

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
August 23, 2017**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Dave Wulfson
Jeff Munger Chris Andreasson
Joann Erenhouse Charlie Moore

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Paul Libby, VTrans
David Tillberg, VTrans
Alan Franklin, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Larry Donna, VTrans
MaryAnne Michaels, VRS
Jack Madden, Erdman Anthony
Larry Lewack, VRAN
Scott Burbank, VHB
Charles Poltenson, NYSDOT
Randy Feeley, G&W
Scott Magnuson, City of Claremont, NH
Deb Carbon, DL Murphy & Assoc.
Mike Smith, FGIK
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

Larry Lewack, VRAN announced the VRAN annual dinner on November 8, 2017 at the Southside Steakhouse in Rutland. A train will be chartered from the north. All are invited for good food, good speakers, and a good time.

3. Approval of February 15, 2017

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Joann Erenhouse, to approve the 2/15/17 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. Staff Changes

Dan Delabruere reported the Rail Section is at full staff for the first time in seven years. The following staff changes were noted:

- Tanya Miller is a crossing inspector/project manager.
- Dave Tillberg is the GIS person replacing Steven Smith.
- Bob Atchinson is now in Property Management working for Mark Fitzgerald.
- Krista Chadwick will continue handling finances for the Rail Section plus financial work for others sections in the Agency of Transportation. Ms. Chadwick will cross-train others in rail finances.
- The Rail Section has been helping the Aviation Section with budgets and projects since the departure of the Aviation Director.

5. Operation Lifesaver Update

Alan Franklin reported the following:

- The orientation for Operation Lifesaver coordinators in Alexandria, Virginia was very informative.
- PSAs will be run nationally on Rail Safety Week and Operation Clear Track.
- Tom Winn with PanAm Rail will replace Glen McNeil on the Operation Lifesaver board.
- Over 3,000 people were reached last year with information on Operation Lifesaver. That number has already been reached this year with more events planned through the end of the year.

Charlie Moore mentioned the mother of a person killed while trespassing on the track is going to the national transportation safety board. Alan Franklin said he is in contact with the national Operation Lifesaver office on the matter.

Larry Lewack, VRAN, announced a Clear Track press event on September 26, 2017.

Dan Delabruere mentioned Charles Hunter is the President of Operation Lifesaver Vermont. The program has made much positive progress over the past year.

6. Passenger Topics

a) Amtrak Ridership & Revenue

Vermonters

Alan Franklin reported ridership on the Vermont for the quarter is up 8.6%. Revenues for the quarter are up 17.4%. For the year ridership is up 7.7% and revenues are up 11.6%. The train service was on pace for record ridership and revenues until the July washout. Even with the washout ridership only decreased 0.1% and revenues were up so demand is strong. The report on delays of the train shows one to two minute delay due to “high passenger count” which is a good problem to have. On/off for the state is up. Bikes on the train showed an increase of 55% and revenues increased 67%. From June 2016 to June 2017 there were 730 bikes on the train and \$11,100 in revenue generated. The bike numbers for July and August have not yet been received plus there are three months of fall coming that should have numbers for bikes.

Dan Delabruere said the revenue from bikes is split on a percentage basis based on the track miles and the percent of the train paid for by the state. The bike pilot program ends in December and the state will have to decide whether to continue it or not. Discussions

will be held with Amtrak to determine what worked or not. The state is tracking how many times someone tried to book a bike on the train and was unable to do so. Right now capacity is fine; there is enough bike space. Bikes can also be boxed and carried onto the train as well.

Ethan Allen Express

Alan Franklin reported there is little fluctuation in ridership and revenue on the Ethan Allen Express. Ridership was down 0.1% and revenues were down 0.9% due to the switch of Train 293 for rail work in Penn Station. The work should be done after Labor Day.

Dan Delabruere said marketing money will be refocused to the Ethan Allen Express to help increase the numbers for the service. Alan Franklin said the Ethan Allen Express is on par with other Empire trains, but year-to-date the Vermonter has the highest percent of ridership and revenue increase of all state supported trains in the country.

b) Middlebury Tunnel

Dan Delabruere reported the temporary bridges are installed in Middlebury, which is a safety improvement until the tunnel sections are installed. Some construction prep work outside the rail right-of-way will be done in 2018 (drainage). In 2019-2020 the major work will be done with cleanup/finish in 2020-2021. Service will begin when construction is complete. The project is complicated, but can be done. The Rail Section is not in charge of the tunnel project, but is involved in the design process.

Carl Fowler asked if work is to be done in summer only. Dan Delabruere said the major shutdown will be in the summertime. Carl Fowler commented another four year delay of having the Ethan Allen Express connect to Burlington is unfortunate and suggested a bus substitute be included on the train schedule to make the connection in that time period. Dave Wulfson said there will be no passenger trains during the 10 week shutdown for tunnel construction. Carl Fowler suggested having a northern Vermont bus connection since there is state supported bus service on the route already. Dan Delabruere said there are no plans to extend the Shires of Vermont bus services to the north at this time.

Joann Erenhouse said the people of Bennington are happy to have bus service to the train station and airport. Ms. Erenhouse asked about vibrations from the trains going through the Middlebury tunnel impacting the foundations of buildings near the track and who is liable. Dan Delabruere said the trains will be moving at 25 mph and the engineers are looking at the impact of vibrations on nearby buildings.

c) On Time Performance Report for Vermonter

Carl Fowler said the southbound Vermonter train is still not on time even with the slower version of the schedule. The northbound train is impacted by construction in Connecticut. The ledge issue is causing a loss of time in five places on the route. NECR will not increase the speed of the train by the ledges. Carl Fowler suggested considering slide detector fences in the rockslide zones in future budgeting/funding. Dan Delabruere said fences and other possible solutions have been discussed with NECR. VTrans has asked

NECR for a mitigation plan. The state has assisted with geo-technical engineering, but it is up to NECR to come up with a fix. Amtrak has been talking to NECR about meeting performance standards in the contract with the state.

Dave Wulfson said Amtrak expansion on the Ethan Allen Express will have to deal with rock ledge issues as well, but there are more derailments in Vermont and the northeast caused by washouts than rock slides, so that needs to be dealt with first. A slide detector system costs millions of dollars for a rock that may fall. There are culverts and bridges needing immediate attention. The priority is not just Amtrak. There is freight to consider as well.

Carl Fowler said Amtrak is not publishing the timetable any longer. The state is urged to publish the timetable for the two trains in Vermont. The schedule should be posted in the stations. Also, the Amtrak website has erroneous information on the Vermont schedule.

Charles Poltenson, NYDOT, said corporate Amtrak marketing and operations divisions do not communicate with each other so schedule changes are not communicated. Vermont is urged to coordinate with Amtrak operations if printing a Vermont schedule.

d) Montreal Update

Dan Delabruere reported the U.S. passed legislation in support of preclearance. The Canadian House of Commons passed the same legislation, but the Senate in Parliament has not yet done this. After the legislation is passed then the details of who does what need to be worked out which will take time. There is lots of support on both sides, but funding still needs resolution. A special train with key decision makers on board was run to Montreal and all agreed there are issues, but all felt the problems could be resolved. Some of the obstacles are track work, swing bridge across the river, track slow orders, signals at the diamond in St. Jean Richelieu, Victoria Bridge locks, and the station in Montreal. Governor Scott supports the project. While waiting for Canada to pass the legislation work on track infrastructure and station improvement issues continue.

Joanna Erenhouse asked the impact if NAFTA is dismantled. Karen Songhurst said NAFTA has no direct bearing on cross border services or funding.

e) BUDD Cars

Charlie Moore announced there are 12 Budd RDC's in Vermont, purchased from the Dallas Area Rapid Transit. The cars are in excellent condition and will be a huge asset to the state. The cars will run on the NECR and VRS lines. More information can be found on the All Earth Rail website.

7. Freight and Construction Topics

a) TIGER VII Update

Paul Libby reported:

- Six mile of continuous-welded rail has been installed between Rutland and Burlington of the 12 miles to be installed and 15,000 new ties have been installed with 600 remaining.

- Safety improvements at five crossings are under design. Construction is slated for 2018.
- Bridge rehab work in Proctor and Pittsford is in the design phase. Construction will be done in 2018.
- Three new station stops (Middlebury, Vergennes, Burlington) with low-level platforms and an onsite lift are under design with construction in 2018. Input from the town of Middlebury on the location of the Middlebury platform is needed. The location needs to be determined by early 2018 in order to meet the construction schedule for the grant.

There was discussion of the Middlebury station. Dan Delabruere said several locations have been discussed (college, former train station, railyard). Middlebury is evaluating the locations. VTrans only owns the railyard. The station will be operated by Middlebury so the town should create the station they want. A multi-use building to serve the town has been suggested.

Carl Fowler asked about parking for the Middlebury station. Dan Delabruere said there is only money for the platform, not parking. Carl Fowler said in an ideal world the station should mutually serve both rail and bus.

Dave Wulfson said the railroad will support a station south of the former rail station, but not north.

Chris Andreasson asked what happens if the station in Middlebury is not built. Dan Delabruere said the grant can be amended to remove the train stop. The grant included three stops and Middlebury pushed for a stop.

Carl Fowler applauded VTrans for moving away from high level platforms. Dan Delabruere said a written waiver from FRA has not yet been received because the location of the station in Middlebury is not known. Paul Libby noted the Vergennes waiver is drafted as a low-level station.

Carl Fowler asked if the train will run in 2020. Dan Delabruere said the TIGER VII schedule is to be done by the end of 2020, but the Middlebury tunnel project is an issue.

Carl Fowler said the train station attendant in Essex Junction, Al Villa, observed that a couple of thousand ties were installed on the Essex to Burlington branch which is Class 1 track. It would not be too expensive to bring the track up to Class 2 (25 mph). Paul Libby said there is conversation with Burlington about a platform location. The bike path and storage of the train overnight are considerations.

8. Other Business/Next Meeting

Next Opportunities for Rail

Dan Delabruere asked the Rail Council to think about next opportunities for Rail. The state owns the rail infrastructure. VTrans can provide information on bridges and culverts and the rail operation in general so the Council has a better understanding. Freight is

important to the economy of Vermont. Goods not transported by train will be transported on the highways which will impact the roads. The Economic Development Section can give an overview of development in the state. A question and answer session can be held at the next Rail Council meeting.

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 16, 2017

9. Adjournment

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Joann Erenhouse, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan