

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
STATE HOUSE PAVILLION
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
April 12, 2006**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sam Lewis, Chairperson

Dave Wulfson William McCormick
Paul Guare Mike Coates
Charlie Moore Rep. Bill Aswad
Rep. Sonny Audette

OTHERS PRESENT: Charlie Miller, VTrans Rail Operations Section
Dick Hosking, VTrans Rail Operations Section
Anthony Otis, Railroad Association of Vermont
Matt Levin, Vermonters for a Clean Environment
Nancy Rice, VTrans Rail Operations Section
J. Jeff Munger, Sen. Jeffords Office
Mel Adams, VTrans Policy and Planning
Chris Andreasson, Vermont Transit
Charles Hunter, NECR
George Betke, Farmrail System, Inc.
Mary Anne Michaels, Vermont Railway
Leslie Blade, Fitzgerald & Holliday
Jill Barrett, Fitzgerald & Holliday
Mike Smith
Paul Craven
Ron O'Blenis

1. Call to Order & Approval of Minutes

Sam Lewis called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. Introductions were done.

Approval of Minutes of March 1, 2006

Postponed due to lack of quorum.

2. State Rail Plan Update

Ron O'Blenis, consultant, explained the rationale for integrating into one plan rail policy and the mission and goals for rail. A copy of the schedule for completion of the document was provided to the Rail Council. A draft copy of the Rail Policy Plan was also given to the Council. It was noted performance goals presented in the Rail Plan are in parallel to the policy plans of the other modes of transportation (highway, air, public transit). The performance measures look at the overall health of the system with regard to infrastructure of the rail lines as well as 286,000 pound rail and clearance initiatives. The matrix of performance measures range from existing conditions to targets. Mr. O'Blenis

requested input from the Rail Council to affirm the priorities as shown. Dave Wulfson suggested adding 20'8" clearance for the Green Mountain Railroad as a priority.

Mike Coates asked how the system's effectiveness is measured (i.e. how it can be determined whether more rail traffic is the result of the economy or an actual increase in business). Mr. O'Brien explained the assumption was made that additional freight on rail means the freight is not on the highway (more freight on rail means less on the highway). An increase in freight transit by rail is sought. Dave Wulfson asked if there are projections on truck traffic increases. Jeff Munger noted nationally the projection is a 20% increase. The situation in Vermont appears to be the railroad is transporting commodities for the long haul, but trucks are carrying the loads on the short haul. Mike Coates commented the environmental impact is an important component in making the rail system viable. Chris Andreasson suggested breaking out the through traffic in the state. There is freight traffic that bypasses Vermont railroads and travels on other railroads because the state does not have 286,000 rail. The gain for the state with 286,000 rail needs to be determined. Dick Hosking said this data can be extrapolated by converting carloads to ton miles and subtracting that amount from highway ton miles to arrive at the rail traffic. Rep. Audette commented that 90% of the containers are empty on their way back to their start points and these containers could be transported by rail. Sam Lewis pointed out there are levels of performance measures so a breakdown identifying the kinds of ton miles (rail, highway, air) and 'bridge' traffic would be helpful to system users.

Dave Wulfson stated the railroad should provide input on the performance measures of crossings. Typically crossings are driven by highway ratings, not the needs of the railroad. There are many crossings on the list as "signalized crossings" which were high on the list in the 70s, but now the crossings are 35 years old and not up to today's technology. These crossings are not on the list for an upgrade. Sam Lewis agreed there needs to be a discussion of methodology so the crossings are included on the list. Charlie Miller stated there are over 600 crossings in the state. The plan shows three will be repaired each year. The number is in consideration of those that need to be repaired, not the gross number of crossings.

Charlie Moore observed a definition of "transload" needs to be included as well as a reason why the definition is in the statistics. "Transload" was defined as freight transported into the state by rail and within the state by truck.

Charlie Miller stressed help will be needed from the railroad to effectively and accurately compile data for the performance measures. Charles Hunter questioned how proprietary information from each railroad will be compiled. Charlie Moore assured New England Central Railroad will provide the state with the necessary information and work with Vermont Railway to collectively provide what is needed. Types of trips need to be differentiated, such as special movement in-state versus product coming into the state. Matt Levin clarified adding capacity does not necessarily mean taking a truck off the road, but rather that a truck is not being added onto the highway.

Ron O'Blenis continued review of the policy plan, noting the project scoring and ranking should answer the question of the benefit to the taxpayer/state overall for their investment in rail.

Dave Wulfson mentioned the concern of limiting the use of railroad land (adjacent to railroad tracks). The goal of making this land available for use needs to be included. It was suggested "and adjacent properties" could be appended to 'Goal L'. Anthony Otis noted once the current legislative session adjourns, the interested parties will convene to discuss preserving adjacent rail properties.

Matt Levin announced there will be public meetings on the Rail Policy Plan. The Rail Division will post notices. Comments on the plan should be forwarded to Charlie Miller, VTrans Rail Operations Section.

3. 2005 Annual Report to Governor – Signatures Needed

Postponed.

4. Amtrak Update

Charlie Miller reviewed ridership numbers on the Ethan Allen Express and Vermonter. Data from White River Junction and St. Albans are not yet received. Information on the route from Saratoga to Rutland is also needed. Charlie Miller and Nancy Rice will draft reports showing month and year-to-date ridership as well as segmented on-time performance for Amtrak. A copy of the Garahan Report was given to the Rail Council for review. The report reviewed what is existing today (current issues) and options to resolve issues. Forward comments and questions on the report by mid-May to Nancy Rice, VTrans Rail Section. Pat Garahan will attend the next Rail Council meeting (June).

Charlie Moore commented New England Central Railroad wants to be part of the solution with Amtrak. Mr. Moore felt the alternatives and savings with passenger rail service can be demonstrated by using a different delivery system. Sam Lewis agreed scenarios such as fewer cars on trains, eliminating food service, using cab cars rather than engines, using DMU cars, modifying existing service need to be discussed at length. Mike Coates suggested considering a new schedule matrix that dovetails with other systems north and south. It was noted Amtrak is a willing partner in trying to resolve issues with the service.

5. Other Business

Legislative Update

Sam Lewis reported the Senate passed the transportation bill (their version which has no increase in the fuel tax, but supports an increase in motor vehicle fees). The House wants to increase fuel taxes and motor vehicle fees. Rep. Audette noted the House bill gives money back to the local communities to help with the local tax rate. Mike Coates spoke against cutting rail projects. Rep. Audette stated the House did not change the rail budget except to decrease the Bellows Falls appropriation in the FY06 budget by \$200,000 due to the federal earmark of approximately \$2 million which requires a \$500,000 state

match. The Senate did not take the same action. Projects were removed in Highway, Bridge, and Aviation.

Project Update

Dick Hosking reported the Bellows Falls tunnel project is on target. Work continues on the design of the tunnel. There has been outstanding cooperation between the railroad, state, town, federal highway, and consultants. Work is being done on a process to help streamline similar projects. In Vergennes, welded rail will be put in from Vergennes to Charlotte on the Vermont Railway line. Rail crossings, resurfacing, and bridge work is being done on the Green Mountain Railroad line. In FY07, 286,000 pound rail and bridges will be done on the Vermont Railway lines.

Guarantee of RIF Loan for Middlebury Rail Spur

Sam Lewis reported any RIF loans will have an impact on the state's debt statement. A proposal from the Gateway Rural Improvement Program (GRIP) that included federal money and a RIF loan is being reviewed. The Middlebury rail spur EIS is underway.

VTA Study

Staff will distribute a copy of the VTA study to the Rail Council. The study group will meet again in August, 2006. An annual report to the Legislature on rail activity is due by January, 2007.

Vegetation Management

An integrated vegetation management plan is nearly complete so there will be a consistent process in place for use on rail lines.

6. Next Meeting/Agenda

Next Meeting: June 8, 2006, National Life Building, Montpelier, 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Agenda Items:

- Amtrak Update (segmented report re: on-time performance and data on the route from Saratoga to Rutland and White River Junction to St. Albans)
- 2005 Annual Report to Governor (need signatures)
- Pat Garahan Passenger Rail Report
- Approve minutes from 3/1/06 and 4/12/06 meetings

7. Adjournment

MOTION by Mike Coates, SECOND by Dave Wulfson, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by M.Riordan, Recording Secretary.

“TO DO” List from 4/12/06 Rail Council Meeting:

1. Comments on the Rail Policy Plan should be forwarded to Charlie Miller, VTrans Rail Operations Section.
2. Charlie Miller and Nancy Rice will draft reports showing month and year-to-date ridership as well as segmented on-time performance for Amtrak.
3. Comments on the Garahan Report should be forwarded to Nancy Rice, VTrans Rail Operations Section, no later than mid-May.

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