

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
DAVIS 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM N313  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
April 2, 2014**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Alan Cook Charles Hunter  
Carl Fowler Chris Andreasson  
Joann Erenhouse Dave Allaire  
Michele Boomhower  
MaryAnn Michaels for Dave Wulfson

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Chris Cole, VTrans  
Dan Delabruere, VTrans  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans  
Costa Pappis, VTrans  
Erik Filkorn, VTrans  
Scott Bascom, VTrans  
Lawrence Donna, VTrans  
Karen Songhurst, VTrans  
Josh Shultz, VTrans  
Rick Kilpatrick, L.B. Foster  
Scott Burbank, VHB  
John Weston, HDR  
Ronald O'Blenis, HDR  
John Riegel, W.J. Riegel Rail Solutions  
Joe Barr, Parsens Brinkenhoff  
Lee Khan, VRAN  
J. Jeffrey Munger, Senator Sanders Office  
Christopher Parker, VRAN  
Matt Levin, VCE  
Herb Russell, Legislature

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**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

In the absence of Brian Searles, Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 2:01 PM. Introductions were made.

**2. Public Comments**

There were no comments at this time.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

*February 26, 2014*

**MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Joann Erenhouse, to approve the 2/26/14 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

**4. MMA Report**

Dan Delabruere reported before the sale of MMA is final a certificate of fitness from the Canadian Transportation Agency is needed (this was filed March 24, 2014 and the existing certificate has been extended to June 1<sup>st</sup>) and a safety management system from Transport Canada is needed (this was filed March 10<sup>th</sup> and takes 60 days).

##### **5. Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NNEIRI)**

Scott Bascom and Ron O’Blenis reported:

- The intercity high speed rail study includes Boston-Springfield to New Haven and Boston to Montreal.
- There is a joint MOU with Massachusetts and Vermont and both are working with Connecticut and Canada.
- Two public meetings have been held to date, one in White River Junction and one in Springfield.
- There is coordination with other projects in process.
- The study is looking at ridership potential, necessary incremental infrastructure improvements, and maximizing use of the existing corridor.
- The project covers 470 route miles, 99 miles from Boston to Springfield, 209 miles from Springfield to Montreal, and 62 miles from Springfield to New Haven.
- There are six different owners of track portions along the route.
- Speed of the train in the corridor ranges from 60 mph to over 90 mph.
- The study will develop alternatives that will protect freight and passenger service, variations of speeds, growth potential, and existing projects. The study is looking at travel times between destinations.
- An environmental assessment will likely be done. Environmental impacts include noise, vibrations, air quality, and impacts on natural resources from land use.
- Further information will be posted on the state webpage.

There was mention of doing outreach to other communities with interest in rail in addition to those along the corridor. Information can be provided to regional planning commissions and TACs. Chris Andreasson asked about travel speed in the New York to Montreal corridor. Costa Pappis said it will be faster to come down the high speed corridor unless Amtrak improves the Adirondack. Karen Songhurst added lost traffic when the train stopped going to Montreal is expected to be captured (70,000 passengers) because the riders did not go to the Adirondack. Carl Fowler urged fixing the Burlington to Essex link to complete the network with the high speed line.

##### **6. TIGER 6 Grant Update**

Costa Pappis reported a discretionary grant application is being submitted for 12 miles of continuous welded rail from Rutland to Burlington. Matching funds will come from the state. The track will be Class 3 and eligible for Amtrak service. Stations, sidings, crossings, and signals are still needed for Amtrak service. Late May/early June is when the grants are awarded. It will likely be two or three years before there is passenger rail service on the track if the state receives the grant.

Chris Cole commented positively on the job well done by Costa Pappis and his team with grants which according to the FRA sets the bar for grant applications.

## **7. Legislative Updates**

Chris Cole reported:

- Transportation bill (H.872) is in Senate Appropriations. The House and Senate bills are similar.
- The rail section (Section 6) includes the addition of the project for the future TIGER grant if received.
- Section 6.a includes the railroad bridge load ratings and gives flexibility to address issues that arise on the state owned rail system.
- Section 9 is the cancellation of projects and includes the Rutland rail yard relocation. FHWA will select the “no build” option. VTrans is sending a letter to Rutland Regional Planning for a scoping project with a narrower scope than the relocation project to mitigate highway and rail impacts.
- There is a section pertaining to scrap railroad dealers which allows only legitimate railroad scrap to be accepted.

## **8. Operation Lifesaver Update**

The list of members on the Operation Lifesaver board was provided to the Rail Council. Dan Delabruere stated changes to how the program operates in the future are anticipated. The new slogan is “See Tracks Think Trains”. Operation Lifesaver will be at National Train Day and visiting schools.

Chris Cole mentioned the state provided \$30,000 funding for Operation Lifesaver in the past, but has not been funding the program in recent years. In order to reinstate financial support a work plan detailing the types of outreach, activities, and deliverables to meet the needs of the railroads and state is needed.

## **9. VEM/VTrans/Railroad Response Plan**

Dan Delabruere reported Vermont Emergency Management response plan to rail hazmat accidents is on the right track.

## **10. National Train Day Update**

National Train Day is May 10, 2014. Events in Rutland include speakers beginning at 11:15 AM and static equipment exhibits. Vermont Rail Systems will have trains at 10 AM and 2 PM. The first train will run from Rutland to Florence with 300 people. Tickets are on sale on the website and the train is open to the general public. The second train is for people in the Rutland area only.

## **11. Passenger Topics**

*Amtrak – Ridership, Revenue, & On Time Performance Report*

Bob Atchinson highlighted for February, 2014:

- Ridership on the Vermonter is up 14.9%. Revenues are up 16.9%.
- Ethan Allen Express ridership is up 3.2% and revenues are up 5%.
- On time performance for the Vermonter is 71.4% for the year. Ethan Allen Express is 66.1% for the year.

- VTrans is working with Amtrak to improve on time performance. Amtrak will do a presentation on 2014 delay codes and why delays occurred at the next Rail Council meeting.

Carl Fowler suggested marketing business class seats which provide more space than coach class seats.

## **12. Freight Rail Topics**

### *Update on Bridge Management Program*

No report.

### *Rail Construction Program Update for FY2014 Budget*

Josh Schultz reported there are 20 projects to be contracted out summer 2014 including five crossings, two bridge replacements, and continuous welded rail (7.5 miles this summer and 7.5 miles next summer). Materials are expected to arrive July 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **13. Track III Updates**

Costa Pappis reported the preferred alternative is to maintain the Ethan Allen Express and run a new service on the western corridor (Schenectady-Mechanicville-North Bennington-Manchester-Rutland). The project includes a study, preliminary engineering, and an environmental component. The cost is \$133 million (\$112 capital cost) split equally on the Vermont side and New York side. It is likely a joint application will be made by Vermont and New York. The work has to be done on the New York side in order for the project to proceed.

## **14. Report of State Rail Plan**

Joe Barr with Parsens Brinkenhoff reported the following on the update of the state rail plan:

- The first round of public meetings has been held. Comments mentioned intermodal connections, funding sources, marketing services, adding services, attracting businesses, supporting the economy, service to places in-state versus out-of- state (i.e. commuter type services).
- The first two chapters of the plan (referred to as technical memos) are available for review.
- A ridership modeling methodology is being developed to identify needs, deficiencies, and opportunities.

Goals in the state rail plan were reviewed. Chris Cole suggested that there be a separate environment bullet for both freight and passenger rail and a link to the state comprehensive energy plan and 2008 climate action plan. MaryAnn Michaels suggested the first bullet (goal) be strengthened to highlight Vermont businesses and jobs in the state.

There was discussion of bus to train connections and the difficulty negotiating with Greyhound. Michele Boomhower asked about commuter train service to Montpelier

versus link bus service. Chris Cole stated the financial threshold to go to commuter train service to Montpelier is eight to 10 buses. Present service is five buses.

Costa Pappis mentioned ownership of rail lines. Options include continuing with the status quo, selling to a private operator, doing a hybrid model, doing a revenue generating model. Financial capacity of a potential owner to maintain the facility in a competitive state and deliver quality service are key issues. Economic development and how rail lines help or can help businesses and jobs needs to be emphasized. The rail lines are part of the state's infrastructure and investing tax dollars to make rail work is partnering with economic development.

The presentation on the rail plan will be emailed to the Rail Council. Comments should be submitted to Costa Pappis.

## **15. Other Business/Next Meeting**

### *Awards*

Announcement was made that the American Short Line Safety Award for no FRA reportable injuries last year was presented to CLP, NECR, and SLR.

### *Next Rail Council Meeting & Agenda Items*

July 9, 2014 at 1 PM to 4 PM, National Life Building

#### Agenda:

- Report from Amtrak on 2014 delay codes

## **16. Adjournment**

**MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Herb Russell, to adjourn the meeting.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:18 PM.

*RScty: M.E.Riordan*