

MEETING MINUTES
CTB Rail and Transit Subcommittee Meeting

VDOT Central Office – HR Training Room
1221 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Tuesday, February 15, 2022 ·9:00 am

The CTB Rail and Transit Subcommittee held a meeting on February 15, 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, Mary Hynes, Frederick Stant, III, Thomas Fowlkes, and Raymond Smoot.

OTHER CTB MEMBERS PRESENT

Scott Kasprowicz

GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT

DJ Stadtler (VPRA), Tanyea Darrisaw (VDRPT), Emily Stock (VDRPT), Haley Glynn (VDRPT), Michael Todd (VDRPT), Wood Hudson (VDRPT), Jen DeBruhl (VDRPT), and Lynne Upton (VDRPT).
Robert Whitfield (Public)-Fairfax County Taxpayers Alliance.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Mitchell called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Presented by Chair Jennifer Mitchell

Chair Mitchell shared that the committee would receive updates from Jen DeBruhl about The MERIT Program and Emily Stock concerning The Freight Advisory Committee. Chair Mitchell shared that Mike Todd would provide a presentation of an Overview of Wythe county RIA Application on Workshop Agenda as well as an update of FREIGHT Program Guidelines .

MERIT Update

Presented by Jen Debruhl, DRPT

DeBruhl updated the committee and shared that the FY23 grant cycle closed on Feb. 1st. DRPT received a total of 181 applications and the DRPT Transit Team is busy entering about 500 line items. A briefing on the preliminary results will be shared at the March Meeting.

So far, there have been four major expansion applications, however; two of these are not ready and they still need to work through some issues.

DRPT has received 23 applications for operating transit assistance that includes assistance for seniors and veterans, for strategic plans and surveys, eight applications for new service, and for additional micro transit. Hynes asked if there is going to be enough money to cover these. DeBruhl answered that we have Federal Grant money in addition to what was already in the budget and that she does not see any forthcoming issues.

DeBruhl went on to note that the micro transit services in Gloucester and in Afton have been doing really well in their first year of service. There is a micro transit service that is about to start in the Shenandoah Valley as well. She stated that in March, she hopes to have a sneak preview of what is the trajectory as far as that is concerned. Smoot asked how much money was all of this going to take. DeBruhl commented that DRPT-Transit is sitting in a good place right now however she does not have a definitive answer at the moment.

APPROVAL OF THE JANUARY 11, 2022 MINUTES

On motion by Johnsen and seconded by Smoot, the minutes of the January 11, 2022 CTB Rail and Transit Subcommittee meeting were approved.

Freight Advisory Committee Update

Presented by Emily Stock, DRPT

Stock updated how things have been progressing with the Freight Advisory Committee (FAC). She is the Chairperson for the Committee. This is a relatively new committee that came into existence a little over a year ago. The USDOT requires a State-wide Freight Plan; however, Stock feels that Virginia needs something more sustainable that would cover more than just one year. That is the approach DRPT has taken on this federally mandated plan.

The FAC includes members from the private sector as well as the public sector. The committee wants to include input from: Port of Virginia, Norfolk Southern and CSX, BBR and other shortline railroads; members from the trucking industry, Freight shippers, manufacturers, and warehouse companies. The committee holds Quarterly meetings. The next meeting will be in May 2022 in Norfolk, VA. DRPT invited Norfolk Southern for the May meeting in Norfolk.

DRPT had a lot of discussion about bipartisan infrastructure law at the previous meeting as it pertains to what is best for the companies and for the Commonwealth. VDOT, DRPT, and the Port of Virginia will be working together to come up with some strategies. Hynes wanted to know if DMV and VEDP were involved in the plans-Stock affirmed that they are. VEDP is active with the site plans. The intent is to come up with a bipartisan agreement between the industry and the constituents. Smoot asked if an additional inland port will be discussed. Stock indicated that an intermodal station has been studied a lot. She did say that the discussion of an inland port and/or an intermodal station was brought up at the last FAC meeting earlier in February.

Smoot also asked about how the supply chain issues with Rail were being handled. The news has been reporting on how bad it has been on the West Coast to be able to get supplies out. Where the East Coast has not had the exact problems that the West Coast has had, we are able to get the supplies out on the East Coast. But if this becomes a problem; how do we prevent those issues within the Commonwealth? Stock said they have been looking at how the grade separations are affecting Rail accessibility around ports to see if there is a solution so that here in Virginia that won't be as big of an issue as it has been during the pandemic.

OVERVIEW OF WYTHE COUNTY RAIL INDUSTRIAL ACCESS 2022

Presented by Mike Todd, DRPT

Todd presents an overview of a large, developing industrial site in Wythe County. Blue Star AGI- a nitrile glove manufacturer; has applied for a grant to add a 3,000 foot industrial spur to accommodate bring supplies into and out of the site by truck and rail. There is already an existing spur –the land is graded and ready to go. All they need is to lay the tracks and they will be ready to run with this- moving supplies and products.

The site itself is set to bring 1,000's of jobs which will boost the economy greatly. There are already some existing buildings on the site. Todd shows a map of the project and points out that the red line is the rail spur that they have applied for. This slide also gives the Committee an idea of how large the site is.

Next, Todd summarizes the process of scoring an application for the grant. There are three steps: Budget-Carloads-Employment. Each of these steps receive a grade. The grade must be 50 or higher to be considered for the Grant. A relatively low budget helps this project earn a score of 20. Bumping up the number of carloads by 892, it also scores a 20 for Carloads bringing the Score to 40. The last element is Employment-we have already been advised earlier that this would bring many, many new jobs; thus it receives another score of 20 bringing the total to 60 so far. VEDP rates it a 10 bring the total Score to 70. So this application is definitely seen as a contender. This project will also help the environment by using the railroad instead of 18 wheelers-less emissions.

The Recommendation process has started. The project is first considered then next month we will be looking for the Resolution of Approval. The final step left is to execute the Grant Agreement.

Smoot asks Todd about the news that he has heard that one of the partners has pulled out and how that will affect the project going further. Todd responds that that part of the deal is with Wythe County. He does not know what, if anything; the County has planned. Smoot says that he believes that one of the partners is from Maryland. Todd goes on to explain that the grant is a reimbursement program. This means they have to spend the money first then they will be paid back for the money spent. There is also a clause in agreement that if the project does not live up to their expectations, we can then pull the money back from them. Todd shares that VDOT has also highlighted this project in their economic development program, so that VDOT also has something to do with this project.

UPDATE OF FREIGHT PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Presented by Mike Todd, DRPT

There were a couple of technical corrections that needed to be made. The first correction that we made was a new logo. Since we are rebranding- we had to change the colors. We had to change the wording under Eligibility. Because of questions we received from applicants as to the clarity of the wording "Improvement to", we then removed those words. We also noted in the resolution that we will prepare some more detailed guidance. This is in alliance with the other programs in DRPT.

Todd then goes on to explain how the scoring for Rail projects come about. We want to ensure that the project benefits are worth more than the cost of the project. To do so we have to have a Benefit Cost Analyst- *The benefits > the cost*. Smoot asks how much this costs per year. The Commonwealth Rail Fund is around \$10 to \$11 million dollars annually but that also depends on the revenues. This cost is also shared with the Rail Preservation Program and any initiatives that DRPT undertakes in the Freight Program itself.

RAIL PLANNING- MULTI-MODAL STUDY

Presented by Chair Jennifer Mitchell

With the extra time left, Chair Mitchell shared some updates with the committee. We are doing a multi-modal Study of connecting Roanoke to Clifton Forge Rail Station by bus that was suggested by Delegate Austin at the last General Assembly. This study is due by the end of June 2022.

Chair Mitchell also shared that a study is looking at the plan to bring Passenger Rail Service from the New River Valley to Bristol, VA. We are working with Tennessee to see if they want to collaborate with Virginia to possibly extend Passenger Rail further south.

Joint Rail Industry Day is to be held in March 2022. Also, some Passenger Rail Service has been temporarily canceled to Newport News because of Covid-19. There was a question from Hynes as to whether VPRA can apply to the CTB Smartscale for up to \$50 Million in additional funding. DJ Stadler (VPRA) answered this question. He said because they are not a state agency so they cannot apply.

Smoot asked Mitchell if the ridership of VRE is still down in its numbers. She replied that it has gone down about 80%. That it is highly affected by the Federal Government and its continued use of full-time teleworking. When they finally start calling the employees back then the ridership will go up. Just essential employees are riding now. Car traffic is a single person in a car going to work. So we need to get more people back to rail and bus. Metro ridership in DC has also been affected, however; Chair Mitchell would like a little more information before she will speak on that because she does not want to pass on misinformation. Smoot mentioned that we all need to be aware that the transportation systems will not look the way they did before the pandemic. Hynes also agrees with Smoot in that many found that people will still telework one or two days when they go back to full time status.

Hynes suggested that all of Transit needs quarterly breakdowns to the CTB. This breakdown would include the Metro in DC. Mitchell said that we actually need to get the Northern Virginia (NOVA) people to come down as well to provide us with the breakdown. All of the transit there is where at least half of the total transit is located for Virginia. Hynes, who lives in NOVA, said it isn't reasonable to go by Metro in the middle of the day.

Mitchell mentioned that she and DeBruhl have discussed putting plans in place to help bring ridership back to the buses and rail. Hynes thinks the trouble with funding will be difficult starting in FY2024. We can put plans into place to get customers back to transit after we receive reports to help support those more. Johnson asked if the Silver Line was ready yet. Mitchell said that they are following the timeline that she hasn't heard any difference.

Smoot asked about the benefit of bringing Maryland to Virginia through Union Station. Mitchell told him they are talking with Maryland and working on finishing up this plan. Both sides are eager to work this plan out.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Robert Whitfield, Board Member with the Fairfax County Taxpayer Alliance; he is concerned about the representation of the needs for the people in Northern Virginia. He became involved when the Silver Line was going on. He has attended CTB meetings before where he wants to see the Financial Planning requirements from 2017. He objects to Tolls being used to pay for this. These plans involve the Purple Line in Maryland. They were recently released again and they were 68% higher than what was released before. He is concerned about the inflation now occurring and have they adjusted for that. He wants all financial plans to be available for the constituents.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 9:57 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

