



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Virginia Passenger Rail Authority Board

Jennifer L. Mitchell
Chairperson

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DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority Monday, March 22, 2021 - 10:00 am Electronic Board Meeting

In light of the continuing state of emergency declared by Governor Northam, where it is impracticable or unsafe to assemble a quorum in a single location, and as allowed by the General Assembly during the continuing state of emergency, this meeting to take action to discuss or transact the business statutorily required or necessary to continue operation, the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority held an electronic meeting on March 22, 2021.

All board members participated remotely using a GotoMeeting platform. Members of the public were able to witness the meeting online via live-streaming and were provided with the opportunity to provide public comment telephonically at the outset of the meeting using a dial in number provided in the online meeting public notice. The online internet public notice for the meeting noted that this meeting would be conducted using an electronic process due to the COVID-19 state of emergency and as a precaution to reduce the risk and spread of the novel coronavirus. The online meeting public notice also furnished the Agenda and Board materials as well as information regarding the availability of online live-streaming of the meeting at the noted link. Online viewers were furnished a telephone number to call to notify staff of any interruption of the live streaming of the meeting in accordance with Item 4-0.01.g. of Chapter 1289 and Section 2.2- 3708.2 of the Code of Virginia.

The audio and meeting documents and presentation materials are on the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's website, <http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/vpra/board-meetings/>

MEMBERS PRESENT

Sharon Bulova, Deborah Bulter Painter, Victor Cardwell, Patricia Doersch, Jay Fiset, Roderick Hall, Wick Moorman, Paul Nichols, Hossein Sadid, James Spore, Mariia Zimmerman, Rich Dalton (Ex-Officio), Bruno Maestri (Ex-Officio), and Jennifer Mitchell (Chair).

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF RAIL AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION STAFF PRESENT

Linda Balderson, Bridget Davis, Suzanne Ellison, Haley Glynn, Jeremy Latimer, Michael McLaughlin, Steve Pittard, Randy Selleck, Emily Stock, and Andrew Wright.

GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT

James Head (Hunton), Corey Hill (Kimley-Horn), Nathan Macek (WSP) and Lisa Wright (Office of the Attorney General).

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The Chair, Jennifer Mitchell, presided and called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the procedures and instructions for the electronic meeting, including all votes will be conducted by roll call vote. The following statement was made:

"On November 19th, Governor Ralph Northam signed House Bill 5005, Virginia's revised biennial budget, which includes new language for meeting electronically. In light of the continuing state of emergency declared by Governor Northam, we are conducting this meeting in a remote setting, keeping safety top of mind and mitigating the impacts and spread of COVID-19."

Executive Assistant Bridget Davis then called the roll and confirmed a quorum was present.

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 22, 2021 MEETING

Ms. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. Moorman to approve the minutes of the March 22, 2021 meeting. The vote was conducted by a roll call vote and the motion passed.

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PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Mitchell opened the meeting up for public comment.

Ian Ollis, FAMPO, Fredericksburg, VA-

Mr. Ollis stated that he looks forward to future board meetings and hopes to encourage upgrades, improvement and additional train service for the Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania and Stafford community.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

The following item was presented for information:

1. Board Chair Update

Presented by: Jennifer Mitchell, Chair

Chair Mitchell provided the following updates:

- **Transforming Rail in Virginia:** Secretary Valentine testified on March 10 at the US House Rail Subcommittee regarding the \$3.7 billion Transforming Rail in Virginia program. The hearing and the Secretary's testimony centered on the economic and environmental benefits of rail investments in Virginia and across the nation. Specifically she reinforced Virginia's support for HR 2, the Moving Forward Act, and its new Passenger Rail Improvement, Modernization, and Expansion (PRIME) grants.
- **2021 General Assembly:** The Budget Conference Report provided one-time funding for the following DRPT rail programs in the 2021 Transportation Initiative:
 - \$83.5M: extend intercity passenger rail service between Roanoke-New River Valley and increase frequency of intercity passenger rail along the I-81/Route 29 corridor
 - \$83.5M: improve commuter rail service on the VRE Manassas Line
 - The Conference Report directs the Secretary of Transportation to conduct a cost assessment of extending passenger rail to Bristol and servicing a rail station in Bedford.
 - HB1893 and SB1212 introduced by Delegate Hurst and Senator Edwards to create a New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Authority have passed their respective houses and signed by respective house president and speaker. The bills is pending the Governor's signature.
- **VPRA:** The Transforming Rail in Virginia interim website is live and the full site is expected to debut in April.
- **Rail Industry Day:** DRPT and VRE held a joint Rail Industry Day on February 24 to inform the contracting community of the various upcoming procurements associated with the Transforming Rail in Virginia capital program. Approximately 350 people were in attendance.
- **Federal Stimulus, American Rescue Plan:** The newest round of federal stimulus in response to the pandemic has allocated \$1.7B total to Amtrak, with \$175M going to all state sponsored services. Official figures for Virginia are not yet available, but we expect to receive \$12M - \$13M.
- Amtrak is making the following service changes, made possible by the federal stimulus support:
 - **Long Distance Service Restoration:** Amtrak is fully restoring reduced Long Distance service to daily service between May 24 and June 7. The restoration includes all 12 routes that had day-of-week service reductions due to the pandemic. Long distance routes Crescent, Palmetto, Silver Meteor, and Silver Star which pass through Virginia are scheduled to be restored on June 7.
 - **Reinstate Furloughed Employees:** Amtrak will start the process of recalling approximately 1,250 furloughed employees later this month. Notifications to employees are expected to begin on or about March 15, with a goal of completing these notifications by March 29.

Amtrak Service:

- **Amtrak Northeast Regional Sale:** Amtrak is offering a \$19 flat rate sale on all NER trains to include Virginia sponsored trains.
 - Sale period: March 23 – March 26
 - Travel Period: March 30 – September 30
 - Accommodation: Coach and Business only - no Business or First Class
- **50% Capacity Restriction:** Amtrak is working on plans to lift capacity restriction on trains sometime this summer. Ridership demand and COVID infection rate will dictate termination of this capacity restriction. Amtrak is subject to federal law and masks will be required at stations and on trains until further federal guidance.
- **Virginia Sponsored Service Schedule:** All routes are back in operation except Washington D.C.-Richmond route, which still remains suspended due to COVID-19 impact. Richmond route stations are being served by Newport News and Norfolk route trains, as well as by long distance Amtrak service.

Amtrak Ridership:

- **Y-o-Y Ridership change for Virginia sponsored service:** Virginia sponsored service for the month of February 2021 was 31.1% of February 2020 ridership (down -68.9%).(see table below)
- **M-o-M ridership change for Virginia sponsored service:** February 2021 ridership was 5.4% lower than January 2021 ridership (-1,048). January 2021 ridership was 19,488.
- **Systemwide** ridership is at 26.5%
- **Amtrak Recovery:** 7-day moving average for bookings continues to improve. Systemwide bookings are at 33.3% of the bookings for the same week last year. The percent of bookings for trips with travel dates that are relatively further in the future are increasing. This shift to bookings with longer days-to-departure promises continued growth in trips ahead.

VRE Service:

- **COVID-19 Service Schedule:** VRE trains are operating on an 'S' Schedule Plus (special schedule for holidays and snow days, supplemented with Train 300 for the northbound commute and Train 307 for the southbound commute on the Fredericksburg line).
- **Step-up Program suspension:** VRE step-up program for Amtrak trains stands suspended. The duration of this suspension is unknown at this time.

VRE Ridership:

- **VRE's Average daily ridership (ADR)** in February 2021 was 1,131. Ridership was down slightly from January, which averaged 1,179 daily passengers.
- **VRE system wide on-time performance** rate for February 2021 was 93%, slightly higher than the previous month. System wide OTP rate was 92% in January 2021.

MOTION FOR CLOSED SESSION

Following the presentations, Ms. Bulova made the following motion:

*"I move that the Board convene in a Closed Session pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 (A)(6) of the Code of Virginia, for the purpose of discussing potential transactions where bargaining is involved and where the financial interest of the Commonwealth would be adversely affected if the discussion were made public at this time,
And,*

pursuant to Va. Code Sec. 2.2-3711(A)(8), for the purpose of consulting with legal counsel regarding provisions in the agreement requiring legal advice.

"Additionally, I move that staff and attorneys attend the Closed Session because their presence is deemed necessary, and will aid the Board in its consideration of this matter."

The motion was seconded by Ms. Butler Painter and carried unanimously by Board roll call vote.

The Board suspended the open session at 10:16 a.m. on March 22, 2021 to move into closed session with instructions that the open session would reconvene at 4:00 pm on March 22, 2021.

RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION

The Chair reconvened the open session meeting at 4:00 p.m. on March 22, 2021. Upon reconvening the meeting, the Chair made the following statement:

"We are now going to take a roll call vote, and I ask that each member indicate their agreement with the following:

To the best of my knowledge, during the Closed Meeting, the only matters heard, discussed or considered were those matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, and only those public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the Closed Meeting was convened."

The motion was seconded by Mr. Moorman and carried unanimously by Board roll call vote.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 4:04 p.m. All presentations to the Board and meeting video can be found at www.drpt.virginia.gov/vpra/board-meetings/.

Respectfully Submitted:

Bridget Davis, Executive Assistant

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