

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
5th FLOOR BOARD ROOM
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
February 26, 2014**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Chris Andreasson
Chris Andreasson Joann Erenhouse
Alan Cook Rick Moulton
Michele Boomhower

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Mladen Gagulic, VTrans
Stephen Smith, VTrans
Lawrence Donna, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Dulcey Mastrangelo, VTrans
Mark Fitzgerald, VTrans
Josh Shultz, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Nick Van Den Berg, VTrans
J. Jeffrey Munger, Senator Sanders Office
Christopher Parker, VRAN
Matt Levin, VCE
Art Whitman, Whitman's Feed Store
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Caroline Mael, Amtrak
Gary Fox, Destination Bellows Falls
Herb Russell, Legislature

1. Call to Order & Introductions

In the absence of Brian Searles and Chris Cole, Dan Delabruere called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM. Introductions were made including Representative Herb Russell, Rail Program right-of-way agent, Dulcey Mastrangelo, and Rail Program civil engineer, Nick Van Den Berg.

2. Public Comments

There were no comments at this time.

3. Approval of Minutes

November 13, 2013

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Chris Andreasson, to approve the 11/13/13 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. MMA Discussion

Dan Delabruere reported Fortress Investment, LLC won the bid for MMA for \$14.25 million and will rename the railroad Central Maine and Quebec Railway US, Inc. (CMQR). Fortress owned Rail America. VTrans is happy with the new owner and expects there will be investment in infrastructure. Hazmat material will move on the east-west corridor. Jeff Munger mentioned DOT-111 tank cars being fixed to be safe. Dan Delabruere said there is voluntary rehab of DOT-111 cars. The FRA issued an emergency order to oil shippers to classify product. Certain classes cannot use DOT-111 cars. Class 1 restricts speeds when hauling hazmat materials.

5. Bridge Management Update

Erin Charbonneau and Mladen Gagulic gave a presentation on the rail bridge management program. The following was noted:

- All owners of bridge infrastructure must follow the FRA bridge management mandate.
- There are 213 bridges owned by the state and 165 are the responsibility of the state.
- All bridges must be load rated by 2017. The standards include 286,000 pound capacity and 23' clearance.
- Rail operators are held to the same standard as the state and must get the rating done.
- All data on the rating form is entered into the state asset and GIS database. An inventory of the superstructure and condition of each line in the state has been done.
- Load rating has been done on 77 bridges and 41 are over 286,000 pound capacity, 36 are less than 286,000 pound capacity. There are still 53 bridges not load rated with 35 scheduled for rating.
- Annual inspection of the 165 bridges is done.
- The state does not have enough money to bring all bridges up to 286,000 pound capacity and must prioritize and take interim action such as slowing the train over the bridge. Rail operators are informed of the bridge load.
- The state will work with operators on bridge maintenance. The railroad indemnifies the state per the lease contract from liability if a bridge fails.
- House and Senate transportation committees are supportive of meeting the bridge load capacity of 286,000 pounds.

6. TIGER V Grant Update

Dan Delabruere reported the grant is moving forward for the nine miles of continuous welded rail from Rutland to Leicester. The final version of the grant agreement is being done. The signed grant agreement must be in place before funds are released.

7. Budget Highlights

Dan Delabruere reviewed projects in the FY2015 Governor's recommended transportation program. A spreadsheet showing project description, cost, and funding was provided to the Rail Council.

8. Legislative Update

No report.

9. Passenger Topics

Amtrak – Ridership & Revenue Report

Bob Atchinson highlighted:

- Ridership on the Vermonter is up 14.5%. Revenues are up 14%.
- Ethan Allen Express ridership is up 4.9% and revenues are up 5.9%.
- On time performance for the Vermonter is 80% for the year. Ethan Allen Express is 78% for the year.

Dan Delabruere mentioned the way services are collaborated with other agencies is changing with a positive impact on ridership and revenues. Also, there are different performance measures in the contract including an incentive payment or a penalty to address on time performance. Chris Andreasson requested future reports on Amtrak include stop locations and boardings to show where ridership is increasing. Dan Delabruere said a report on percentages this year and last year and a three year trend over stops can be provided. Bill Hollister added August is the best month for ridership. Amtrak can provide monthly station ridership and comparison year-to-year.

There was discussion of the \$12 within Vermont fare designed to get more Vermonters on the train. The number of people using the fare has increased, but not the number of riders in Vermont. The amount of the fare or having one fare to all points in Vermont is under discussion.

Carl Fowler suggested VTrans consider restoring the track in Richmond if funds become available because there is no passing track between Waterbury to south side St. Albans which would help avoid train delays. Dan Delabruere assured VTrans is aware of the situation. One performance measure in the contract goes to the host railroad.

New Technology for Amtrak

Bill Hollister reported the following:

- E-ticketing has been a huge success. Reservations are made on the Amtrak website and boarding passes are printed at home or from an I-phone then scanned by the train conductor at the train.
- WiFi service on the train is improving all the time.
- Equipment includes view liner cars. Engines are electrified on the high speed trains.
- Upgrades have been done to the website including improvements to fares and promotions.
- Amtrak's marketing department is working with Vermont Tourism to promote Vermont trips. Escapemaker.com offers weekend getaway trips (three day trips) to areas in New England from the New York/New Jersey metro area. The 'escape' packages include transportation, B&Bs, hotels.

Carl Fowler mentioned picking up passengers from the train or bus at the White River Jct. station. Also, service from Burlington to Albany should complement the Ethan Allen Express. Chris Andreasson mentioned inter-ticketing between bus and train which has been successful in Maine. Dan Delabruere said VTrans is investigating the ticketing. The state now owns the White River Jct. station and is determining the highest and best use. Chris Andreasson will forward a copy of a rendering of the White River Jct. station that shows a bus pull-in area.

Carl Fowler mentioned the public meeting on the Knowledge Corridor and representatives from Massachusetts initially not being aware of service to Greenfield, Brattleboro, and White River Jct. then making an announcement that MBTA converted coaches will be used for additional service to Greenfield. Dan Delabruere said a presentation on the results of the study and the public meeting on the knowledge corridor will be done at the next Rail Council meeting. Karen Songhurst explained the services are in the Massachusetts Governor's administration commuter operations run by the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority between Springfield and Greenfield under FTA jurisdiction.

Joann Erenhouse said the bus from Burlington south to Albany (with stops in between) will not stop at the train station, but will stop at the bus station and airport. Carl Fowler noted there is a bus facility at the Albany Amtrak station. Bill Hollister stated Amtrak does not own the Rensselaer train station. Dan Delabruere said VTrans will look into the situation.

10. Freight Rail Topics

Josh Schultz, Rail Section Project Manager, reviewed the focus for the next construction season to include work on Vermont Railway northern portion, installation of continuous welded rail (7.5 miles), crossings and track projects, bridge and culvert projects. Once all the continuous welded rail is installed there will CWR from Rutland to Burlington. An update on structure and pavement projects that impact crossings and bridges will be provided at the next meeting.

There was mention of returning Ethan Allen Express service to Burlington as a goal once the continuous welded rail is installed. There may be some platform work needed and additional parking. Bus and rail service should be coordinated.

11. Track III Updates

Dan Delabruere reported the intercity passenger rail study Rutland to Bennington portion using the Ethan Allen Express or an extra train or no train is done and will be presented at the next Rail Council meeting. Of the six options that were investigated the most likely is to keep the Ethan Allen Express service and add another train so there are two trains into Rutland each day.

Rep. Herb Russell said the House and Senate transportation committees are sponsoring a resolution of support based on the study to bring attention to the need for infrastructure

improvements and to get buy-in from New York State. Infrastructure alone for the train is \$138 million.

Carl Fowler opined looking at Rutland-Albany service is a flaw of the study. Ridership and revenue must be looked at to justify the investment. The study should investigate using DMU equipment which will allow low platform boarding and that will reduce costs.

12. Other Business/Next Meeting

Montreal Update

The treaty between the US and Canada must be signed before the service can proceed. There was mention of dedicated bus service from St. Albans to Montreal in the interim. Issues include leaving Montreal at a reasonable time of day and having to pay a commission to Amtrak on revenues. Greyhound is running four buses now out of Montreal.

Vermont Rail Action Network Annual Meeting

October 28, 2014 in St. Albans

Next Meeting: April 2, 2014, 2 PM – 4:30 PM (meeting follows the train luncheon).

13. Adjournment

MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Herb Russell, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:29 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan