

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
DAVIS 5th FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM 1
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
August 26, 2015**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Cole
Carl Fowler Dave Allaire
Joann Erenhouse Jeff Munger
Dave Allaire Charles Hunter
Charlie Moore Herb Russell
Chris Andreasson Rick Moulton
Mary Anne Michaels for Dave Wulfson

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Scott Bascom, VTrans
Larry Donna, VTrans
Jonathan Farmer, VTrans
Stephen Smith, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Erik Filkorn, VTrans
C.B. Hall, Media
Bill Hollister, Amtrak
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Michael Chenette, Stantec
Chris Parker, VRAN
Scott Burbank, VHB
Scott Magnuson, Claremont Ad Hoc Committee
Charlene Lovett, Claremont Ad Hoc Committee
Gary Fox, Destination Bellows Falls & WRJ

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 1 PM and recognized new Rail Council member, Jeff Munger. Introductions were done.

2. Public Comments

- Chris Parker announced the Vermont Rail Action Network meeting on November 5, 2015 at Main Street Landing.
- Dave Allaire mentioned there is a group in Charlotte and in Middlebury expressing concern about rail in their towns. Chris Cole said VTrans is working with the Town of Middlebury on two town highway bridge projects that go over the railroad tracks. The town agreed to pay additional funds for a tunnel, but as yet there are no engineering solutions that satisfy all interests. Construction

- Managed General Contractor (CMGC) is being utilized for the work in Middlebury. The town is in charge, but VTrans is part of the process. Regarding the concern expressed about shipments of fuel by rail, derailments, and fires, tanker cars will be dealt with in the state rail plan. The comment period on the plan has been extended by six weeks to allow further public input. Rick Moulton noted the issues seem to be a NIMBY opposition to rail cars and increased speed of the trains, but having track up to 60 mph is not new to the rail plan. Carl Fowler added there is an ill-informed fear of the speed of rail cars which highlights the need for Operation Lifesaver to do an education push. Also, if someone buys a house by a railroad track then there should not be complaints about trains.
- Scott Bascom announced the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative final round of public meetings on 9/16/15 Boston Park Plaza, 9/17/15 Springfield, and 9/24/15 White River Junction.

3. Approval of Minutes

May 27, 2015

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to approve the 5/27/15 minutes with correction that Norfolk Southern did not purchase the line below Saratoga and the Canadian Pacific D&H connection in Schenectady should be maintained. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

4. NEW RAIL STAFF INTRODUCTIONS

Dan Delabruere reviewed the Rail Program organizational chart noting Kyle Wells and Paul Libby have been hired as civil engineers, Jonathan Farmer is doing crossings and GIS work, and the position for Operation Lifesaver is to be filled. Vacancies in the program continue to be filled to bring the program up to full staffing.

Chris Cole announced former Secretary of Transportation, Brian Searles, has agreed to be a temporary employee in the Rail Program to do high level work garnering international and domestic support for passenger rail service to Montreal and to get legislation passed. Karen Songhurst is serving as staff support and as a liaison.

5. TIGER 7 Grant Update

Dan Delabruere reported the FRA will announce the TIGER 7 grant in October. Vermont has submitted a good application. Chris Cole said the grant is critical to moving forward with the work to Burlington and extending the Ethan Allen Express service. The state is in no position to finance the project.

Mary Anne Michaels and Dave Allaire mentioned the thank you note from a federal deputy secretary that was received for the grant support letters that were submitted.

Carl Fowler spoke in support of the need for the project and improvement to the track. Kudos were given to Vermont Rail Systems for the track improvements in place.

6. WHAT'S NEW IN RAIL GIS

Stephen Smith demonstrated the mobile data collection tool developed with Esri software to compile and analyze information from rail crossing and bridge inspections. Vermont received a special achievement award for using the software for data collection and mobile mapping. Stephen Smith said he gave presentations on the template Vermont developed at the Rail GIS Summit in 2013 & 2014 and Esri UC in 2014. The tool provides quarterly reports for engineering, a data menu of data sets for users, daily asset reports showing conditions on the rail line, FEMA data set and mapping of FEMA sites, and bridge inspection collector to track progress on bridge work. The information is available on the web. GoPro cameras are used to provide video of the rail line and asset inspections (i.e. culverts and such). Other web maps include the rail asset map (crossings, bridges, switches, mile posts) and evaluation sheet overlay map. The online tools are used to capture information for reference by all teams. Similar tools are being developed for the Property Management Program.

Bob Atchinson reported on the infrastructure inventory inspections covering to date 168 miles of track, 333 crossings, 132 switches, and 690 culverts. The information is now digitalized and available online. Next steps include continued inspections on rail lines and automating the process of uploads. Tracings of rail parcels are available online (done with val sheets for each parcel) which allows Property Management to view any encroachments.

Jonathan Farmer reported on inspections of at-grade rail crossings throughout the state using the Esri tools which make the field work very efficient. The data collection has been restructured to meet FRA guidelines. For areas without data service an off-line mode can be used to see data and save the information collected for download to service at a later time. Operation Dashboard summarizes the work done and what is remaining to be done as well as the location of the inspector. The tool also provides an analysis of the information collected. Completed work will be posted on “VTransparency” for the public.

There was mention of backup and security of the system (the servers are duplicated, backed up, and stored off-site), the track grade Burlington to Essex (that level of inspection has not yet been done), and creating an historical rail time capsule. Stephen Smith and his colleagues were recognized as highly valued assets to VTrans for their work on the GIS tools.

7. Passenger Topics

Amtrak Ridership

Bob Atchinson reported ridership on the Vermonter is up significantly as are revenues. Business class is also showing significant increase in ridership and revenues. The numbers for the Ethan Allen Express are not as strong though business class does show a marked increase. On time performance improved on both trains. Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak, noted track work on the Metro North line was impacting the Empire service. The work should be wrapping up. Chris Cole urged informing customers when there are delays due to major projects.

There was discussion of the accuracy of the published train schedule and people missing trains. Massachusetts will remove 25 minutes from the schedule once the route is working. Hopefully this will occur by fall. Dan Delabruere will communicate the final decision by Massachusetts DOT to the Rail Council.

Charles Hunter asked about revenues to the state from Amtrak service. Chris Cole said Vermont receives revenue for people getting off at stations in the state. Costa Pappis mentioned the state rail plan is based on performance of the stations. Bill Hollister said reports are sent to each state on the stations in the state. Overall ridership increases reduce the cost for all the states. Bob Atchinson pointed out the data indicate more riders.

Chris Parker asked about the in-state fare. Dan Delabruere said the fare is now \$18. A report on use of the fare can be provided at the next meeting.

Carl Fowler asked for an update on the bus station in Albany being relocated to the Albany Airport. Dan Delabruere will invite Barb Donovan, Public Transit Program, to the next Rail Council meeting to provide an update.

Herb Russell asked about promotion of the Ethan Allen Express service and possibly partnering with ski resorts to build numbers or holding a regional meeting with local and regional partners to collaborate on how to increase ridership. Erik Filkorn stated promotions are ongoing. Chris Cole said reliability and on time performance are needed on the Ethan Allen Express to increase ridership. Carl Fowler interjected inter-connectivity is needed or people will just drive their cars.

Claremont, NH (CLA)

Charlene Lovett, Claremont Ad Hoc Committee, said the Vermonter stop in Claremont, NH has seen significant growth in ridership. People are traveling to take the train as an alternate form of transportation. It is hoped the station will be a stop on the Northern New England initiative. Ms. Lovett mentioned steps that have been taken or are planned at the train station to maximize the asset of having a train stop in town including signage, local bus service weekdays, evenings, and weekends, car rentals, lighting improvements, benches and potted flowers, parking, and a pavilion. Local stakeholders, the federal delegation, Amtrak, and the media have all been involved. Events are held at the station to help generate riders.

Michele Boomhower will provide an update on the Essex Junction train station along with the presentation from Brian Searles on the Montreal connection.

Bikes on Amtrak Trains

Dan Delabruere reported Amtrak is adding bike racks on Vermont trains, one northbound and one southbound train. There will be one rack per coach. Each rack holds five bikes. The bike rack must be reserved with the ticket purchase and there is a fee. Racks will be available in the fall.

There was discussion of carry-on baggage and fees for oversized or excess bags. Skis are allowed as carry-on per Amtrak rules. Chris Cole mention having a competitive advantage to promote ridership, such as having bike rentals at train stations.

Update on CT Work Window Request

Dan Delabruere reported a letter was sent to Connecticut with a 32 hour work window. Vermonter passengers will travel by bus from Springfield to New Haven, 10 PM Friday to 6 AM Sunday. Passengers will get a notice when they book their ticket.

8. Freight Topics

Bridge Emergency Repairs

Staff reported Bridge 502 was hit by a supply truck and was out of alignment. The emergency repair was finished in eight weeks and the bridge is now at 286,000 pound capacity. Bridge 111 has cracks in the members which will be immediately addressed.

Rail Load Ratings

Thirteen more bridges have been added to the list of bridges to be inspected by VTrans for a total of 178 bridges. To date VTrans has done 51 with 50 left to do and a consultant will do the remaining. Next year VTrans will cover all 178 bridges. Load ratings are done on 95 bridges, 32 are done and not verified, 19 are scheduled, 9 are scheduled with Project Management, and 23 are to be scheduled. Of the 178 bridges, 91 meet 286,000 pound capacity and about 75% are at 263,000 pound capacity.

Carl Fowler asked about repairs at the Newport exchange on the Central Maine & Quebec. Dan Delabruere said some work was done. The wooden trestle to Columbia Forest Products in Newport needs significant repair and is shut down. The railroad requested money from the state because the trestle is in an economic development area. The state, railroad, and Columbia are each contributing \$100,000 for the work so the business can remain open and jobs preserved.

Genesee & Wyoming/NECR Short Line Purchase of Claremont Concord Railroad

Charles Hunter said NECR is waiting for word from the STB on the sale of the Claremont Concord line. NECR will take over operations with NECR crews. Claremont Concord will cease to exist. The west Lebanon lease with New Hampshire DOT will also be assumed by NECR. The railroad is lining up the work to be done on rail in Connecticut and is working to do this with Massachusetts.

Rail Construction Program Updates for FY2014-2015 Budget

Dan Delabruere reported:

- There are 21 projects under construction. Six projects are immediate or emergency work.
- Bridge 219 is ready to be advertised for bid and awarded.
- The Middlebury tunnel is not on the rail project list because it is not considered a rail project.
- Track projects will be finished with the TIGER 5 project next summer.

9. Update on State Rail Plan

Costa Pappis reported the public comment period on the state rail plan has been extended to September 15, 2014. Comments must be in writing or emailed. Themes of the comments are editing/context of information, safety/higher speed/type of freight, operational/crossing arms not working, local emergency response agency information, rail station rehab/economic development opportunity, and commuter rail (St. Albans to Montpelier via Essex Junction and Burlington). The FRA is the review and approval party for the rail plan. The FRA said Vermont's plan is compliant as is now so the state will have a rail plan compliant with PRIIA and FRA requirements.

Carl Fowler stated upgrade of the line from Burlington to Essex Junction should have a higher priority because freight operations will benefit as well as passenger service. Costa Pappis confirmed upgrading the track is a top priority. The tunnel remains a challenge. There was discussion of track and crossing improvements (gates) on the former ABRB-E line (western corridor). The state is gating all grade public crossings on the corridor because Amtrak service at 59 mph will be added to the line.

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Herb Russell, that the Rail Council endorses the state rail plan in its draft form. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

Staff will inform the Rail Council of any material changes to the rail plan based on the comments received.

10. Other Business

Next Meeting

November 18, 2015 at 1 PM.

11. Adjournment

With no further business before the Rail Council and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 4 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan