

MEETING MINUTES
CTB Rail and Transit Subcommittee Meeting

VDOT Central Office – HR Training Room
1221 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Tuesday, January 11, 2022 · 8:30 am

The CTB Rail and Transit Subcommittee held a meeting on January 11, 2022. The primary location was VDOT HR Training Room, located at 1221 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia, 23219.

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Jennifer Mitchell (Chair), Stephen Johnsen, and Raymond Smoot.

OTHER CTB MEMBERS PRESENT

Thomas Fowlkes, E. Scott Kasprowicza

GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT

DJ Stadtler (VPRA), Tanyea Darrisaw (VDRPT), Emily Stock (VDRPT), Haley Glynn (VDRPT), Miriam Foster (VDRPT), Wood Hudson (VDRPT) and Lynne Upton (VDRPT).

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Mitchell called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

APPROVAL OF THE DECEMBER 7, 2021 MINUTES

On motion by Mr. Johnsen and seconded by Mr. Smoot, the minutes of the December 7, 2021 CTB Rail and Transit Subcommittee meeting were approved.

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Presented by Chair Jennifer Mitchell

Chair Mitchell shared that the committee would receive presentations about General Assembly Studies Update and Virginia Statewide Rail Plan Policy Update. Chair Mitchell shared that Emily Stock would provide presentations of the results.

Rail General Assembly Study Results: Bedford, Bristol, and Commonwealth Corridor

Presented by Emily Stock, DRPT

Stock presented the findings of the Three General Assembly Reports that were under review by the Secretary's office. They are Bristol Passenger Rail Extension Study, Bedford Rail Traffic Control ("RTC") Modeling Study, and The Commonwealth Corridor Study.

- Feasibility Study- which emphasized four major objectives:
 - 1) The planning-level Conceptual Design
 - 2) Planning-Level Opinion of Probable Construction Costs
 - 3) Traveler Survey
 - 4) Ridership Analysis

Bedford Study Conclusions:

- 1) As far as the feasibility-To build at the preferred Macon St. East station site (which does not include property acquisition) the cost in 2025 dollars would be \$11M.
- 2) RTC Modeling showed no impact on non-material NS freight operations by adding an additional stop by Amtrak-there is a double track at this location.
- 3) The amount of riders that the Bedford Station would increase is approximately 12,650 total.

There were many questions from CTB members concerning the number of riders and the number of diversions from Lynchburg & Roanoke. These diversions would be beneficial for the Bedford Station. Most of the concerns dealt with how we reached our numbers of riders and how was the study paid for. The VPRA applied for a federal grant program-CRISI that supports improvement to existing tracks at the Ettrick Amtrak Station in Chesterfield County and for the preliminary engineering for the potential Amtrak Station at Bedford. Chair Mitchell and Stock were able to answer all the questions the members had and all concluded that the statistics were pretty good.

Bristol Study Conclusions:

- 1) VPRA is doing a study for the New River Valley corridor feasibility. Also, a lot would depend on where the NRV Station location.
- 2) So far we know that to connect to Christiansburg from the Whitehorn District Route would probably result in the need for a tunnel. This would be extremely expensive upwards of \$100 billion. The Blacksburg route would potentially save up to \$1 billion. We need to keep in mind that we don't have any word yet on whether NS would allow this.

- 3) As far as ridership, this route would set up for service connections from Bristol to Knoxville and may extend down to Atlanta. Chair Mitchell told us that Tennessee is willing to work with Virginia, however; they are more interested in going north towards Chicago instead of connecting to D.C. Again, we do not have confirmation that NS would allow this.

Concern is expressed by Members of how to get the Bristol trains to the NS main line. Chair Mitchell also explained that this depends on Blacksburg connection to get to Christiansburg. Stock stated that we will continue to work with localities and regional entities to determine the number of stops there would be between the NRV and Bristol.

Commonwealth Corridor Study Conclusions:

- 1) The one difference this study brings to the table is that we own the rail between Doswell and Charlottesville. This alone would cut the cost.
- 2) The study was based on a proposed two daily round trips between Newport News and Christiansburg. A public survey indicated support for "one seat" end-to-end service.
- 3) The infrastructure needs of the Commonwealth Corridor would mean significant upgrades for a passenger service to include a route to and from Charlottesville to Doswell. Storage and servicing would be necessary at either end of the route as well. This also comes with an annual potential 169,400 passengers (this is not a net number). While there are existing routes there is a need to combine service. This also includes two new routes.

The CTB Members stressed that this would be a long trip for end to end service- approximately an 8-9 hour trip. They posed the question that if a reduction of fare would equal increased ridership. DJ Stadtler of VPRA fielded this question. He stated that this is exactly right; they do add this elasticity in the fares and that we would benefit from this practice. Amtrak has been lowering fares on longer routes as opposed to shorter routes. This brings to attention that we may benefit from using our own service as opposed to Amtrak. We could make the short trips to our maximize opportunity with lower fares using our own service. To this conclusion we decided that we need to find out more about Brightline Florida. This service has a car waiting for passengers when they disembark. Brightline Florida is owned by a private company. They are actually building condos around the stations and building a lot of track. Their reputation is that of excellent customer service, on-time performance, and they also have great marketing.

STATEWIDE RAIL PLAN 2022

Presented by Emily Stock, DRPT

Stock gave an overview of what we are planning to achieve in the year 2022. One of the main talking points was that the studies that we needed will touch on many Economic policies, and it will need to be very thorough.

Discussions about various developments that include: Economic Development, Equipment, Coordination, the Corridor Development, and Multimodal Access. With the answers to these studies we hope to confirm our direction statements concerning four different policies: Station, Service, Equity, and Climate Change. We know these are the policies we need to review.

To adequately review these policies we need to look at Existing Conditions. Pulling together-VPRA and DRPT are working on a coordinated process. This process will not only be Commonwealth centered but will also look to be in step with both National and Regional Integration.

Stock answered concerns from the Members about the fact that a partnership needs to be established with either Amtrak or Brightline. Again, we are circling back to finding out more concerning Brightline and what makes their approach different from Amtrak. By comparison, we will determine which has the better scope of business. This way, DRPT can glean helpful information to use to develop long-range plans that can be implemented by VPRA.

Stock also went over that we will be looking into more use of CSX and NS rail lines because the use of coal is diminishing. This means the freight lines won't have one of the main sources of revenue available to them. It also lends to the fact that some rail lines will be underused and/or abandoned. Another factor was brought up- the trucking industry is booming. We need to establish how that is affecting cargo freight. Is it narrowing down cargo freight? If it is then we need to do our part to make use of those rail lines because they are cost effective. Perhaps there are other industries that will benefit from using cargo freight. We need to get a grasp on where we are going right (and wrong) in our approach as our ways of travel have changed drastically within the last two years.

Among the other scopes of our study, we really need to look at the Corridor Development Policy. We need to look at preserving the existing corridors not just for use now but also for use in the future. What is the highest and best use of these lines? That is one of the questions we need to address. That way we will have those corridors available moving forward. Of course this also means we have to look at needed repairs to the existing infrastructure. What repairs will we obtain the most use from? What is the best use of our federal grants throughout the existing corridor?

Answer this with the thought in mind that we are also trying to move away from the use of fossil fuels (where feasible).

There is also the need for more safety at railroad crossings. We need to look at the issues for certain localities for grade separation. A plan needs to be executed so that we can lessen the hazards to both vehicular traffic becoming blocked and stranded because of trains standing still on rail lines. Some towns basically become paralyzed because of this.

The Chair touched on the status of ADA compliance with some of the older platforms. These are very important to the state as we now own some of these that are out of compliance. With respect to the prospective stations we have in the works, ADA compliance will be included with those plans.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments presented or received.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 9:55 a.m. All presentations to the Board and meeting video can be found at www.drpt.virginia.gov/rail/ctb-rail-transit-subcommittee/

Respectfully Submitted: Lynne Upton, Executive Assistant

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