amtrak trains in front of the site. The statement by Ms. Moulton included the following:

- “Main Street Landing has been doing a lot of heavy lifting around the return of Amtrak to Burlington. We built the train station at One Main using federal dollars. And we have been managing it for the State of Vermont for 20 years at a profit to the state. We acted in good faith at every turn and we expect the same in

return. In our mind's eye we see thousands of people arriving by train from New York and Montreal passing through the station and out onto Burlington's Main Street. This is an economic development project that will provide additional income for the city and people will be arriving without their cars. This has always been our vision, one that respects the integrity of this precious place and honors the future potential development by Main Street Landing. An Amtrak storage and service spur directly in front and adjacent to our property at the foot of Main Street has never been part of our vision and, in fact, it is antithetical to anything we believe should happen in the core of the downtown waterfront. The Amtrak overnight storage and service location should not be in the city's waterfront core, but two blocks to the south in the existing railyard that exists for the storage and servicing of trains."

#### *Rail Restoration*

Carl Fowler urged putting funding toward the 7.8 mile branch to Essex to open up the possibility of serving upstate, and suggested a 40 mph restoration speed and moving the terminus to St. Albans or Montpelier rather than building a wye.

#### *VRAN Dinner*

Charlie Moore commented positively on the VRAN dinner and thanked VRS for the train.

#### *Storage of Propane Cars*

Dave Wulfson said the storage of propane cars mentioned in some newspaper articles has been done for the past three years and is being done legally. There is a need to store the cars based on rail users who handle heating products in New England. The forward staging is to prevent running out of fuel in the northeast. The railroad worked with the fire departments and Vermont Emergency Management. The storage is not long term.

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

*August 23, 2017*

**MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Rick Moulton, to approve the 8/23/17 minutes with the following correction(s)/clarification(s):**

- **Page 4, paragraph beginning "Dave Wulfson said Amtrak expansion..." – change "Vermont" to "Ethan Allen Express".**
- **Page 4, BUDD Cars, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph – change "10 BUDD cars" to "12 BUDD cars".**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

### **4. Reorganization**

Dan Delabruere announced Aviation and Rail divisions have been combined. Trini Brassard and Dan Delabruere are co-managers of daily operations. The Rail Program has not changed.

### **5. Operation Lifesaver Update**

Alan Franklin reported:

- Operation Lifesaver in Vermont reached 3,000 people last year and has reached 5,700 people so far this year. Presentations have been given at schools, fairs, and other public events.
- During National Rail Safety Week four law enforcement agencies in the state patrolled crossings and distributed literature on safety. Al Franklin was on Fox 44 Morning Show to promote safety week.
- Operation Lifesaver coloring books will be distributed on the Jingle Bell Express holiday train.
- Al Franklin completed Operation Lifesaver Coach training and can now train others.

Dan Delabruere credited Al Franklin with the fantastic job of spreading the word on rail safety through Operation Lifesaver.

## **6. Grant Opportunities**

Dan Delabruere reported VTrans reacted to two federal grant opportunities, one being a TIGER grant and one being an INFRA grant (former Fast Lane program). If the grants are not awarded the proposed work will have to be re-evaluated.

Paul Libby explained the TIGER 9 grant will address 21 bridges on the Connecticut River line from White River to Wells River. Project cost is \$9.8 million. The INFRA grant will address 15 bridges between Manchester and Rutland. The bridges will be brought up to 286,000-pound load capacity. Project cost is \$12.1 million.

### *Future Opportunities*

There was discussion of horizontal clearance issues (not a priority at this time) and vertical clearance issues (on the western corridor a temporary bridge will be in place in Middlebury until the tunnel is built, and there are some issues in the Proctor area). The Statewide Rail Plan indicates the state wants double stack vertical clearance (20'8" minimum). The Vermonter on state owned track is the number one priority (vertical issues in Proctor and the southern line from Rutland to Bennington) then the Green Mountain line and the Connecticut River line.

Rick Moulton said the seven mile connect to Essex has always been included. It was noted there are height and curvature issues with the tunnel.

There was discussion of being able to change the shape of the top structure of a bridge or in the bridge timbers to gain height otherwise the bridge must be replaced. There was mention of demand for HiCube cars by lumber mills and feed mills. HiCube cars are moved all over the state. The Bellows Falls tunnel was cleared for modified double stack cars and with minor changes (additional undercut) could accommodate full double stack. On the Green Mountain RR the truss bridges can be modified to gain height.

Dave Wulfson stressed the need for 286,000-pound capacity as the immediate need because freight traffic is lost every day due to insufficient load capacity. Per the bridge inspections there are 57 bridges that either lack 286,000 capacity or have a serious, poor,

or fair rating or both. Staff noted not all of the worst bridges are in the TIGER 9 or INFRA grants because the grants require that an entire segment of the line be completed. Dan Delabruere explained there can be bridge superstructure that can hold the load, but the washout behind needs to be fixed, for example. This does not affect the load rating for the bridge.

Carl Fowler mentioned resuming granite freight traffic with the bridge work on the WACR.

Dave Wulfson said 286,000 capacity at entry and exit points for connection to other 286,000 capable railroads outside the state is what is needed. Dan Delabruere said Massachusetts is trying to get a grant to fix their 286,000 pound issue which is an important consideration. Carl Fowler noted on the northern line there is 286,000 capacity from Burlington to Whitehall and there are five bridges between Burlington and Rutland. Dan Delabruere said the bridges are at 286,000 capacity, but they have condition issues.

There was continued discussion of 286,000 pound capacity. Costa Pappis said the rail plan has a method to determine 286,000 priority (must connect to other Class 1 track with 286,000 capacity). Some grants require 286,000 capacity and others do not. VTrans is not deviating from the rail plan with the grant applications. Dave Wulfson said there may be traffic on the WACR in the next six months (1,000 carloads). Bridge 304 needs to be fixed, but the other bridges (B.305 and B.306) can be bypassed and the old state right-of-way reactivated. For the bridges to be totally fixed requires replacement. The little WACR does not need to be 286,000 capacity at this time and should not be considered a priority, but 286,000 capacity statewide is a priority issue. The majority of traffic for VRS is through Hoosick Jct. Amtrak through Whitehall is fine. Norfolk Southern wants to do business with VRS, but needs 286,000 capacity. New cars for ethanol are 286,000 loads. VRS has lost business and revenue and jobs because of not having 286,000 capacity. The south end of Vermont at 286,000 capacity is a priority because 80% of the freight traffic there connects to other railroads with 286,000 capacity.

Carl Fowler proposed that the Rail Council advise the Rail Division to focus on clearing the main lines in the state to 286,000 pound freight capacity beginning with the northern section to Rutland and the southern section, Rutland to Hoosick Jct., as the #1 and #2 priorities in seeking grants. Chris Andreasson said a clear idea on what happens with NECR and Massachusetts is needed (i.e. how long will it take and will the priorities change). VTrans will do more research. The Rail Council agreed by consensus only; no vote was taken.

Erin Charbonneau stated the state owns 216 bridges and is responsible for 174. VRS is responsible for the balance. The information that was presented is only on the 174 state owned bridges. Bridges with a “3” rating need serious consideration for fixing. Dan Delabruere said VTrans tries to get bridges with a “3” rating in grant applications or asks for state funds.

Clem Bissonette asked the estimated cost to repair all “3” rated bridges. Erin Charbonneau estimated \$7 million in construction cost. Engineering and design work would be additional cost (about \$2 million).

Dan Delabruere summarized the priorities going forward for the Rail Council are 286,000 capacity over horizontal and vertical clearances with southern being the focus area. VTrans should also be looking at the Burlington to Essex connection in addition to the 286,000 pound issue

Dave Wulfson noted the STB made a decision on the Pan Am and Genoese & Wyoming conflict (mileage charge for use of the Connecticut River line). Genoese & Wyoming is appealing the decision. NECR is planning increased freight service to White River Jct. and will make the Connecticut River line healthier.

The history of freight movement on the Connecticut River line was briefly discussed.

## **7. Passenger Topics**

### **a) VRS – Executive Rail Car Exhibit**

Seldon Houghton, VRS, gave a presentation on the American Association of Private Rail Car Owners (AAPRCO) 2017 Convention that was held in Burlington. Executive rail cars from all over the country traveled through Vermont from Burlington to Rutland to Bellows Falls. The event brought lots of people to the state who spent lots of money while sightseeing and dining. AAPRCO made a significant donation to Make-A-Wish. The luxury rail cars have an interesting history. The oldest car was built in 1911. Some of the cars carried past presidents.

Seldon Houghton announced the VRS dinner train beginning in May. The train will run between Burlington and Middlebury.

### **b) & c) Amtrak Ridership & Revenue and On Time Performance**

#### *Vermont*

Ridership year-to-date is up 7.3% (10,000 passengers in August). Revenues are up 11.1% (over \$6.3 million). On time performance was impacted by weather and projects. Station on/off for the year shows a 2.9% increase. Bikes on the train (485) generated \$7,640 in revenue.

#### *Ethan Allen Express*

Ridership year-to-date is down 1.5%. Revenues are down 2.1% which is in line with the Empire service. On time performance is at 83.1%. Station on/off for the year is down 3.5%. The numbers for October look good with an increase in ridership of 4.9% and increase in revenues of 12.8%.

Carl Fowler said the online Amtrak time table shows the fast schedule for the Vermonter out of St. Albans which is not correct. Also, New Shires of Vermont bus service is not easily found on the Amtrak schedule.

Chris Andreasson questioned why Amtrak is stopping in Windsor when the ridership is down. Alan Franklin said the ridership is up 3% for the year.

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

### **a) TIGER VII Update**

Paul Libby reported:

- All the continuous welded rail is installed Rutland to Burlington except the Middlebury tunnel piece which will be done with that project. Crossovers, turnouts, and switches are being finished now.
- A study is being done on the location of the Burlington platform. A location for the platform in Middlebury needs to be identified. The Vergennes platform is under design.
- Five crossing upgrades and bridge rehabs are in design for construction in 2018 and 2019.

Kyle Wells and Cos Gardner reviewed the \$9.45 million in construction projects done during the 10 day closure on the B&R. Six projects were done including Bridge 63 replacement in Sunderland, Bridge 64 replacement in Sunderland, Bridge 74 rehab in Manchester, Bridge 91 superstructure replacement, crossing, and culvert in Wallingford.

Dan Delabruere extended thanks to VRS and the VTrans team for the amazing feat and a job well done.

## **9. Other Business/Next Meeting**

*Next Meeting*

February 28, 2018

*West Borough Railyard*

Chris Andreasson said the 20 acre railyard owned by New Hampshire has a roundhouse and is leased to Genoese & Wyoming until 2020. The site is used for propane and gravel storage. The usable rail ends on property owned by Twin State Gravel. There is 100 acres for sale (\$15 million). The property might be viable for some entity that works with rail.

*New Hampshire Freight Plan*

Jack Madden said New Hampshire Dept. of Transportation had an open house on their freight plan. Input was given on potential sites for development in New Hampshire.

## **10. Adjournment**

**MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Dave Wulfson, to adjourn the meeting.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.

*RScty: M.E.Riordan*