

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
BARRE CITY PLACE
219 NORTH MAIN STREET
CONFERENCE ROOM 1
BARRE, VERMONT
December 3, 2019**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Jeff Munger
Chris Andreasson Charlie Moore
Dave Allaire Arthur Whitman
Charlie Baker Charles Hunter
Dave Wulfson Rick Moulton

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
Katharine Otto, VTrans
Toni Clithero, VTrans
Leslie Welts, VTrans
Brian Savage, Legislature
Peter Sterling, Legislature
Deb Fox, Finger Lakes Railway
Scott Burbank, VHB
David Saladino, VHB
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Melinda Moulton, Main Street Landing
Ritchie Berger, Dinse Law firm
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony & Assoc.
Selden Houghton, VRS
Nicole Carlson, VRS
Eleni Churchill, CCRPC
Greg Edwards, Stantec Consulting
Calvin Cutler, WCAX
C.B. Hall, Vermont Business Magazine
Wes Cate, citizen

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Joe Flynn called the meeting to order at 1:30 PM. Introductions were done.

2. Approval of Minutes

September 18, 2019

MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Carl Fowler, to approve the minutes of 9/18/19 with the clarification of the comment by Carl Fowler regarding the Amtrak train going to St. Albans, not Essex, and a note that Attorney Berger was not prepared to correct a statement in the minutes on the spot that was questioned by Charles Hunter relative to the overnighting of the Amtrak train. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

3. Passenger Topics

Rail Council Ranking of Locations for Overnighting Amtrak in Burlington

Rail Council members were invited, (by Secretary Flynn), to comment on potential locations for the Amtrak train to overnight in Burlington before ranking the options. Comments included:

- Dave Wulfson clarified overnighting the train and the second track in front of Union Station are two separate issues.
- Carl Fowler spoke positively on the McNeil Plant location for the train and against having a second track in front of Union Station and questioned the length the siding and the need for two switches when Amtrak plans to use two locomotives. Also, the state accepted the argument by VRS that the passing track by Union Station is necessary so that must be included as part of the project as well as associated costs such as the bike path relocation and second track.
- Charles Hunter said the siding could be used as a passing track if necessary. NECR trains must get by the McNeil Plant and Union Station on a daily basis so having flexibility with the track is good.
- Jeff Munger stressed the preferred location needs to be ready when the train arrives even if there is a temporary location until the preferred choice is ready.
- Secretary Flynn said the state must fulfill having a place for the train by the end of 2021/early 2022.
- Chris Andreasson said the solution should not impact the waterfront vitality.
- Rick Moulton observed the numerical scores are not necessarily indicating priorities, and the cost to overnight the train, \$300,000 for Union Station versus \$50 million for the railyard, is questioned. The criteria of cost are not fair or appropriately adjusted to show the true cost of overnighting Amtrak at Union Station which includes a second train and relocating the bike path.
- Charlie Baker spoke of the need for more public process.

The Rail Council members ranked the six potential locations under consideration including Flynn Avenue, McNeil, northern reserve, urban reserve, Union Station, railyard. The preferred location by the Rail Council is the McNeil Plant following by the northern reserve then the urban reserve, railyard, Flynn Ave., and Union Station in that order. Charles Baker noted there are more significant issues with the urban reserve sites besides just acquiring the land.

Secretary Flynn commended the Rail Council for thoughtfully taking action on the matter. There will be more discussion before the final decision is made. As VTrans

narrows to a final decision the comments from the City of Burlington and Vermont citizens will be considered.

Changes to Food Service for Amtrak

Dan Delabruere said there is no support for changes to the food service on the Vermonter or Ethan Allen Express at this time.

4. Freight and Construction Topics

Paul Libby reported on current rail projects noting the Build grant for Hoosick to Rutland includes 31 bridges and will take five to six years to complete. TIGER VII grant projects are going well. Dan Delabruere said the Middlebury tunnel project is progressing with the 20-hour work windows in place and operating. Dave Wulfson confirmed the work windows are working and the tunnel project is ahead of schedule. The detour with NECR will be in place next summer. Carl Fowler asked about the passenger platform. Dan Delabruere said the platform is in design for construction next summer. Middlebury is handling the parking.

Paul Libby showed pictures of the Vergennes station interior and platform that will be complete by spring 2020. Carl Fowler asked if parking in the nearby park-and-ride lot will be available to train riders. Dan Delabruere said there is plenty of parking available for the station. Secretary Flynn commented positively on the teamwork that moved the Vergennes project forward.

Dave Wulfson announced the CN rail workers strike interrupted rail service in Canada and indirectly in Vermont. VRS had 200 propane cars in storage which assisted in those areas needing propane during the strike. The strike is now settled. Also, CP is in the process of buying CNQ which could change how trains run with connections and overhead. Trini Brassard noted 75% of the fuel coming into Vermont comes off the CN line.

There was discussion of revenue generation by Amtrak trains in Vermont and southern New England. Bill Hollister reported ADA improvements are being done at the Windsor and Claremont stations. The Rail Council is urged to continue looking ahead with passenger rail service in Vermont.

Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office, said there is \$50 million for Amtrak safety in the budget, but Amtrak has been slow in spending the funds. There will be another \$50 million in the next federal budget if passed. It is hoped to have appropriations in 2020 for TIGER, Build, and Federal Rail programs.

5. Operation Lifesaver

Dan Delabruere announced Toni Clithero is the new Director of Operations Lifesaver.

6. Public Comments

- C.B. Hall, Vermont Business Magazine, requested a copy of the agreement by VTTrans to pay for the second siding at Union Station. Secretary Flynn clarified there

is no single agreement between VTrans and VRS for the siding. A meeting with the Burlington TEUC and VRS is scheduled to discuss the second track. VTrans will take the outcome of the meeting into consideration with the Amtrak train.

- Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony Associates, asked the rail miles to the McNeil Plant from Union Station (2.1 miles) and about the status of the Montreal preclearance. Dan Delabruere said work continues on preclearance. The new Canadian cabinet is in place including Transportation Minister Garneau. Vermont has a standing offer to go to Quebec City at any time to discuss the issue. The governance model for the facility must be determined. Past concerns with the connection have been resolved. Montreal is also looking into commuter rail between Central Station and the airport there.
- Melinda Moulton, Main Street Landing, recalled her 36 years at Main Street Landing and the redevelopment of the Burlington waterfront which needs to be protected. A DVD on the history of the waterfront development was provided. Much of the development involves rail.

7. Other Business/Next Meeting

Next meeting: March 18, 2020, Barre City Place.

8. Adjournment

Without further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 3:16 PM.

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