

Approved January 9, 2007

At the January 9, 2007 Rail Advisory Board meeting, a motion to accept the minutes of the November 9, 2006 meeting was made by Hunter Watson, seconded by Dwight Farmer and unanimously approved by the Rail Advisory Board members.

Minutes

Rail Advisory Board Meeting Forum Room Science Museum of Virginia 2500 W. Broad Street Richmond VA November 9, 2006

Members present:

Sharon Bulova, Chairman
Dwight Farmer

Trenton Crewe
Wiley Mitchell, Jr.

Richard L. Beadles
Peter J. Shudtz

Members absent:

Bruno Maestri

Jack Quinn

The meeting was called to order at 10:12 a.m. by Ms. Sharon Bulova, Chairman.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

A motion to accept the draft agenda of the November 9, 2006 meeting was made by Peter Shudtz and seconded by Wiley Mitchell. Richard Beadles moved for an amendment to the agenda to include a discussion of the I-95 Corridor, emphasizing that this corridor should be given top priority. Wiley Mitchell felt it was imperative to discuss a recommendation to the General Assembly that the 30% matching funds required for project funding are inadequate for public projects. He also felt that discussion should center on proposed recommendations to the 2007 General Assembly in regards to the Board's ability to meet the identified needs of the public sector. Chairman Bulova recommended that these topics be included as part of the legislative section of the meeting agenda. Accordingly, these agenda items were incorporated and the amended agenda was unanimously approved.

Adoption of Minutes

A motion to accept the draft minutes of the September 14, 2006 meeting was made by Richard Beadles and seconded by Wiley Mitchell. A correction to Page 4 Paragraph 4 of the minutes was noted by Wiley Mitchell. This was so noted by the Board and the draft minutes, as corrected, were unanimously approved.

Chairman Bulova noted the absence of Bruno Maestri from the meeting. She also announced that Mr. Hunter Watson will no longer be serving with the Rail Advisory

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Board. She expressed appreciation for Mr. Watson's service as a member of the Board. In his place will be Mr. James Keen. Chairman Bulova stated that Mr. Keen would not be able to attend the meeting. He was soon to be sworn in and he should attend the next Board meeting.

Public Comments

There were no public comments received by e-mail.

Nancy Finch and Lois Walker of Virginians for High Speed Rail signed up for public comment prior to the meeting.

Nancy Finch presented a letter from Thomas G. Tingle, AIA, and Immediate Past President for Virginians for High Speed Rail. In this letter Mr. Tingle stated that there is an overall rail crisis in Virginia. To emphasize this point, Mr. Tingle cited the recent consideration by Amtrak to significantly reduce rail service prior to the Jamestown 2007 celebration. This reduction was deferred for the time being due to the combined efforts of "...passenger rail advocates, the DRPT, Rep. Jo Ann Davis of the 1st District and others." Mr. Tingle went on to state that while other states are expanding rail service, Virginia is in a struggle to maintain the status quo. With this in mind, he closed with asking that the Board consider a new course in the operation of the Rail Enhancement Fund that would steer monies towards passenger service. He also indicated a desire to attend the next Board meeting to discuss passenger rail improvements.

Lois Walker of Virginians for High Speed Rail commented on the potential loss of Amtrak service to Richmond's Main Street Station. She stated that Main Street Station could be a viable economic tool for the region. Ms. Walker urged that the General Assembly be given input from the Rail Advisory Board on this matter. Chairman Bulova asked that the issue be addressed in the Legislative Section of the Agenda. Richard Beadles commented that he had both comments and suggestions regarding this issue.

Amtrak Presentation

Thomas Schmidt, Assistant Vice President of Transportation for Amtrak, gave an informational overview of on-time performance along with suggestions for performance enhancement in the Commonwealth.

Amtrak services fall into four categories, including the following:

1. Corridor Service which includes Newport News/Richmond to Boston
2. Short Haul Service, which includes The Palmetto and The Carolinian with no sleeper cars, and minimum food service
3. Long Haul Service, i.e. The Silver Service and The Auto Train, which provide sleeper service and full dining service
4. Commuter Service (VRE)

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He also informed the Board that Amtrak owns and operates no facilities in Virginia except for the stations. The host railroads include CSXT, Norfolk Southern and Buckingham Branch RR (on the former CSXT line).

The presentation went on to compare On Time Performance (OTP) between the various categories. Out of 46 states surveyed, Virginia was ranked in the top third in performance. Mr. Schmidt went on to cite some hindrances to OTP. These include the following:

- Track capacity, which includes consideration of freight train interference
- Infrastructure, which includes slow orders by dispatchers, equipment failure, repairs and breakdown
- Passenger issues such as physically challenged passengers, passengers who become ill while on board, and passenger/luggage disembarkation
- Other challenges to OTP include inclement weather, accidents, issues of security, and third party issues

Mr. Schmidt concluded by saying that focus is needed on the RF&P Corridor with emphasis on train volume and delay experience. He stated that with a coordinated effort, various interests can be accommodated including intercity passengers, commuters, freight OTP and reliability and a host of railroad issues. Mr. Schmidt made a pledge to do so in conjunction with the Board.

When questioned by Richard Beadles as to how many dollars are now available for infrastructural improvement, Mr. Schmidt responded that there is \$4 million in the Host Railroad Investment Fund. Mr. Schmidt continued to state that movement is underway to increase the fund. At the present time, no matching funds have been identified.

The real challenge at present is OTP, Mr. Schmidt stated. Trains are 35-40 minutes late. Multiple issues contribute to this problem, and considerable work must be undertaken in all corridors. Any train 11 or more minutes late is considered a failure in regards to OTP. Mr. Schmidt then stated that this performance is still far superior to the airline industry.

Wiley Mitchell asked for further explanation as to the number of causes hindering OTP. Mr. Schmidt began by stating that there are capacity issues where there are more trains than track. There are also delays with food and supplies being delivered onto trains and luggage being taken off. Dispatching orders may result in trains waiting on other trains at various junctions, and equipment failure is an ongoing problem.

When asked by Wiley Mitchell if a distinction is made between various areas in regards to track capacity, Mr. Schmidt replied that most delays are in the I-95 Corridor. This includes Richmond, Quantico and the Washington Metro Area. Mr. Schmidt also cited defective equipment, total breakdowns in equipment, engine trouble, passenger misinformation and accidents that include striking trespassers, which can bring about hours of delay or the complete termination of a train's run.

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When asked by Peter Shutz if he felt that railroad enhancements were a viable idea for the I-95 Corridor, Mr. Schmidt replied in the affirmative and felt that the market stands to grow.

Dwight Farmer asked if delays are so frequent that they can be built into the schedules. Mr. Schmidt replied that lengthening the schedule does not appeal to riders. The problem is still being addressed. Chairman Bulova then stated that John Gibson of CSX had suggested at the last meeting that time delays should be built into the schedule. Mr. Schmidt said that he was in agreement as to the suggestion being realistic. Transit time is important, and this is an ongoing issue being addressed.

Wiley Mitchell then asked Mr. Schmidt which issue is the greater priority, infrastructure or track capacity. Mr. Schmidt answered that realistically he felt that it was more of an issue of capacity than infrastructure. Mr. Mitchell stated that up until now no proposal has been received from Amtrak. Mr. Mitchell felt that the Board would like to know what is critical to Amtrak. Mr. Schmidt responded that in the future he plans to provide more insight into Amtrak's perspective on the situation. He would like to have more participation in these discussions, and again pledged his support.

Virginia Railway Express Presentation

This presentation, given by Dale Zehner, Chief Executive Officer of VRE, included information regarding VRE OTP and included suggestions to achieve results and meet expectations in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Zehner opened by saying that VRE has experienced double digit growth annually for over five years. Parking lots were over 100% full with a growing ridership. Ridership is down today due to:

- Low OTP
- Rising fares
- Cutbacks in service

Challenges to OTP through the January-October 2006 period include intense heat, along with equipment failures.

If one train is late leaving, the one behind will also be late. The problem is getting out on time at the outset. Ten or fifteen minutes cannot be made up. Passenger offload time must also be addressed. For instance, if an 8-car train pulls into a 6-car station, passengers are forced to walk through the train to cars which are accommodated by the station, thereby increasing delay time.

Other reasons for delays include the following:

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- Rain: this past June was the wettest on record and cancelled one day of service. There were flood restrictions, washouts and fallen trees. 66% of trains were delayed due to four days of flood restrictions.
- Heat: 61% of Fredericksburg trains were delayed due to heat restrictions between June 15 and July 31, 2006.
- Dispatching: There was a loss of experienced dispatchers due to retirement.
- Signal/Switches/Ties: Disruptions related to tie and switch replacement programs, in addition to maintenance problems.

Steps have been taken to respond to these issues. Meetings have been held with executives of CSX and NS who have committed to improving VRE operations. Changes are underway for dispatching. One change being considered is the movement of all dispatching to Baltimore. Customer service is being improved by sending written reports or making phone calls on all major outages to notify passengers of delays in advance. Other projects underway include completion of the tie program on CSX, completion of the Quantico Bridge and a third track and storage track at L'Enfant.

OTP for October 2006 was increased in the Fredericksburg and Manassas regions with an overall improvement in the system of 89.3% in October, as opposed to 53.5% in July. Only ten out of sixty-five delays were over 30 minutes. The number of delays was down from 287 in July to 65 in October. A VRE advertising campaign was launched on October 9th and a public forum was held on October 19th.

Wiley Mitchell asked about the extension of VRE service to Haymarket. Mr. Zehner replied that the study initiative through the Rail Enhancement Fund is moving forward.

Richard Beadles asked if any progress had been made to extend service as far as Spotsylvania. Mr. Zehner responded that the Spotsylvania County Board did not support this option.

Chairman Bulova remarked that it was helpful to have a presentation focusing on issues to address and improvements that are being made.

Rail Enhancement Fund Current Status and Way Forward

This presentation was given by Matthew Tucker, Director of DRPT. It included information about the current status of REF agreements and the latest draft of the updated REF Application Procedures document, including stakeholder survey results and public comment information.

Mr. Tucker began by mentioning that out of 13 projects approved by RAB/CTB in December 2005, 12 are managed by DRPT. The Median Rail Project is being managed by the Virginia Port Authority. Of the approved REF projects, one agreement has been signed, eight are in negotiations with the grantee, two are in final internal review and two will not advance. The latter two are the Charlottesville Connecting Track Upgrade and the Richmond Port Passenger/Freight Improvements Study. All other projects have

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projected completion dates ranging from summer 2007 to summer 2008, consistent with the original schedules submitted with project applications.

Mr. Tucker then moved into a presentation of the latest draft REF Application Procedures document. The current timeline for implementation is as follows:

- November: the first draft presented at the meeting today along with public comments received on the current document
- Nov-Dec: 30 day public comment period.
- January: Final draft approval at January RAB meeting
- March: CTB to approve final application procedures at their March action meeting
- April: Open application process to begin.

The key change from the previous REF Application Procedures document is the incorporation of an open application period, where projects may be considered and advanced more frequently than at one specific time per year. A more detailed project review process and public benefit analysis is under development. Applications could be submitted as early as April 2007, following CTB adoption of the final document at its March meeting.

The next part of the presentation dealt with the DRPT's Strategic Rail Investment Plan. The goals listed for the plan include the following:

- Set priorities for state investments in rail, which will include identifying priority rail corridors and chokepoints for investment
- Establishing a reference to help guide REF and other DRPT rail fund investments
- Focusing on completing high impact improvements first to make the most of limited funding

Key elements which will bring about the realization of these goals include:

- Updating information from, and expanding upon, the Virginia State Rail Plan of 2004
- Including data from other rail initiatives, such as the Statewide Multimodal Freight Study and passenger rail studies
- Enhancing the public benefit analysis through the weighing of projects, based on a point system and the REF policy goal requirements
- Incorporating best practices established by VA transportation programs such as Transportation Enhancement

The current schedule for the Strategic Rail Investment Plan is as follows:

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- Initiate development in fall 2006
- Review of draft document in summer 2007
- Implementation in fall 2007

In conclusion, Mr. Tucker stated that DRPT is undergoing a thorough assessment of agency functions and performance as part of the agency's development of a comprehensive, long-term strategic approach to rail and transit in Virginia.

Questions from the Board were then addressed by Kevin Page, Director of Rail Transportation for DRPT. Richard Beadles asked about the timetable for input from Board members on the new draft Procedures document. Mr. Beadles was informed that Board comments are welcome at any time as part of the public comment process. At the January meeting, the Board will see the final draft of the new Applications Procedures document.

Brief discussion ensued as to the full authority of the Board under the Code of Virginia. Richard Beadles noted that the Board is positioned to react to suggested projects, but that it is not well positioned to solicit projects. Mr. Beadles continued that, under the Code of Virginia, DRPT is charged with preserving, protecting, planning and developing the rail transportation system throughout the state. He went on to say that perhaps DRPT's funding and staffing levels may or may not be consistent with this mandate.

The meeting adjourned for lunch at 12:00 p.m.

The meeting was reconvened at 12:45 p.m. by Chairman Bulova.

With permission from the Chairman, Kevin Page honored Mr. Ranjeet Rathore for his service to DRPT and congratulated him on his upcoming retirement. Mr. Page gave a brief personal and work history of Mr. Rathore with emphasis on his 34 years of loyal service to the Commonwealth. Mr. Rathore was wished well by the entire Board.

Update on Roanoke Region Intermodal Facility Site Search

This was an update by Kevin Page, Director of Rail Transportation, on DRPT's efforts to identify and evaluate the most suited site for the investment of public funds.

The REF Project Site Evaluation and Selection Plan was reviewed. Key elements include the following:

- DRPT's notification to Norfolk Southern (NS) of the general parameters for a qualified site.
- The solicitation of site proposals from NS and localities in the geographic area. There was a two-week offering period from the date of the letter of notification.
- The site evaluation process will be put into place after the receipt of all proposals.

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The site evaluation process will require a 45-day review period. This will involve working with NS, The Virginia Department of Transportation and the Virginia Port Authority. Public comment is also to be taken into consideration during this period. Responses to public comment will be issued upon completion of the review process.

Upon completion of these steps, DRPT and NS would seek to agree on the proposed site. DRPT would then announce the approval of the site, and at that point DRPT would work with NS on plans to proceed with final design and construction. If no agreement can be reached between DRPT and NS on a site location, Rail Enhancement funding will not be applied to the site.

Proposed Schedule of Meetings for 2007

The proposed schedule of meetings for 2007 was approved after the decision to hold the January meeting on January 11, 2007. It was noted by Chairman Bulova that the meetings are now going to be held on a quarterly, rather than bi-monthly, basis. She commented that this would ensure more productive and in-depth discussions at each meeting, and help reduce the demands on members who travel great distances to attend.

Informational Items for the Board

Kevin Page briefed the Board Members regarding informational items at the back of their packets. Afterwards, Mr. Page asked Dr. Mary Lynn Tischer, Virginia's representative on the I-95 Corridor Coalition to come and forward to speak about the federal Corridors of the Future Program. Dr. Tischer explained that the Corridor Coalition is made up of representatives of states from Florida to Maine, with an inclusion of two associates in Canada. The Corridor Coalition has identified two major projects as part of their Corridors of the Future program submission. They include the following:

- Attention to bottlenecks and associated improvements
- Enhancing communication systems along the entire corridor

Board members raised questions related to the criteria for the selection of Virginia corridors submitted for this program. Discussion ensued as to the need to inform the US Department of Transportation of the Board's belief in the importance of investment in the I-95 Corridor.

Richard Beadles indicated that it is important that problems along the corridor be identified by Virginia as they had been by Maryland and North Carolina. Wiley Mitchell said that a lack of identification indicated that Virginia did not take this as seriously as Maryland or North Carolina.

Chairman Bulova suggested that a follow-up letter be submitted with an emphasis on the Board's belief that the challenges facing the I-95 corridor are indeed of the highest priority. She was assured by Dr. Tischer that this was feasible. Peter Shudtz agreed,

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citing the need to clarify the Board's emphasis on support for I-95 improvements. Also discussed was a need for further investigation into the authority of the Board to identify rail funding needs. Dwight Farmer then commented that I-64 has no projected funding sources for the next 20 years. Along with this, CSX and NS lines are still struggling for rail improvements. These two corridors are the main connections to the second largest Port on the East Coast. These corridors must also be addressed.

A discussion of service at Main Street Station then ensued. While service has not been discontinued, there is concern over the future security of current service. The Board is aware of the Amtrak Strategic Plan and will do its best to keep open the lines of communication regarding this subject.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:47 PM.