

SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION

Walter Anderson Museum of Art and Community Center Meeting Minutes March 4, 2016

Attendance: Greg White, Knox Ross, John Spain, Claire Austin, Phil Jones, Toby Bennington, Kay Kell, Ashley Edwards, Jack Norris, Blake Wilson, Patrick Sullivan, Roy Woodruff

Commissioners Not in Attendance: Angelia Mance (Austin) has Proxy, J.W. "Billy" McFarland, Jr. (Austin has proxy) Walt Leger (Spain has proxy), Natalie Laborde, Larry Watts Bennington has proxy) Steve Carter, Michael Jackson

Others: Dan Dealy, Rachel DiResto, John Robert Smith, Joe McAndrew, Mayor Connie Moran, Freddy Jackson, Chance McNeely, Jerry Gehman, Tom Hunter, John Renzaville, Dean Goodell, Kim Mannelich, Debbie Vignes

Call to Order: *Chairman Greg White*

Roll Call

Prayer by Jerry Gehman

REGULAR BUSINESS

- I. Approval of Minutes of the December 4, 2015 Meeting
 - a. A few corrections were noted: Roy was not Larry's proxy, add Toby
 - b. Knox moved to approve minutes, seconded by Toby, motion passes

- II. Financial and Administrative Report – Debbie Vignes w/ Alexander, Van Loon, Sloan, Levens, Favre, PLLC
 - a. \$330,000 was not recognized as revenue until expenses occur
 - b. The income statement reflects income and expenditure activities including \$200 in interest, \$50,000 in expenditures
 - c. Also SRC paid Amtrak \$40,000 for the Gulf Coast feasibility study - \$20k last year, and \$20k this year.
 - d. In the 2nd Quarter – received dues from MS, State of LA will be paying this month
 - e. Discuss financial statement audit – Kim, Director of ABL's audit department (separate from Debbie Vignes' department) submitted a proposal to perform the audit for potential cost of \$6k – 7500. The proposal would be completed and delivered by June 30, 2016.
 - f. They have a good reputation for thorough audits and reviewing governmental standards, and the cost is competitive. They are considered independent because they make no management decisions for commission.
 - g. Spain moves to accept the proposal and move forward on audit, seconded by Toby. Motion passes.

OLD BUSINESS

- I. Report on Executive Committee activities and report Amtrak Inspection Train and other initiatives – Sec/Treas - Knox Ross; VC - John Spain
 - a. The Gulf Coast Inspection Train Trip was one of the most significant efforts by SRC to date and many attended.

- b. When VP Biden was in New Orleans for a recent press conference he talked about the importance of infrastructure investment in the country and the lost opportunity that would have paid for BR/NO rail – he really knows the importance of rail investment. Governor John Bel Edwards followed by saying he wanted to have passenger rail up and running in south and north LA within his first term.
 - c. FRA Administrator Sarah Feinberg said that when she was first nominated, her first meeting was with SRC in her new role. The FRA staff has been responsive, came to ride train from NO to Mobile – and this commitment was noticed by CSX. Sarah Feinberg has offered to support the SRC in next steps towards expanding to adjoining states (FL, TX) and she has offered to convene the meeting to bring Governors together to talk about gulf coast and northern link rail opportunities.
 - d. This all came about with the assistance of T4A who was able to insert language in the transportation bill to create a working group to study restoration of gulf coast train service. Congress told FRA to do this and gave \$1m to get it done.
 - e. The FRA held the first meeting in February and will generate a report in 9 months for how to get it done. In the next few months, SRC will be working with the FRA to assess the feasibility, economic impact and intermodal needs to support restored and improved passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast from New Orleans to Orlando and destinations in between (Option A from the Amtrak report).
 - f. Knox went to Washington after this trip to testify before the US Senate Commerce Committee to make the case on behalf of communities along the Gulf Coast for the funding and appropriations of the two discretionary grant programs created within the FAST Act. The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements program and the Restoration and Enhancement Grants program would provide funding for capital and operating costs to advance passenger rail projects.
 - g. Jerry Gehman will also be going to DC and Alabama SRC Executive Committee Commissioners will be going to DC with Wiley’s Coastal Alabama Partnership group – these are important upcoming opportunities to align support.
 - h. The Alabama delegation will need to talk to the Governor’s staff and legislators given the concern expressed by the Governor for funding a government entity
 - i. There will hopefully be an I-20 Inspection train trip scheduled in the near future.
- II. Update on the Birmingham to Mobile study
- a. At an upcoming meeting, SRC will request Robert Smith of the City of Montgomery to give an update on the study, which will hopefully be completed soon.
- III. Consider proposal from 9/11/15 meeting to form a Technical Advisory Committee
- a. FRA working group will cover this need for a few months so no further action is needed at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

- I. Legislative Affairs Update –John Robert Smith
 - a. We witnessed on the Inspection train trip the opportunity that passenger rail symbolizes to people in rural areas to connect small towns and large cities to economic development, providing choices that seniors and millennials are demanding and connecting to family and friends.
 - b. With MS 100% on board, we are witnessing a new day, with a conservative governor and southern senators in support of passenger rail.
 - c. JRS suggested the SRC should send a letter to STB about the importance of on-time performance for the Gulf Coast service since this has previously been an issue and the precedence given to freight can cause problematic delays. “On-time” should be measured station to station.

- d. STB should give preference to humans vs. cargo – since STB is currently considering language that would give freight preference, which would be a problem for on-time performance.
- e. He also suggested that SRC facilitate a letter of support from Governors of TX, AL, MS, & LA about the I-20 corridor rail service with support from Mayors too.
- f. CSX and Amtrak are inspecting the line and should come back with a report on capital improvements along the line, then negotiation with FRA to get to real cost for implementing passenger rail service.
- g. SRC needs to weigh in on the upcoming Appropriations process with a few key requests:
 - i. Authorize Amtrak at \$1.5 B Senate to appropriate plus additional \$5.5m for the Gulf Coast daily service
 - ii. Support full appropriation of TIGER at \$500M for program, level funding as last year which can be used for rail capital needs
 - iii. Request \$50m in FY17 for Consolidated Rail and Infrastructure Improvements Program (CRISI) which provides flexible funding for states and Amtrak to improve rail infrastructure such as Positive Train Control and grade crossings. Interstate compacts can apply and Senator Wicker carved out 25% for rural areas
 - iv. Restore and Enhance Funds – ask for \$20m in FY17 – entities can take out a loan and payback over 30 years
- h. Senator Cochran chairs the Appropriations Committee, Senator Roger Wicker is the lead Republican on multi-modal, Senator Durbin from IL will champion the TIGER program and Senator Shelby has signaled to Cochran his support.
- i. The deadline is March 18th to send letters
- j. The SRC plans a visit on March 14-17th to DC to meet with our member states' delegations, and with staff of appropriations and authorizing committees.

II. I-20 Corridor Update

- a. I-20 has a \$600k old earmark that needs to be spent, Judge Anderson has offered this towards the capacity study and MDOT has also offered small match funding. Amtrak has already conducted the feasibility study showing that this train pays for itself operationally. Next they need to get KCS to the table to complete the capacity study and come up with final numbers.
- b. Norfolk Southern has already improved the track between Shreveport and Meridian with private funds.
- c. The FRA will convene a meeting of the region's governors when the states get out of legislative session – hopefully by May.

III. Communications and Media Relations Update – Rachel Diresto, CPEX

- a. The SRC has enjoyed exceptional press coverage related to the Inspection Train trip with over one hundred articles published across the states' media outlets.
- b. The SRC website features a recap with photos, videos and vignettes from the train tour at <http://www.southernrailcommission.org/2016-gulf-coast-passenger-rail-trip/>
- c. CPEX is poised to send out the Call to Action e-blast to the current contact list of SRC to support the appropriations requests.
- d. Also CPEX has mailed thank you letters on behalf of SRC to all of the participants.

IV. Other items

- a. Chance McNeely reported that Shawn Wilson and LA DOTD staff went to DC and made visits talking to members about passenger rail for every district. In expression of support for the work of SRC, Louisiana is paying dues.
- b. The Mayor of Atmore has empowered Jerry Gehman to do whatever he can to support rail. The Poarch Creek tribe (from the Atmore community) has important federal relationships and his brother David Gehman is on the FRA working group.
- c. Joe McAndrew reported that the next steps to invite Florida to become a member of the SRC, which was discussed at the last meeting, requires action by each state legislature. Joe is crafting the language and will follow up to ask all states to act on this.
- d. Roy made a motion to hold meetings in cities only served by passenger rail although other members pointed out that SRC wants to work with Mayors who don't necessarily have stops but would still connect to the service. Therefore SRC does not want to restrict meeting locations since there may be political reasons to meet in different geographic areas. Motion dies for lack of a second.

SUMMARY AND SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

June 3, 2016 – Louisiana (Most likely to be in Baton Rouge)

September 9, 2016 – Alabama (Anniston)

December 9, 2016 - Mississippi

ADJOURNMENT – motion by Greg, seconded by Knox