

Meeting of the Southern Rail Commission

June 9, 2017 9:00am-12:00pm
Windcreek Hospitality in Wetumpka AL
303 Poarch Rd, Atmore, AL 36502
MINUTES

SRC Commissioners attending: Greg White, John Spain, Shawn Wilson, Jerome, Kay Kell, Roy Woodruff, Jerry Gehman, Ashley Edwards, Patrick Sullivan, Claire Austin

Commissioners Not in Attendance: Walt Leger, Steve Carter, Larry Watts, Toby Bennington (Greg White has proxy), Tommy Clark (John has proxy), Knox Ross, Angelia Mance, Jack Norris, Blake Wilson

Others in attendance: Betsy Nelson (NARP), Janice Hamilton (AL Public Service Commission), Patty Culp (SE Tourism Society), John Robert Smith, Rachel DiResto, Bryan Jones, Chance McKneely, Phil Jones, Elizabeth Lawlor (Northfolk Southern), Alvin Jackson - GCWG (Live Oak), Matt Holleman

Call to Order: *Chairman Greg White at 9:05am*

Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer by Jerry Gehman

Welcome by Jerry Gehman – The Poarch Creek Tribe is happy to host this SRC meeting and looks forward to being a corporate partner with Amtrak and SRC. In addition to owning properties in Atmore, the tribe will be building another casino in D’Iberville, MS so their interest in the return of passenger service along the Gulf Coast is growing.

REGULAR BUSINESS:

- I. Approval of the minutes from the meeting on March 3, 2017 – motion by Shawn to approve, Jerry seconded, motion passes.
- II. Financial and Administrative Report - *Greg White* reported that Debbie Vignes keeps close tabs on our work. The dues have been collected from MS, anticipate soon that AL will pay, and LA-has initiated the paperwork to get their dues paid soon.
 - a. Motion to approve financials– John Spain, Jerry seconded, motion passes.
- III. Communications and Media Update-Rachel DiResto
 - a. Rachel reported that SRC’s recent call to action about the proposed Trump Budget yielded some great advocacy from stakeholders across the Gulf Coast who sent letters to the House and Senate Appropriations committees. The SRC thanks the following for their efforts:

Letters to Senate/House Committees:

- Mayor Blevins – City of Pascagoula
- Mayor Barney Arceneaux – City of Gonzales
- Parish President Natalie Robottom – St. John Parish
- Linda Owens
- Nikki Moon

- Call to Action emails by Commissioner Nancy Miller and Commissioner Scott Maddox in Tallahassee

Also the SRC thanks the following for sending Letters of Support for Proposed I-20 Corridor to Governor John Bel Edwards & Wick Moorman:

- Village of Junction City Louisiana
 - Ouchita Parish Police Jury in Monroe, LA
 - Mayor Ollie S. Tyler of Shreveport, LA
 - State Rep Patrick Jefferson, Homer LA
 - Origin Bank in Monroe
 - David Rockett, Jr., President of Greater Bossier Economic Development Foundation
 - President Nick Bruno, University of Louisiana, Monroe
 - Mayor Lorenz Walker of Bossier City, LA
 - Stacy Brown, President of Shreveport – Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau
 - Bossier Parish Police Jury
- b. Senator Nelson’s staff has been very active with local officials in FL. Alvin Jackson has met with Florida Governor Rick Scott, who has a good relationship with Transportation Secretary Chao.
- c. Community involvement – Kay requested that CPEX send SRC meeting notices to stakeholders to generate interest in attending meetings.
- d. All Aboard Live Oak –Alvin Jackson gave a brief report from Live Oak’s digital marketing efforts which includes website visits and social media analytics.
- A few key highlights are:
 - Over 16,000 website page views
 - 462 total social media followers (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram)
 - The video we premiered in April has reached over 20,000 Facebook users resulting in 10,000 views.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Report on Executive Committee activities (*White, Spain, John Robert Smith*)
 - Update on Visit with Senators Wicker and Cochran-*John Spain*
 - Continuation of Gulf Coast working group – the report has been finalized and includes the costs of capital improvements. The SRC Executive Committee met in DC with FRA and CSX in May in a significant meeting and although a wide variety of cost estimates were included in the report, CSX presented their final position as supporting only the highest cost figure of \$2.3 billion. Next the report will be reviewed by various federal agencies and ultimately be sent to congress with findings. The higher cost estimate is still in the report, but SRC sent letter expressing our opinion that the lower numbers are more appropriate.
 - The lower number was not a random estimate – it is a valid figure derived with input from engineers, Amtrak, FRA and CSX working to assess requirements. SRC and FRA are disappointed with CSX’s hard stance on the estimated cost to restore service. The

Gulf Coast Working Group asked for ongoing negotiation on this and CSX said no. SRC is disappointed in the lack of willingness to continue conversation.

- iii. The SRC Exec also met with Amtrak CEO, Wick Moorman and Amtrak senior staff to discuss how long it will take to get the train running. Amtrak said it can happen quickly. CSX agreed to start 3 day service more quickly, but SRC wants a more effective new service operating 7 days a week.
 - iv. John Robert Smith said that Moorman is committed to running the train on the Gulf Coast and on North LA route. Expressed thanks for work by SRC to support Amtrak's operating and capital funding at federal level.
 - v. The SRC was helpful in supporting the CRISI language, which is an infrastructure and safety initiative with \$20m authorized and appropriated through Wicker and Cochran's efforts – this is significant.
 - vi. Also SRC supported the Rail Enhancement grant program – expansion of rail program, and the Gulf Coast project is in the most competitive position to receive these funds. Still have to write rules on how to apply for these funds.
 - vii. New DOT Director Chow will appoint a new FRA administrator but senior staff has been consistent. The new deputy administrator of FRA is from MS.
 - viii. Ashley said the class-one freight RRs are competitive, although CSX is a large player. Potential changes in rules in measuring on-time performance could also be affecting our negotiations.
 - ix. Phil suggested try to show RR we are also trying to find benefit for them. The public sector would be investing in improving their ROW.
 - x. Discussion with coast guard and their protocol on bridges has been part of the working group negotiations. Improvements that work for passenger rail service also help the freights with speed. Mutual benefit was always the goal.
 - xi. Rail safety is key issue that will also have benefit for freight RR.
- b. Update on Gulf Coast Working Group and next steps.
 - c. Report on meeting with Amtrak CEO –
 - i. As mentioned, the SRC Exec met with Moorman and senior managers from Amtrak.
 - ii. They discussed bringing together the Governors from MS, LA and AL to talk about rail, which would be a remarkable opportunity that demonstrates how far we have come.
 - iii. Amtrak offered the Beech Grove car for this meeting to take place on a train ride – to talk about how to work together on a combined strategy to have a unified voice with Amtrak and would allow Amtrak CEO to get to know the Governor's and their priorities.
 - iv. Looking for dates to host this meeting in July or August.

NEW BUSINESS:

- I. I-20 Corridor Update
 - a. The Meridian to DFW route would not require a subsidy to operate, only needs funding for capital improvements.
 - b. \$300 m has been invested in corridor over last decade.

- c. The goal is run an inspection train in August or September – Amtrak is ready to do this before end of year.
- d. In anticipation, we have been compiling list of high profile dignitaries and will share with Commissioners for feedback and to add contacts to list.
- e. Senator Thompson from North LA passed a resolution in support of this service during the LA legislative session.

II. State Reports

- a. Louisiana
 - i. Update on BR-NO Rail project – Shawn reported that there is great disappointment that legislators did not pass a proposed gas tax which would have included funding for rail project.
 - ii. He was pleased that the coalition of supporters stayed behind a multi-modal approach.
 - iii. DOTD will take advantage of investments that improve safety on freight corridors – and has some funding available to do this.
 - iv. Excited about I-20 corridor – Mayors have requested capital outlay for Shreveport to improve its multi-modal hub.

III. Legislative Affairs Update and Update on Station Planning Grants-John Robert Smith

- a. SRC provided station planning grants to communities that were eligible and the grants are administered through FRA who has had to create their own internal structure for this.
- b. Cities have been requested to provide information and cannot spend funds until FRA signs off. The recipients are aware of status: Mobile – done; Louisiana –should be done in next two weeks
- c. The proposed budget by Trump includes an emphasis on public private partnerships – financing (private) and funding (public) – however these still need public federal partner.
- d. Administration budget calls for \$200B in infrastructure investment over 10 years spread over every mode – which is not a big number and means less funding for transportation trust fund.
- e. Most concerning is that the Trump budget proposes cuts in \$206B over same 10-year time period to TIGER, Corp of Engineers and Amtrak, and Delta Regional Authority.
- f. Senate is sending a bipartisan message that this budget is not going anywhere. There is still an opportunity to tweak budget and we hope rail will be protected.

IV. SRC called upon two guests to present on their initiatives:

- a. Patty Culp from the Southeast AL Travel Council based in Montgomery reported on the upcoming annual advocacy trip to DC where priority issue is transportation,
 - i. Leave on June 19th – 13 people from AL attending
 - ii. Patty also represents Alabama Tourism and reminded SRC that Toby is the rep from SRC on the Southeast Tourism Society.
- b. Betsy Nelson presented information about the NARP summer intern program –
 - i. Summer by Rail internship program– 2 girls traveling by rail for one month, website and blogs to follow trip Summerbyrail.com
 - ii. Their trip starts July 31 in NYC and ends In New Orleans on August 22nd-23rd.

- iii. NARP is encouraging local officials to host them when they arrive to generate media
- iv. NARP also hosts Spring day on Hill last month – 200 visits on hill, 6000 calls to elected officials.
- v. NARP is organizing Rally for Trains campaign in 14 core cities including New Orleans and Birmingham.
- vi. Details are at Townswithouttrains.com – communities are invited to plan a media event with mayor to talk about negative impact of proposed federal budget.

V. Executive Session

SUMMARY AND SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS:

- September 8, 2017 Mississippi at Bay St. Louis
- December 8, 2017 Louisiana

ADJOURNMENT motion by Jerome, seconded by Kay at 11:46am