

Meeting of the Southern Rail Commission

Friday, June 9, 2023 – 9:00 -11:30 AM

Hancock Chamber of Commerce, 300 S. 2nd Street, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520

Commissioners in Attendance: Toby Bennington, Knox Ross, Kay Kell, Katie Hood (by phone), Frankie Castiglia Jr., Brian Fulton, Jerome Wall, Roy Woodruff, Renee Lapeyrolerie, Steven Brom (by phone), Christopher Christianson (by phone), David Clark

Attendees: Arun Rao, Ben Johnson, Nicole Bucich, Rodney Alexander, Joe McHugh, Delta Colley, Lori Hahn, Lara Bowman, Paul and Betsy Nelson, Beckie Feldman, Elliott Flaggs, Collin Arnold, Ben Goodner, Patrick Duffy, John Robert Smith, Dean Goodell, Phil Jones, Francesca, Glen Ellington (Hyde-Smith's office), Maggie Woodruff, Arun, Jeff Christine, JT Blalock, Zach Hollifield, Nikki Moon, Roger, Craig Higgs (Meridian), Janell Caruthers, Dell Luce, Ben Goodman, Brian Schneider, Jay Trepani, Mike Reese, Councilman Doug Seal, Laura Bauman, Mayor Friday Ellis, Wendy McDonnell, Lori Hine, Jarey Austin, Tish Williams, Tom Hunter, Max, Gerald Long (Cassidy's office), Karen Parsons, Jennifer Ansarti, Mathew Martinec, Franziska Lambrecht

Zoom: Colin Alexander, Amy Ainsworth, Bob Johnston, Dennis Stripling, Jim Delapp (city of Mobile), Ihussey, Lloyd, Maggie Olver, Meperez, Ray Morrison KTBS News, Rebekah Gongora, Sharon Gilmore (Rep. Thompson), Stephen Worley, Urban Syystems, Adrian Perkins, Andrea Ramey, Elizabeth Lawlor, Jason Lathbury, C. Deanville, Adrian Perkins

Call to Order: *Chairman Knox Ross*

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer

Recognition of special guests and new Commissioner

Front Range commission out of Montana – note read by Knox of admiration of work by SRC

REGULAR BUSINESS:

- I. Approval of the minutes from the meeting of March 10, 2023
 - a. Commissioner Bennington moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Castiglia seconded the motion – motion passes.
- II. Financial and administrative report - Knox Ross
 - a. The SRC is solvent.
 - b. MS and AL dues are not paid, but working to reconcile that now.
 - c. AL legislative session just ended, and Toby/David worked to share information with Governor Ivey and making steady progress.
 - d. Commissioner Bennington moved to approve the financials, and Commissioner Kell seconded the motion – motion passes.
- III. Communications and media update – Rachel DiResto
 - a. SRC recent press tour in five cities yielded many headlines.
 - b. Current Facebook page: 1,426 page followers, Page reach – 8,284, Impressions – 11,660
 - c. Emergent Method produced a one pager for Alabama's economic impact at the request of Commissioner Bennington.
- IV. Legislative affairs update, grant updates - *John Robert Smith*
 - a. Recent grant requests:

- i. December 1, 2022 – SRC/Amtrak application for \$223 million (\$45 million non-federal) of the **CRISI program** for infrastructure improvements along the Gulf Coast. Grant announcements expected late August - early October.
 - ii. February 28, 2022 – Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport application for \$32 million (\$7 million non-federal) for the **RAISE program** to plan and design rail-air connections.
 - iii. March 7, 2023 – SRC/Amtrak application for \$14.3 million (\$3 million non-federal) of the **Federal-State Partnership program** to conduct planning along the I-20 corridor.
 - iv. March 27, 2023 – SRC application for the **Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP)** to officially recognize the Gulf Coast, I-20, and Baton Rouge to Shreveport corridors. CIDP will provide \$500,000 and match state contributions.
 - v. July 10, 2023 [upcoming] – SRC application for the **Interstate Rail Compact (IRC) program**, which will provide matching funds for state contributions. Awards expected by February 2024.
- b. Upcoming opportunities
 - i. June 2023 – Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (Mega, INFRA, and Rural)
 - ii. Summer 2023 – Reconnecting Communities Program and Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program
 - iii. Summer 2023 – Railroad Crossing Elimination Program
 - iv. Fall 2023 – Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements Grant (CRISI) Program
 - v. December 2023 – RAISE
- c. Small and Rural Transit Reform Bill
 - i. Rural transit agencies are underfunded and constrained by bureaucratic red tape, so:
 - ii. Facilitate coordination of resources for rural mobility services
 - 1. **Pool the myriad federal funding streams** into a more streamlined approach that would enhance rural service delivery – including services for veterans.
 - 2. **Create a federal procurement clearinghouse** to facilitate lower capital costs for rural mobility services.
 - iii. Make rural mobility services world-class
 - 1. Establish a **standard** for quality rural mobility service and **tie funding to performance**.
 - 2. **Increase the maximum federal share** for operating costs from 50% to 80%.
 - iv. Increase predictability in rural mobility service planning
 - 1. Require states to provide rural mobility service providers with **multi-year funding streams** to allow those agencies to conduct **strategic planning**.
 - v. Catalyze innovation
 - 1. **Create a competitive rural mobility innovation fund** to facilitate innovation that increases reliability, efficiency, and access to mobility choices while reducing costs.
- d. FAA Reauthorization – intermodal connections
 - i. Over **60 airports of all sizes nationwide** would be **accessible to Amtrak** if connective infrastructure was built to enable passengers to access it.
 - ii. But: FAA says their authority over air-rail intermodal projects is limited
 - iii. So: Include the following provisions in the upcoming FAA reauthorization bill:

1. Facilitate the combination of FAA, FRA and FTA funding for intermodal projects that link passenger rail infrastructure to airports.
 2. Authorize a single, consolidated, and simplified application process for intermodal projects.
- e. IIJA language was developed in large measure due to SRC, and the authorization of these funds would not have been possible without support of Sen. Wicker, Sen. Hyde Smith, and Sen. Cassidy's leadership.
 - f. These leaders are moved by local voices, and supporters are making a difference.
 - g. Nicole/Arun are feeling the enthusiasm while visiting with local stakeholders.
 - h. The New Orleans Airport also applied for a RAISE grant for connectivity to the rail line and it has been a driver for this project.
 - i. The Corridor Identification program is a visionary program led by FRA to develop corridors that should be completed to connect regions across the country with passenger rail service.
 - i. The Gulf Coast project is ranked number 1 in priority.
 - ii. LA DOTD has filed separate grant for BR to NO service.
 - iii. Pensacola also filed a grant for gulf coast connection.
 - j. Upcoming grants have a focus on reconnecting infrastructure that separates neighborhoods, or rail projects in middle of main street, designed to take that impediment and move it to restore community fabric.

V. NOFA 2023 - John Robert Smith

- a. SRC has additional funds remaining under the old earmark for station development and planning and will soon issue a NOFA for cities along rail corridors in three states.
- b. Funds available to be included in NOFA are up to \$1m and will require a 50/50 match.
- c. A motion was made to grant the SRC Executive Committee the authority to release the notice upon approval from FRA.
- d. Commissioner Blankenship made the motion to approve, and Commissioner Kell seconded the motion – motion passes.

NEW BUSINESS:

- I. Update from Nicole Bucich, Amtrak's Vice President of Network Development
 - a. She has been traveling across the I-20 Corridor, saw palpable excitement, which is valuable for Amtrak to see.
 - b. After IIJA, leadership at Amtrak realized a new group was needed to facilitate network expansions, and her staff covers entire country. Arun Rao and Ben Johnson are here today.
 - c. **I-20 grant status** – Amtrak submitted application for Federal-State Partnership program for the extension of the Crescent, requesting \$14m for planning activities, with a local match committed from Mississippi and Louisiana.
 - d. They anticipate a fall announcement, and when this is awarded, Amtrak will advance the technical analysis to understand where stations will be located, develop operating agreements, and then quickly jump to engineering/construction/design.
 - e. Of that \$66B available in IIJA, \$44B is included in competitive grants over next 5 years.
 - f. The key is moving fast to take advantage of funding opportunities and having local, state and federal support aligned.
 - g. **Gulf Coast Service Status** – Amtrak is excited for the start of new service to be launched, and teams are working diligently with many tasks underway. Crews are running test trains, and food/beverage requests are being customized for this service.

- h. **Baton Rouge to New Orleans service** – CIDP application was submitted by LADOTD and Amtrak is working on an agreement with Louisiana to get that service moving forward quickly.
 - i. Also congressional support is building in Texas because of Louisiana’s advocacy. There was a Texas delegation in attendance at recent press events and formal support expressed from TXDOT.
- II. Report on Executive Committee activities – *Commissioners Ross, Bennington*
- a. Update on recent events along the I-20 Corridor
 - b. Councilman Seal from City of Bay St Louis stated that for every \$100 spent in Bay St. Louis by visitors, city gets \$1.29 in sales tax and tourism. If visitors come, they will return and we need to fund these facilities and station stops and market them.
 - c. The compiled economic impact reports are posted on the website and demonstrate the return on investment for passenger rail.
 - d. On Monday, the SRC will participate on a call with all tourism agencies across coast to discuss marketing the service.
- III. State Reports
- a. Louisiana-Updates:
 - i. Press events on June 7 and 8 in Shreveport, Monroe, Vicksburg, Jackson and Ruston were very well attended with many stakeholders in attendance.
 - ii. Update on Baton Rouge to New Orleans
 - 1. The new LADOTD Secretary Kalivoda has lots of institutional knowledge and Governor Edwards is committed to this project.
 - 2. Dean Goodell reported that LA DOTD has applied for the CRISI and Federal/State Partnership grants available to support infrastructure improvements necessary to start service.
 - 3. The Corridor ID grant program can help to provide guidance on order of steps for implementation and anticipate announcement in the Fall.
 - 4. LADOTD is in good position to start work on design/construction and in the meantime, started the environmental process to include 2 stations that received the RAISE grants so that portion of the study can be completed quickly.
 - 5. LADOTD is also working on agreements with Amtrak to sign before end of year and starting to work on agreements with parishes/cities for management of stations and funding support for operations.
 - 6. The Bonne Carre spillway is the largest infrastructure piece requiring \$100m in improvements needed.
 - iii. Senator Long connected with Knox with the Louisiana Municipal Association to speak with them at a meeting on June 21.
 - iv. John Gallagher of LMA brings in small rural communities that don’t typically have voice, and it is important for rural mayors to hear about these projects firsthand.
 - v. MS/AL also have this statewide network of local leaders and are encouraged to engage with the rural communities who will benefit from these projects.
 - b. Mississippi - Next steps on New Orleans to Mobile
 - i. In Mobile, there is progress on the station site with agreements between Amtrak working with city moving forward on building a temporary platform and developing a vision for future station.
 - ii. David Clark scheduled a meeting with local elected officials that went very well.

- iii. When questioned about the timeframe for start of operations, Nicole said Amtrak is working hard to get it running this year.
 - iv. The CRISI has to be finalized by FRA but work is still underway to get the ADA compliant platform built so service can begin.
 - c. Alabama
 - i. Recent activity – Commissioner Bennington thanked David Clark and Wiley Blankenship for their ongoing communications with the Governor’s office which is keeping the state focused on the progress in LA/MS.
 - ii. Commissioner Bennington reported on station improvements in Anniston which have completed 100% plans, with review/approvals getting underway.
- IV. Overview of Hy Stor Energy’s Mississippi Clean Hydrogen Hub project - *Laura L. Luce*
 - a. Formed 5 yrs ago as a Mississippi entity to bring energy resiliency
 - b. Propose to fuel hydrogen train with Green Hydrogen – take energy and water/split it to be an energy carrier and storer, with natural occurring geology, can store it and dispatch it in MS in pipelines for larger plants or to run the train.
 - c. Why MS: natural geology and geography and can connect clean and quiet with hydrogen train.
 - d. Hy Stor H2Hub has \$2b budget for hydrogen hub, \$1b request, \$1b private match, \$1b fed match.
 - e. Hy Stor is one of final 22 selected, to be announced this Fall.
 - f. Budget includes hydrogen rail train at cost of \$150m plus fueling for 7-10 years, and some operations.
 - g. Also the request includes \$2 m per station to make resiliency centers with backup generators for emergency situations.
 - h. Hydrogen is as versatile as diesel, with no requirement for overhead lines.
 - i. The New Orleans/Baton Rouge route is also opportunity to use hydrogen trains.
 - j. Port Bienville Industrial Park will have a mobile fueling station.
- V. Siemens Hydrogen Trains – *Franziska Lambrecht, Director for North America (located in Sacramento)*
 - a. Siemens wants to bring new technologies with hydrogen.
 - b. The proposed platform is designed based on efficiency, focused on emissions and fuel consumption, with minimum emissions.
 - c. The battery concept works for short range and low elevation, commuter service.
 - d. If the route is longer than 50 miles, need hydrogen for capacity. The train has capacity to run 500 miles.
 - e. Siemens wants to develop a solution for both short and longer routes.
 - f. Hydrogen power car is clean and emission free.
 - g. The output of power car is energy, and safety is important.
 - h. Siemens wants to bring the gulf coast experience into the train.
 - i. This would be the newest train in the US, with no noise and cars can be added as needed
 - j. Decarbonized transport: will reduce carbon emissions by more than 3,000 t of CO2 per year.
 - k. The timeline for building the train depends on NTP and could be up by 48 months after NTP.
 - l. Hydrogen fueling is issue of concern for some, but there is already a project in Germany with mobile fueling stations, and there have been no mistakes, and the science is not new in terms of unknowns.
 - m. Hydrogen is lighter, does not exceed weight limits so no there is no need to upgrade tracks.
 - n. The trains also offer faster acceleration ramp ups. than diesel values since it’s an electric experience

- o. Siemens wants SRC's support and is waiting to hear from Dept of Energy. They want to get input on using funds for resilience aspect of train station.
- p. Siemens will build a corporate office in Bay St. Louis if awarded.
- q. The trains will be built to be FRA compliant.
- r. Assuming funding is granted, and Amtrak says yes, Siemens will also need a maintenance facility (adds jobs). Hystor is encouraging co-location.
- s. Facility jobs will come with this project, but Siemens will be building initially in Sacramento for first cars to meet timeline but in future could localize.

OLD BUSINESS:

- I. Safety campaign and other updates from Amtrak - *Todd Stennis and Marc Magliari*
 - 1. Crews are working to get ready for service starts along the gulf coast.
 - 2. There have been 3 major incidents with cars going around gates, one was loss of life.
 - 3. Media messages and police are engaged, but need to amplify messages and get the word out to friends and neighbors.
- Working with emergency management agencies, on the "stay off the tracks campaign"
- Safety runs will start running on proposed schedules soon and Amtrak will run trains overnight
- There is a 1-800 number to dispatch for unsafe activities or slow train observed.
- LA, MS have both put up the match for I-20 and for the operations for Gulf coast route.
- LA has legislatively put up match funds for IJA opportunities.

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETING:

- I. Sept. 8th Alabama
- II. Dec. 8th Louisiana

ADJOURNMENT