

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
May 16, 2018**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Seldon Houghton for Dave Wulfson
Charlie Baker Chris Andreasson
Charles Hunter Charlie Moore
Dave Allaire Jeff Munger
Arthur Whitman

OTHERS PRESENT: Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Alan Franklin, VTrans
David Tillberg, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Cos Gardner, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Clem Bissonette, Legislature
Caroline Mael, Amtrak
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Chris Conatell, Amtrak
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Gary Fox, Amtrak station attendant, WRJ & BF
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony
Allison DeMag, Railroad Association of VT
Scott Burbank, VHB
Matt Byrne, Gavel & Shea, PC
Larry Lewack, VRAN
Rich Tetreault, WSP
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office

[Note: Minutes reflect the order of the published agenda.]

1. Call to Order & Introductions

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

2. Public Comments

Rail Siding

Matt Byrne representing Main Street Landing said the location of the rail siding/spur in Burlington will impact Main Street Landing. There has been very little outreach to

stakeholders so the rail study will likely provide poor information to the Governor on economic issues, environmental issues, and quality of life. There is an agreement between the state, City of Burlington, Vermont Rail System, and Main Street Landing regarding property rights through Year 2050. The agreement prohibits a rail spur. The Wing Building was permitted and approved based on the agreement. Michele Boomhower said Chittenden County Regional Planning, the City of Burlington, and VTrans are partnering on the study. VTrans is not the lead. There is a meeting on June 6, 2018 at Burlington Public Works on Pine Street on the study. VTrans is weighing the outcome of the agreement and can further investigate.

Carl Fowler urged incorporating moderate renovations to the Essex branch so the passenger train can continue to St. Albans, and Dave Wulfson should be asked about available track in the rail yard for the siding.

New Hampshire Capital Corridor Project

Jack Madden announced the New Hampshire Senate and House committees removed \$4 million for preliminary design in the DOT 10-year plan on the Capital Corridor Project.

3. Approval of Minutes

February 28, 2018

MOTION by David Allaire, SECOND by Carl Fowler, to approve the 2/28/17 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. GIS Update

Dave Tillburg, VTrans, gave a presentation on the GIS app used to do annual rail crossing inspections across the state and update information for the FRA inventory. The tool is very powerful. The Google app will warn drivers of active crossings. GIS coordinates are updated to Google data. The state owned rail lines have leases and agreements for rights to be in the rail right-of-way and the app shows spatially where the agreements are and verifies the data.

5 Operation Lifesaver

Alan Franklin reported over 6,000 people were reached last year through events and presentations. This year will exceed that number. There have been 27 presentations/events this year to date. Operation Lifesaver is partnering with Vermont Highway Safety Alliance, the Vermont Municipal Highway Association, and others to continue to expand the program and spread the word.

Dan Delabruere asked for people to send in any pictures of people trespassing on the track or in the rail right-of-way. Also, volunteers are always wanted for Operation Lifesaver.

6. Grant Opportunities

Dan Delabruere reported on federal grant opportunities including CRISSI safety grant to remove rock ledge on the NECR Amtrak line (deadline is mid-June) and BUILD (replaces TIGER) for bridge and 286,000 track improvement projects (grant application

due in July). Costa Pappis added the BUILD program has triple the amount of money and is an extremely competitive transportation grant program that covers all modes of transportation except aviation.

Charlie Baker asked if the Burlington to Essex rail segment will get some consideration. Dan Delabruere said the western corridor is a priority. Costa Pappis said there are passenger and freight priorities in the Rail Plan. The grant application is for freight projects. With the grants the state must demonstrate the federal investment returns a positive cost/benefit ratio. There must also be reasonable chance of getting environmental clearances by a certain date. Each application submission costs nearly \$40,000 so the state must do them piecemeal.

Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office, said Senator Leahy has supported more positive train control money for rail and safety issues on Amtrak state lines.

Gary Fox, Rockingham, asked about the status of the Bellows Falls station ADA upgrade. Dan Delabruere said Amtrak was directed by the FRA to have ADA compliance with platforms. Amtrak is in the process of assessing all stations. The state purchased the White River Junction train station and is currently doing renovations and working on the platform design.

Carl Fowler said the grant for rock slide mitigation should show Amtrak's safety review process. Dan Delabruere said this will be done if the state gets the grant. The grants have a state match and the state budget is very tight.

7. Passenger Topics

a) Update on Safety Analysis/Waiver

Waiver

Dan Delabruere reported a waiver is needed through Massachusetts on the Knowledge Corridor. This impacts the Amtrak train. Vermont has been working with Massachusetts on the waiver process. Massachusetts has implied that the waiver should not be an issue, but the application has not yet been submitted. Vermont continues to ask for a date. Massachusetts owns the line and PanAm operates freight on the line.

Caroline Mael noted PanAm and Massachusetts are in discussion and Amtrak is monitoring the discussions. Amtrak wants to be involved in how the issue resolves.

Carl Fowler said the impact is significant without a waiver because substantial portions of the Amtrak system could be fractured. This could become a major political issue if not resolved soon. If necessary Vermont's Congressional delegation should be asked to contact Massachusetts Governor Baker to take action.

Safety Analysis

Caroline Mael reported Amtrak is doing a risk mitigation analysis on all routes. The schedule is not yet set for each individual assessment. The goal is to complete the work by mid-fall and then discuss the findings and strategies for each route. The analysis

covers what makes the most sense on each route. Bill Hollister added the analysis and mitigating actions will tie into the \$50 million in safety funding in the Congressional budget. Amtrak will do its best to allocate funds toward safety mitigation.

Carl Fowler observed even with the highest funding in the history of Amtrak, the company is talking about stopping service on routes. It seems Amtrak's policy decisions are jumping over positive train control to operational issues. States should strongly object. The January deadline is artificially set by Amtrak. Dan Delabruere said Vermont is not anticipating positive train control systems in the state at this time.

Chris Saunders said the FRA has two years to spend the safety money so there is flexibility to see what is coming in and identify any hot issues.

Costa Pappis pointed out the funding in the Amtrak budget is opportunity to address concerns identified in the analysis and known safety concerns in the state.

Karen Songhurst assured the issues are part of the dialogue at the national level. The state meets with leaders in the rail industry, the FRA, and Congress.

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

Ridership was down 0.4% in the 2nd quarter on the Vermonter and revenues were up 3.1%. On time performance was 81.7%.

Ethan Allen Express

Ridership was down 2% in the 2nd quarter on the Ethan Allen Express and revenues were up 3.7%. On time performance on the Ethan Allen Express was very good.

Carl Fowler mentioned the northbound Ethan Allen Express train absorbing the Lakeshore Limited ridership from May 26, 2018 to September 2018. Kevin Chittenden said there are inhibitors in place to favor through train traffic. The inhibitors can be made bigger if necessary. Amtrak does not have extra coach cars for the summer and will be using standard five car sets.

Bill Hollister reported the contract has been awarded for the new ADA accessible platform and improved parking at the Castleton stop. Work in Windsor, VT and Claremont, NH is going out to bid. Major improvements are underway this summer.

d) VRS Special Service

Seldon Houghton announced the dinner train out of Burlington is operating. The roundtrip dinner train to Middlebury is popular. Tickets are available through Trainridesvt.com.

e) Update on Amtrak to Montreal

Dan Delabruere announced Harry Garforth with Amtrak is working on getting the Vermonter to Montreal. Karen Songhurst said dialogue will begin again on the service.

Quebec is willing to pursue service. Brian Searles is meeting with people and working the project.

Gary Fox said the 2015 Rail Plan shows the goal of rehabbing passenger rail stations and coordinating with the state's economic development priorities. Updating the stations in southeastern Vermont for tourism and passenger rail to Montreal should be part of the plan.

8. Freight and Construction Topics

a) Project Update

Paul Libby reviewed the list of rail projects and their status. There are 11 more bridge projects and 15 more crossing projects on the list this year as well as a couple of "support" project for VRS. The work in Middlebury is funded with Federal Highway funds. With the TIGER 7 grant the work on five crossings will be advertised in July and the bridge work sent out in the fall.

Dan Delabruere said in Middlebury there will be 20 hour work windows and for approximately 12 weeks there will be no freight trains through Middlebury. NECR and VRS are working on the route for freight traffic. There are operational and capacity issues to handle.

Dave Allaire asked when the Middlebury project will be complete. Dan Delabruere said Year 2021 in order to run the Ethan Allen Express to Burlington.

9. Other Business/Next Meeting

Updated Rail Organizational Chart

Dan Delabruere said an updated organizational chart for the Rail/Aviation Division has been provided. Sasa Dejan is a new hire to do bridge inspections and interviews are underway to fill the Field Tech position.

Next Meeting

August 15, 2018

10. Adjournment

**MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to adjourn the meeting.
VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 PM.

RScy: M.E.Riordan