

CTB Rail Subcommittee Meeting Minutes  
VDOT Central Office Training Room  
1221 East Broad Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
December 4, 2018

The Meeting began at 8:30 am

CTB Rail Subcommittee Members Present: DRPT Director Jennifer Mitchell, Ray Smoot, Mary Hynes, Stephen Johnsen and John Malbon.

1. Approval of October 29th Minutes-The October meeting minutes were reviewed. Stephen Johnsen moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Mary Hynes and unanimously approved by the committee.
2. Director's Report-Jennifer Mitchell told the subcommittee that the Rail Industrial Access application for Superb Solutions For You would be brought before the full CTB for Action at Wednesday's meeting. She said that the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) staff had some due diligence to do regarding the application, which was brought to the workshop in June. Jennifer Mitchell told the subcommittee that a preferred alternative for Long Bridge had been announced. The preferred alternative is a separate two-track structure upstream that leaves the current bridge in place.
3. Rail Industrial Access Presentation-Superb Solutions for You-Jennifer Mitchell reviewed the application. She said that the grant was for \$230,810 and would create 25 new jobs. She said that DRPT staff had checked into the viability of the venture. Linda Balderson, the Rail Preservation and Access Programs Manager for the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, said that Superb Solutions for you had obtained a loan through the Federal Small Business Program and the County of Sussex has applied for grant funds through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development on behalf of Superb Solutions. Jennifer Mitchell reminded the committee that there is a claw back provision on Rail Industrial Access Applications. The following discussion points were noted:
  - Mary Hynes asked if the language in item number four of the Resolution, in the "Now Therefore, Be it Resolved" Section that references perpetual maintenance of a track was standard language. Mary Hynes said that she

had not seen that language before in other resolutions. Linda Balderson said that it was standard language that was in DRPT's grant agreements.

- Linda Balderson said that as soon as the Superb Solutions agreement is executed DRPT will file it with the county so that the Commonwealth has a lien against the business.
- Mary Hynes asked if the grant funding was reimbursable or given up front. Linda Balderson confirmed that it was reimbursable.
- Ray Smoot, who was not on the Commonwealth Transportation Board when the presentation was brought to the workshop in June, asked for more information about the site. He wanted to know where the business was located and on what railroad. Linda Balderson confirmed that the business was located in Waverly on Norfolk Southern's line on an existing rail spur that needs rehabilitation.
- Mary Hynes asked if DRPT had evaluated sites throughout the state that could be rail served. Linda Balderson said that DRPT is working with VEDP, the Short line rail roads and Class 1 railroads to create a database of sites that are rail servable. Mary Hynes suggested that this database be married up with the I-81 study, to give trucks options to get off of I-81.

4. Amtrak Focus Group Results and Economic Forecast-Chris Smith, DRPT and Jane Broadbent, Siddall Communications-Chris Smith said that the presentation would be follow up from the meeting in June. He also indicated to committee members that they had been provided with copies of two annual reports that DRPT had submitted to the General Assembly. One report was on the Intercity Passenger Rail Fund (IPROC) and the other was on How DRPT is using transit and transportation demand management (TDM) to reduce single-occupancy vehicle use in Virginia. Chris Smith said that DRPT had noted dips in ridership over the summer of 2018 due to operational challenges and marketing issues. He said that Siddall Communications had been tasked with conducting a study and doing research. The following discussion points on the presentation were noted.

- Ray Smoot asked who had participated in the survey. Jane Broadbent said that focus group participants came from the Virginias for High Speed Rail mailing list as well as the Southeastern Institute of Research universal sample panel.
- Chris Smith noted that most of Virginia's train riders are leisure travelers.
- Michael McLaughlin and Chris Smith noted that ridership has been increasing since the summer. They attributed this to better on time performance, the completion of the parking lot at the Staples Mill Amtrak Station and the completion of construction at Acca Yard.
- Jane Broadbent noted that those who had been surveyed were very sensitive to the conditions at stations. Jennifer Mitchell said that next year DRPT staff will begin compiling a station inventory and documenting immediate needs at each station. DRPT will then bring back a prioritized list of needs to the committee.

- The effect of discounts on ridership was discussed. Jennifer Mitchell provided context on the discounts and said that in 2018 Amtrak cut back on discounts. She said that it was hard to determine what effect that had on ridership. Jennifer Mitchell said that the State does not have much control over the price of trains in the North East Corridor but that there are some discounts that could be instituted in Virginia. An inter Virginia discount was discussed. Chris Smith says that an inter Virginia discount will only work as well as the state works with Amtrak. Conversations on how to integrate our discount into their system have begun.
  - Stephen Johnsen noted that Virginia's annual subsidy to Amtrak for state-sponsored trains is about \$15 million dollars (note: this is the FY2019 allocation which includes new Norfolk service. FY18 was about \$11m). He noted that increases in the discount decrease revenue. Jane Broadbent stated that while there would be a decrease in revenue it would be slight and that the increase in riders would offset that decrease over the long-term. Ray Smoot noted that spending an additional \$683,000 a year could increase ridership by 51,000 passengers.
  - John Malbon suggested creating flash sale promotions during the slow travel months (generally January and February) that would pique the interest of those who do not normally take the train.
  - Jennifer Mitchell said that the next steps were to begin conversations with Amtrak and work to begin phasing in discounts. The state will also continue to work around issues involving food and wifi, as well as other low cost high impact improvements. Michael McLaughlin noted that Secretary Valentine had stressed the need for cleanliness on the trains to the Amtrak CEO and that her conversation with him had resolved some of those issues.
  - Mary Hynes suggested encouraging legislators and public interest groups who travel to Richmond to use the train during session.
  - Jennifer Mitchell said that DRPT is continuing to work with Lyft on the last mile issue.
5. Public Comment-No one was signed up for public comment. Mary Hynes asked that a report on the quantitative data be brought to the full CTB.
  6. The meeting adjourned at 9:45.