

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
DAVIS 5<sup>th</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
May 17, 2017**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Carl Fowler Dave Wulfson  
Joann Erenhouse Charlie Moore  
Rick Moulton Charlie Baker  
Dave Allaire Charles Hunter

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Joe Flynn, VTrans  
Dan Delabruere, VTrans  
Michele Boomhower, VTrans  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans  
Paul Libby, VTrans  
Alan Franklin, VTrans  
David Tillberg, VTrans  
Kyle Wells, VTrans  
Karen Songhurst, VTrans  
Dave Pelletier, VTrans  
Larry Donna, VTrans  
Costa Pappis, VTrans  
Barb Donovan, VTrans  
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans  
Jacqui LeBlanc, VTrans  
Selden Houghton, VRS  
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony  
Jeff Sinclair, AECOM  
John Wilson, Jacobs  
Deb Carbin D. L. Murphy & Assoc.  
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak  
Fran Berk, Amtrak  
Bill Hollister, Amtrak  
Charlene Lovett, Mayor, Claremont, NH  
Lee Khan, Champ P3  
Scott Burbank, VHB  
Allison DeMag, RRAV

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

**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

Secretary of Transportation, Joe Flynn, called the meeting to order at 1 PM and announced Dan Delabruere, Rail Division Director, will Chair the Rail Council meetings going forward. Secretary Flynn said he will attend the meetings when possible. Introductions were done.

*Comments/Announcements*

Dan Delabruere reported Brian Searles said the preclearance for passenger rail service into Montreal is not moving as quickly on the Canadian side as first anticipated, but passage is still anticipated in June. Karen Songhurst added group testimony has been submitted. The testimony has been positive and strong from the Canadian government. Sen. Leahy is reaching out through the Ambassador's office. Canada has civil rights concern for Canadian passengers.

Carl Fowler spoke of the support from the Congressional delegation and support from NY and NH as well.

Karen Songhurst mentioned the rail title (Fast Act) has been funded so there will be restoration funds to help with operating grants up to three years and to help restore service.

Deb Carbin asked about signage on I-91 and I-89 for Amtrak. Dan Delabruere said there has been no movement on signage.

Jack Madden asked for an update on the regional passenger rail service Burlington to Essex and the Hoosick Jct.-Bennington-Rutland upgrade. Costa Pappis said there is no final decision on the Fast Act grants. Applications are pending and may be released under the same project, but different criteria. Everything is holding until a decision is made by the new Administration.

**2. Public Comments**

There were no comments from the public.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

*February 15, 2017*

**MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Charlie Baker, to approve the 2/15/17 minutes as written.**

**DISCUSSION: Carl Fowler noted that hot entrees on Amtrak are not being discontinued.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

**4. Operation Lifesaver Update**

Alan Franklin reported on the Operation Lifesaver State Coordinator Summit in New Orleans that he recently attended. There is discussion of a holding a regional summit to train new coordinators. The cost of the training will be paid by the national Operation Lifesaver office. Mr. Franklin also reported on events and activities including Rail Safety Week (September 2017), websites, social media outreach (Pandora, virtual reality tool). Nearly 2000 people have been reached in scheduled events in Vermont.

Dan Delabruere recognized the work on Operation Lifesaver by Al Franklin and Charles Hunter.

Charlie Moore asked about any rail incidents. Al Franklin said there was only one fatality at a rail crossing this year.

Dave Wulfson asked if Operation Lifesaver covers changes in the trespass laws. Al Franklin confirmed this. Dan Delabruere added there is a Vermont state police officer on the Operation Lifesaver board so the information is communicated. Dave Allaire stressed the message against trespass on rail must continue to be hammered home at schools, local government, and police departments.

Carl Fowler mentioned people parking on the platform in Brattleboro which is very dangerous and needs to be stopped. Dan Delabruere said VTrans is working with the local police on the matter.

## **5. Passenger Topics**

### *Amtrak Ridership and Revenue*

Alan Franklin reported:

- Ridership numbers on the Vermonter for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter are good. January numbers were the best in the last eight years. Revenues are up as well. March revenues were down due to two train cancelations for weather (winter storm). April numbers are encouraging though not finalized. Ridership on the Vermonter is up 9.7% and revenues are up 11.1%. Station on/off in Vermont is up 4.7%. Waterbury station for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter is up 19% for station on/off in February. Waterbury station serves Stowe.
- Ridership on the Ethan Allen Express is stagnant with no change between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarters. Ridership for April is up 14% and revenues are up 13.2%.

Carl Fowler asked about plans by Amtrak to close Penn Station for eight weeks this summer. Al Franklin confirmed there has been some discussion. Kevin Chittenden said there is significant track work to be done in Penn Station. Amtrak is developing a plan to accommodate the track work. Service will be decreased. The plan is not finalized yet. Track work is Monday through Friday. Train 296 will run on Saturday and Sunday. The Ethan Allen Express Train 293 on Fridays will be impacted. Options to run Train 291 seven days a week are being investigated to address the impact on Train 293. The Vermonter is not impacted in any way by the track work at Penn Station. Dan Delabruere assured Amtrak has been communicating with VTrans on the matter. Neither entity wants to lose ridership or revenue.

Dave Allaire said the trains into Rutland will be impacted so the effort to find the best option is appreciated.

### *Amtrak Outreach for Vermont Communities*

Fran Berk reviewed the Amtrak station host volunteer program which is a way to reach out to passengers and travelers coming into the community and provide information on area restaurants, taxi service, local shopping, and attractions. The station volunteer program does not replace the station attendant and is more of a community liaison. The

program can have a paid program manager or set up a non-profit organization. Stations with the program in place have seen very positive results. The community takes pride in the station, does fund raising and seeks grants for improvements, holds community events, farmers markets, art shows, concerts in the station space. Tourism and welcome center space can be located in the station. The program manager is the point of contact and arranges the schedule of volunteers who staff the station. First steps are to identify the stations and needs, work out any ownership legalities, establish a leadership committee and volunteers, establish a plan and reward system and supply materials. The Great American Stations website has lots of ideas and information train stations.

Deb Carbin noted station masters/caretakers are considered independent contractors and may be impacted if the rules change. Bill Hollister said station masters are contracted with Amtrak so they are not under state or local ordinances.

Carl Fowler mentioned organizing on-board hosts to offer information to passengers on local amenities. Dan Delabruere said VTrans is talking with Amtrak about improving customer service for people coming to Vermont. Karen Songhurst mentioned the 251 Club downtown program that hopefully will promote towns with train stations.

Lee Khan volunteered to be the station host at the train station in Randolph.

#### *Middlebury Tunnel Update*

Joe Flynn said the environmental assessment for the Middlebury Tunnel project is in the public comment period. The meeting with the Middlebury Selectboard went well. There were questions from the opposition on bridge ownership. The state has exercised its statutory authority for emergency closure of the bridge which will be removed and replaced with a temporary bridge this summer. Work will begin June 15, 2017.

#### *On Time Performance Report for Vermonter*

On-time performance on the Vermonter has been helped by the temporary schedule change to accommodate slow orders (long standing problem). Ten minutes was added north and south bound in Vermont, which has resulted in the train being an average of one to two minutes late into Brattleboro in April compared to 17 minutes late. Slow order minutes have decreased by about 3%. Northbound the Vermonter average being early 3.8 minutes versus 1.3 minutes in March. Dan Delabruere said VTrans is working with NECR on the slow orders and once there is improvement, then the 10 minute add-on to the schedule will be removed. The solution is not ideal, but what was done was best for the customer. It is expected the CSI scores will come up.

Carl Fowler echoed the reduction in delay noting the average delay in Brattleboro he experienced was one minute and departure from Springfield in both directions was on time.

#### *Potential for Future BUDD Rail Diesel Cars*

Lee Khan, Chair and Founder of Vermont Rail Action Network and Champ P3 and establisher of Railview which is in the process of mapping 140,000 miles of rail in the

United States to be a companion to Streetview, briefed the assemblage on the public/private partnership, board members, and key executive officers of Champ P3 that is focused on expanded use of freight and passenger rail for economic development. Part of the concept is to extend the Ethan Allen Express from Rutland to Burlington and beyond to St. Albans, Montpelier, and Rutland with BUDD cars. Twelve BUDD cars have been purchased by Champ P3. Ms. Khan discussed the potential for redevelopment along the lakefront where the rail line is located in Burlington with an innovation station, commercial/office space, multi-family housing units, and restaurants. For freight rail service which is vital to Vermont the property adjacent to the rail needs to be preserved to ensure freight continues to move Vermont goods and services throughout the U.S. Focusing economic development on rail would be a tremendous benefit to Vermont. Ms. Khan reviewed what would be needed to promote economic development with rail including an inland port, 9.98 miles of new track, using existing rights-of-way owned by the state along Interstates I-89, 1-89, and 2-89 to form a rail loop with stations to run the BUDD cars, relocating the railyard and opening the waterfront to other economic development. Estimated project cost is \$150 million. There are many obstacles, but also opportunities. A waiver from positive train control could be secured. The legislature could be asked to limit passenger rail liability insurance. Permitting reform is needed to ease getting economic development projects done around the stations. Incentives and tax credits for rail adjacent properties could be given to encourage businesses to locate there and use rail service. A plan is needed to use rail to attract economic development for both passenger and freight.

Rick Moulton advised reviewing the commuter rail study commissioned by the legislature. Lee Khan noted the study did not follow the vehicle of public/private partnership and is a totally different approach than that of P3. There is a better chance of success by focusing private sector resources on rail properties and public resources on the loop along existing state rights-of-way and existing public properties.

Dave Wulfson stated Vermont Rail Systems is supportive of the concept that was developed by Stearns & Jacobs 30 years ago.

Charlie Baker noted the regional plan is being updated at this time and Regional Planning can model environmental impacts and economic impacts of the proposal by P3.

## **6. Freight and Construction Topics**

### *VTrans FY2018 Rail Budget*

Dan Delabruere reported the projected budget is \$40.9 million and still needs to be passed by the legislature. A map showing where projects covered by the budget are located was reviewed. State funds which are limited are partnered with TIGER V and VII grants for the projects. VTrans is responsible for state owned infrastructure (bridges, crossings, rail). Dan Delabruere reviewed projects in the FY2018 Governor's Budget, noting work being done is needed for the present and the future of rail.

### *TIGER VII Update*

Paul Libby reported there are 27 projects (bridges, crossings) in design and 22 active projects (bridges, crossing, culverts, track). Dan Delabruere added there is progress on many projects. Continuous-welded rail (over 11 miles) will arrive mid-June and be installed by fall so the entire Middlebury corridor will be 115,000 pound capacity. Other TIGER projects include upgrade of crossings, bridges, platforms (Middlebury, Burlington, Vergennes), Burlington side track work, and Vergennes depot fit-out.

David Tillberg, the new VTrans GIS database management technician, was introduced.

Bill Hollister briefed the group on Amtrak ADA station projects. Castleton station will have a new platform, station and parking improvements (work to begin this summer). Windsor station will tie into the tourism center. Claremont, NH station will have a new platform and upgrades to parking and access. The state is working on ADA platform upgrades at the White River Jct. station. The stations at Essex Junction, Brattleboro, and Rutland will be surveyed as the first step in the process for upgrade.

Carl Fowler urged waiving the six-car platform length and height requirements at Vermont stations.

## **7. Other Business**

*Next Meeting*

August 23, 2017

## **8. Adjournment**

**MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charlie Baker, to adjourn the meeting.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting adjourned at 3:35 PM.

*RScy: M.E.Riordan*