

CTB Rail Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
VDOT Central Office Training Room
1221 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
February 20, 2018

The Meeting began at 9:03 am.

CTB Rail Subcommittee Members Present: Jennifer Mitchell, Scott Kasprovicz, Shannon Valentine, Mary Hughes-Hynes, and Stephen Johnson.

DRPT Director Jennifer Mitchell introduced the agenda and said that the major agenda item for the day would be to discuss rail safety issues in light of the recent Amtrak incidents in Crozet and South Carolina. She said that Deputy Secretary Quintin Elliott would be giving a presentation during the full CTB on safety across all modes of transportation in the Commonwealth and that the presentation for the Rail Subcommittee would delve further into Rail Safety.

1. Rail Safety in Virginia-Jeremy Latimer

Jeremy Latimer started out explaining the National Surface Transportation Board was investigating the Washington state, South Carolina, and Crozet, VA incidents, and that any information we have from the media is not verified by any official findings from the NTSB. Jeremy Latimer informed the members that the State Corporation Commission has the authority to enforce regulations on rail safety in the Commonwealth set by the Federal Railroad Administration. He said that the FRA has delegated some inspection authority to the state. The following discussion points from this presentation were noted.

- a. Scott Kasprovicz asked if the SCC actually has people who go out and inspect the lines. Jeremy Latimer said that yes they did. He said that there are 8 SCC staff members dedicated to rail safety inspections, and that two FRA inspectors with authority over the area that also covers Virginia.
- b. Jeremy Latimer said that the FHWA (Federal Highways Administration) Program provides funding to states for road/rail crossing improvements. There are two types of safety improvement categories for crossings: active and passive. Active crossings are where there are gates, flashing lights, etc., and passive are where there are signs indicating a railroad crossing ahead
- c. Jennifer Mitchell pointed out that the Commonwealth has safety oversight responsibilities for rail transit, such as Norfolk light rail and WMATA. Virginia only has the authority to enforce transit safety violations over HRT, not WMATA.
- d. Secretary Valentine asked about media reports from the Crozet crash that indicated that gates weren't working properly. She asked who maintains grade crossings. Jeremy Latimer said that in the Crozet accident that the grade crossing was maintained by Buckingham branch and inspected by the FRA, and that the NTSB (National Surface Transportation Board) is investigating the crash. Scott Kasprovicz asked if the cab camera was working. Michael McLaughlin said that they were not sure because the NTSB was not letting those involved with the incident comment.

- e. Jeremy Latimer said that PTC was mandated by Congress, but not funded.
- f. Secretary Valentine asked if Buckingham Branch would have PTC. Jeremy Latimer said that they would not in the foreseeable future.
- g. Jeremy Latimer said that the current Federal deadline of 2018 is for installation of the system. The system is not required to be turned on until 2020. VRE and Amtrak are on track to meet these deadlines.
- h. Secretary Valentine asked if there was a standard system for PTC or if each railroad was using their own. Jeremy Latimer said that Amtrak had a different system for the NEC, and there may be different systems on freight railroads..
- i. Mary Hughes-Hynes asked if Buckingham Branch was the only rail line that carried both passengers and Hazmat. Jeremy Latimer said yes, in Virginia, but we are not sure what hazmat may or may not travel over the Buckingham Branch route/Cardinal route.
- j. Jeremy Latimer was asked if being a short line gives an automatic exemption from PTC. Jeremy said that no, it did not. Buckingham was given an exemption because only 3 passenger trains a week use that line.
- k. Numbers on crossings with and without gates in the Commonwealth were reviewed. There are 2,600 crossings without gates in the Commonwealth and 385 crossings without gates on Amtrak routes. Secretary Valentine asked if these numbers included both public and private crossings. Jeremy Latimer said that the numbers did include both. Michael McLaughlin said that DRPT received different numbers from FRA and VDOT. FRA tracks both public and private crossings while VDOT tracks on public crossings.
- l. Jeremy Latimer pointed out that all public crossings have signs with 1-800 phone numbers to call if you get stuck. If the railroad gets a call they will stop traffic immediately. Scott Kasprowicz asked if Virginia driver training includes information on rail safety. If it doesn't he suggested that DMV should include that information.
- m. Chris Smith noted that the Operation Lifesaver organization also provides rail crossing safety education and programs including truck driver safety
- n. Michael McLaughlin said that it is important to note that PTC cannot prevent all accidents. In the recent crash in South Carolina, PTC may have prevented the accident. Stephen Johnson agreed and said most incidents are a result of human error.
- o. Mary Hughes-Hynes asked how many crossings in the state without gates are public. Michael McLaughlin said that approximately 1400 crossings have either passive or active warnings, 1200 have gates and approximately 600 have nothing.
- p. Secretary Valentine pointed out that incidents happen every week in Virginia. She asked if the state was tracking loss of life. Michael McLaughlin said that DRPT has created a new policy to inform the Secretary's office of issues. Technically a derailment is when one wheel goes off the track. DRPT will notify Quintin Elliott when a derailment involves a car or a vehicle.
- q. Chris Smith pointed out that the crossing in Crozet had gates even though there was a very low volume of train traffic in that area. He pointed out that this is a commitment from the Commonwealth to public safety.
- r. Jeremy Latimer said that the Rail Preservation Fund program has significantly reduced the number of incidents on shortlines, especially in yards. Secretary Valentine said that it is important that someone makes that point during the full CTB meeting.

- s. Randy Marcus from CSX, who was present at the meeting, was asked if CSX trains have cab cameras. He said that 90% of CSX trains do. Secretary Valentine said that Amtrak is required to have cab cameras because they are so important in accident reconstruction. She asked if the requirements could be changed for freight rail.
- t. Secretary Valentine asked Randy Marcus what investment CSX has made in PTC. He said that they have invested 2.0 billion so far across 23 states and still plan to invest another .4 billion. She asked him if CSX sees any operational benefit to PTC. He said down the road they may see marginal benefits. Michael McLaughlin thanked Randy Marcus for his willingness to provide state data to DRPT when he only had to provide national data.
- u. Mary Hughes-Hynes proposed the idea of creating a short-term committee out of the CTB to determine what Virginia needs to monitor safety.

2. Legislative Update-Chris Smith

Chris Smith from DRPT provided a handout of bills that impact DRPT and that are still alive in the General Assembly following cross-over. The General Assembly session has been predominately focused on transit and getting dedicated funding for WMATA. He said that DRPT had one other minor technical FOIA bill. On pg. 5 of his handout he pointed out an amendment regarding short line rail preservation funding being used to acquire track for an excursion train in Roanoke at the Virginia Transportation Museum. Chris indicated that DRPT staff preliminarily did not think this an eligible cost, but would do follow-up and outreach to the Delegate who patroned this item. The following discussion on legislative issues occurred:

- a. Randy Marcus mentioned that the amendment was likely put in by Delegate Head. Director Mitchell said that the state has so many state of good repair needs and that those dollars should not be used for tourism.
- b. Chris Smith pointed out the Delegate Roem wanted DRPT to look at studying best management practices for commuter trains and transit systems internationally but this bill did not make it. Her intention was to find out if there are less expensive ways of doing things for future expansion opportunities in Virginia. Chris Smith said that Delegate Filler Corn put in a bill that would have required DRPT to fund 84%. Of the costs form track lease payments for VRE While DRPT already provides federal and state resources to VRE at this level, if put into code it would have been different than our current grant process by making it a permanent legal requirement.
- c. Director Mitchell said that currently there is a balance of unobligated funds in our REF program. Cash balances do not look good when you are trying to obtain more funding, and can be vulnerable to being used for other purposes. This year the REF program only received one application. Potential grantees are concerned about clawback. The CTB Rail committee needs to look at what could be done to make the program easier to use. The program should be refreshed and restructured. DRPT will work with stakeholders on this so these funds won't be raided for being used inefficiently.

3. Public Comment-There was no one signed up for public comment.

4. The meeting adjourned at 9:50 am.