

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF JUNE 13, 2001  
VTRANS BOARD ROOM  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Brian Searles, Chairman

Dona Bate Ken Enzor

Thomas Altemus John Pennington for Jerry Hebda

Al Perry

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Charlie Miller Sue Compton

Tina Bohl Scott Bascom

Peter Gregory Pete Snyder

Nancy Rice Dick Pembroke

Paul Craven Jim Fitzgerald

Jeff Munger Barry Driscoll

Brad Worthem Greg Maguire

Anthony Otis Tamsen Benjamin

Tom Kennedy Sheri Burch

Edna Martineau Catherine Dimitruk

Bill Rossmassler Bob Paquin

Micque Glitman Bill McCormick

Kevin Chittenden Clay Poitras

Amy Bell Chris Andreasson

## **1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes (April 11, 2001)**

Chairman Searles called the meeting to order at 1:12 p.m. Introductions were made.

### **Approval of Minutes of April 11, 2001**

MOTION By Al Perry, SECOND by Dona Bate, to approve the 4/11/01 minutes with the following corrections:

Page 3 - correct the date of Rail Day to June 28, 2001;

Page 4 - correct the spelling of "Moulton";

Page 6 - note that "STB" stands for "State Transportation Board".

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

## **2. Amtrak/NECR Update (Charlie Miller)**

Charlie Miller reported on the recent suspension of Amtrak Vermonter service due to track conditions on the New England Central Railroad (NECR) line. The geometry car run by Amtrak on the line from Palmer to St. Albans on May 21, 2001, found numerous deficiencies in the track needing correction. Following as much repair as possible by NECR, Amtrak ran their gauge restraint measurement car over the tracks and found other deficiencies. Amtrak passenger service was suspended and connecting bus service was implemented. Since that time, Amtrak has also stopped the connecting bus service for the Amtrak riders and ticket holders were notified. NECR is short of crew and cash to do the repairs in a timely fashion, stated Mr. Miller. Amtrak is willing to lease a ballast car for \$100/month to help get the work done.

Nancy Rice commented the Amtrak website indicates as of June 18, 2001, there will be train service. Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak representative, stated Amtrak will contact people with reservations if the train is not running by the published date.

Chris Andreasson, Vermont Transit bus service, said a proposal was sent from Vermont Transit to Amtrak in Washington, D.C., to operate a through way bus service to Springfield, Massachusetts on ticket revenues.

Dick Pembroke expressed concern for situation. Charlie Miller stated there are 44 outstanding issues on the line and NECR has limited resources. There was discussion of creating confusion with the public regarding a start up date that may not be feasible. Brian Searles asked if Amtrak is experiencing the same situation on rail lines across the country. Kevin Chittenden did not have this information.

Jeff Munger asked what leverage the State has to ensure the track problems do not reoccur. Charlie

Miller stated the troubleshooting done by Amtrak magnifies the fact that the State has Class 3 track. NECR does not agree many of the trouble spots identified by Amtrak need immediate attention, but rather can be addressed during timed maintenance. Mr. Munger asked if there is anything the federal delegation can do to expedite the matter. Brian Searles stated the problems are with NECR. John Pennington commented Amtrak wants Class 3 service for freight and passenger rail, but does not pay the maintenance for Class 3. NECR is trying to maintain for freight service and Amtrak service, too.

Brad Worthem asked if the State has any emergency funding that could be applied to the situation. Brian Searles explained the State is restricted to grant aid to NECR, but can loan money. NECR has not expressed an interest in this option. A question to be answered is what is the responsibility of the State with regard to infrastructure preservation and rail corridor work when the railroad company is moving so much freight and passenger traffic, commented Secretary Searles.

### **3. Amtrak Contract (Susan Compton)**

Susan Compton reported a final draft of the contract is done, but the recent events with Amtrak's stop in service have impacted finishing the work. It is hoped to have a signed contract in place by July 1, 2001.

### **4. LVRR Consortium Update (Charlie Miller)**

Charlie Miller gave a brief history of the consortium, the RFP, responses, recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation and the Legislature. Catherine Dimitruk further explained the consortium (a group made up of regional businesses, planning groups, and state staff) reviewed and ranked the proposals on technical and financial merits. The recommendation from the consortium was for the St. Johnsbury section to go forward with use of the less than a mile length of track as rail as part of the Three Rivers project. The remainder of the corridor should go in the rail bank and used by the Lamoille Valley recreation committee and VAST as a recreation corridor. The Secretary of State concurred with this recommendation, stated Ms. Dimitruk.

The Rail Council was given a copy of the written recommendation. Al Perry asked if the recommendation had been officially accepted and if there are implementation plans. Brian Searles replied one project is underway. The State is working on the rail banking issue and better defining the projects to come out of the Lamoille Valley recreation committee. There are no plans to transfer ownership of the line. Dick Pembroke noted the Joint Fiscal Committee will review the rail proposal.

John Pennington asked about any legal problems with conversion from rail to trails. Brian Searles stated this is always anticipated, but hoped to be avoided. Catherine Dimitruk added the conversion will be a long term process with much opportunity for public input.

Brad Worthem requested the opportunity for Vermont Rail Link to read a prepared statement. Peter Snyder, Vermont Rail Link, read the statement that expressed disappointment the State will abandon rail service on the line when Vermont Rail Link had a proposal that would preserve rail service plus share the corridor with recreation at a cost less than the proposal to convert rail to trails. There would be rail service from Morrisville to Swanton, seasonal rail service from Swanton to Greensborough

Bend, then no service to St. Johnsbury, explained Mr. Snyder. Mr. Snyder stressed the true cost of the recommendation (rail to trails) should be calculated, pointing out that future Vermonters will suffer from the abandonment of rail service on the line by increased auto and truck traffic congestion on the roads. Mr. Snyder asked if the Rail Council had input in the decision, stressing the Council should have been involved in a decision involving 96 miles of rail. Mr. Snyder invited the Rail Council to ride the scenic Adirondack railroad in New York as an example of what the Lamoille Valley line would be like as a rail service.

Catherine Dimitruk rebutted the Consortium's recommendation for rail banking (not abandonment) was accepted by the Agency of Transportation, and the costing was done by a certified engineer. Peter Snyder interjected the process of abandonment has to be followed in order to do rail banking, and the cost to convert to trails should be known before moving forward with the recommendation.

Bill Rossmassler suggested the Joint Fiscal Committee should review the three proposals received in order to have a comprehensive and accurate review. Dick Pembroke stated the House Transportation Committee was concerned with economic impact, and that is why Joint Fiscal became involved. Joint Fiscal is looking at the proposal submitted by Rail Link on validity and substance of the proposal.

Ken Enzor asked about freight traffic. Pete Snyder stated Rail Link looked at freight for the western side of the line, and had interested shippers (there could have been 750 carloads in a year on the line that had not been in use in the past 10 years). Mr. Snyder spoke in support of the St. Johnsbury proposal, but reiterated the abandonment process will have to be followed on the other section of the line.

MOTION by Al Perry, SECOND by Ken Enzor, that the Vermont Rail Council express appreciation to the Consortium and all participants for their work on the Lamoille Valley Rail Corridor project. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

## **5. ABRB Update (Susan Compton/Tina Bohl)**

Tina Bohl reported on the Hoosick section, noting 96% of the ballast is unloaded, re-decking of bridges and resurfacing has begun. The ballast is being unloaded in Manchester. The continuous welded rail will be installed in August. Project agreements are being worked. The work on the Arlington crossing has started.

Al Perry asked about the rail lines in New York being crowded with freight traffic. Charlie Miller stated passenger service yields to freight trains, and this can cause delays for passenger trains. It is less difficult to go up the western side of Vermont, than use the freight lines in New York, especially north of Albany where most of the delays occur.

## **6. VTA Update**

Jim Fitzgerald reported ridership on the Champlain Flyer continues to grow with over 9,000 riders anticipated for the month of June. There have been many special events in which the Champlain Flyer played a part (U.S. Attorney Generals Convention, Vermont Chew Chew, school trips, Lake Champlain

schooner restoration project). The goal for Year 2015 was 10,000 passengers per month, and it appears after only six months of operation there will be nearly 9,000 passengers. Towns are still having an issue with the train whistle and asking about the quiet zone, noted Mr. Fitzgerald.

Brian Searles testified he has witnessed the train on Sundays being full of passengers. Mr. Searles commended Mr. Fitzgerald for his efforts. Thomas Altemus commented thanks should be extended to state marketing departments (conventions, visitors bureau) as they have doubled the number of conventions and festivals held in Vermont in the last two years. The train is a major advantage for conventions.

John Pennington asked about the pre-emption of the line on Maple Street in Burlington. Brian Searles noted cars trying to enter Perkins Pier are causing congestion on the streets. Jim Fitzgerald confirmed he has tried to rectify these matters with Burlington Public Works, but has not been successful to date. Brian Searles will follow up on this matter.

Ken Enzor asked about the parking in Charlotte. Jim Fitzgerald stated an additional 50 parking spaces have been leased from Vermont Country Home Products across Ferry Road, however, this space is only temporary. Additional permanent parking is desperately needed in Charlotte.

Dick Pembroke asked about the South Burlington station. Tina Bohl stated a temporary station at Magic Hat has been approved by South Burlington. Once the building permit is secured and construction in Charlotte is complete, the contractor can begin construction of the South Burlington (temporary) station. Dubois & King Engineers identified 11 sites in South Burlington for a permanent station and South Burlington approved four of these in May. Conceptual plans and detailed analysis for each of the four sites will be done. Public input will also be gathered.

## **7. Other Business**

### Burlington-Essex Project

Public meetings will begin next week. An update on the project will be given to the Rail Council at the next meeting.

### Passenger Rail Service To IBM

There was mention of a meeting held with NECR, IBM, VTrans, and the VTA to discuss possible commuter rail service on the NECR line in Franklin County to IBM in Essex Junction.

### Appointments to the Rail Council

A list of 10 potential candidates for the Rail Council has been forwarded to the Governor for appointment. A list of possible members on the VTA Board of Directors has also been submitted to the Governor for appointment.

## Rail Day 2001

Everyone is invited to Rail Day on June 28, 2001, at Burlington Union Station. The Champlain Flyer will take riders to the Charlotte station for a dedication ceremony.

## Firecracker Express Train on July 3rd

There is a special train (reservations needed) to carry passengers from Charlotte and Shelburne to the waterfront for the fireworks in Burlington on July 3, 2001.

## Franklin County Rail Task Force

Al Perry stated the Franklin County Rail Task Force recommends and supports commuter rail service from Franklin County to Chittenden County, high speed rail service, maintaining rail infrastructure, retaining rail infrastructure in the rail bank, new commercial rail sidings, cooperation between rail service providers and regional businesses.

## Congressional Earmark

Jeff Munger reported the Congressional delegation has a \$2 million earmark request for passenger rail service from St. Albans to Essex Junction.

## Thomas Altemus Resignation

The assemblage thanked Mr. Altemus for his contribution to the Rail Council. Mr. Altemus is returning to Connecticut to be with his family. Mr. Altemus stated the Department of Tourism is rail oriented, and this cooperation is indicated in the marketing plan. The Rail Council has been a good influence.

## **8. Next Meeting Date/Future Agenda**

### **Next Rail Council Meeting**

**July 11, 2001, 1 p.m., 5th Floor Board Room.**

### **Next Agenda Items**

Burlington-Essex Project

Franklin County Rail Task Force Recommendation

## **9. Adjournment**

**MOTION by Ken Enzor, SECOND by Al Perry, to adjourn the meeting. VOTING: unanimous;**

**motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:39 p.m.

List of attendees at the 6/13/01 Vermont Rail Council Meeting:

**NAME AFFILIATION**

1. Scott Bascom VTrans
2. Al Perry Rail Council
3. Dona Bate Rail Council
4. Brian Searles Rail Council
5. Ken Enzor Rail Council
6. John Pennington for Jerry Hebda Rail Council
7. Thomas Altemus Rail Council
8. Charlie Miler Rail Division
9. Brad Worthem Vt. Rail Link, Inc.
10. Paul Craven CCMPO
11. Susan Compton VTrans
12. Tina Bohl VTrans
13. Bill McCormick Vermont Transit
14. Jim Fitzgerald Vermont Transportation Authority
15. Tammy Benjamin VTrans
16. Greg Maguire Vermont Tourism
17. Peter Gregory Two Rivers-Ottauguechee RPC

18. Pete Snyder Vermont Rail Link
19. Dick Pembroke House Transportation Committee
20. Barry Driscoll VTrans
21. Nancy Rice VTrans
22. Tom Kennedy Southern Windsor RPC
23. Catherine Dimitruk Southern Windsor RPC
24. Jeff Munger Sen. Jeffords Office
25. Anthony Otis RRAV
26. Edna Martineau VTrans
27. Chris Andreasson Vermont Transit
28. Bill Rossmassler Lamoille County PC
29. Bob Paquin Sen. Leahy's Office
30. Sheri Burch Senate & House Transportation
31. Micque Glitman VTrans
32. Kevin Chittenden Amtrak
33. Clay Poitras VTrans
34. Amy Bell VTrans

“TO DO” List from 6/13/01 Rail Council Meeting:

1. Pre-emption of the line on Maple Street in Burlington and cars trying to enter Perkins Pier causing congestion on the streets: Brian Searles will follow up on this matter with Burlington Public Works.

