

**Southern Rail Commission
Full Commission Meeting
September 12, 2014**

Minutes

A meeting of the Southern Rail Commission was held on Friday, September 12, 2014 at the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission offices in Birmingham, Alabama. Commission members in attendance were Vice Chairman Greg White, Larry Watts, J.W. "Billy" McFarland, Claire Austin and Toby Bennington of Alabama; Charles Ozier and Kay Kell of Mississippi; Michael Jackson and Roy Woodruff of Louisiana.

Guests in attendance were Mayor William Bell of Birmingham, Mayor Vaughn Stewart of Anniston, Melinda McGrath with Mississippi DOT, Josh Stubbs with Mississippi DOT, Bryan Jones with HNTB Corporation, Dan Dealy with T4America, Joe McAndrew with T4America, Tim Basilica with the Center for Planning Excellence and Rachel DiResto with the Center for Planning Excellence via conference call.

1. Welcome and Call to Order

Commissioner White called the meeting to order and led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioner McFarland led the invocation. Commissioner White welcomed the guests and congratulated the newly appointed and reappointed Alabama Commissioners.

2. Old Business

Meeting minutes were approved for the July 2014 full Commission meeting held in Biloxi, Mississippi. Commissioner Bennington motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Watts seconded the motion, and the motion was unanimously approved.

3. New Business

Approval of bylaw changes: Commissioner White presented several proposed bylaw adjustments including ratifying the vote on terms for Officers and the make-up of the Executive Committee. Commissioner White moved to approve the outlined bylaw changes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Austin. The motion was unanimously approved.

Meeting Frequency:

Commissioner Bennington opened a discussion to increase the number of full Commission meetings to 6 per year, instead of 4. Bennington cited an increased level of activity as reason for the additional meetings. Commissioner White reviewed the current bylaws for meeting frequency and opens to the floor for discussion. Several Commissioners acknowledged the financial impacts as the major barrier to additional meetings that require travel. Commissioner Bennington proposed interim video conferencing as a potential alternative.

Commissioner McFarland voiced his support for the two extra meetings citing it would be worth the investment. Commissioner Austin requested the cost-per-meeting information to better understand the impact. Commissioner Woodruff proposed they use the rail line cities to save on mileage.

Commissioner McFarland made the motion to add two meetings to the annual schedule. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bennington. Before the motion could be voted on, Melinda McGrath asked the Commissioner what the return would be on the two additional meetings. Commissioner Bennington explained that there would be an increase in activity and that there has been a tremendous amount of information exchanged between meetings that should be discussed at live meetings.

The discussion on meeting frequency was tabled to allow for Mayor's Panel.

Mayor's Panel: Commissioner White introduced Joe McAndrew from Transportation for America as the facilitator of the panel. Commissioner Watts introduced William Bell, Mayor of Birmingham and Commissioner Bennington introduced Vaughn Stewart, Mayor of Anniston.

Both mayors detailed how rail could enhance the current planning underway in their cities. They also shared obstacles and issues that could improve regional connectivity and collaboration. Mayor Bell emphasized reliability as a key factor to growing ridership. Mayor Stewart emphasized the need to focus on seniors and students as key sectors that could benefit and advocate for increased rail. Both mayors also detailed the funding mechanisms that financed their recent rail-related projects. Commissioner White opened the floor for questions. After several questions, Commissioner White thanked the mayors for participating in the panel and mentioned the Southeast Multi-State Rail Workshop as a forum to continue the discussion.

Mayor Stewart made a suggestion to the Commission to create a "Best Practices" manual to help local elected officials understand funding and implementation mechanisms for rail projects. The idea was well received by the Commission with Commissioner Bennington and Ozier voicing support for the Southern Rail Commission's involvement in local implementation support.

Transportation for America report: Commissioner White asked Joe McAndrew of Transportation of America to give the strategic report.

McAndrew began his report by detailing activity in Washington. He stated there was good momentum generated by recent SRC efforts related to restoration of Gulf Coast passenger rail. He updated the Commission that the TIGER grant for planning was not awarded, but it sparked an in-depth conversation with FRA on Capital Hill. He mentioned that Beth Osborne, Vice President, Transportation and Development Services for Transportation for America, was completing the grant application for the FRA multi-state funding opportunity. The proposed grant would include \$150,000 of local match funds with remainder coming from the FRA.

McAndrew also mentioned a breakthrough call with Amtrak that occurred the week prior. He said that Amtrak was excited about the momentum generated around the opportunity to connect New Orleans with Orlando.

T4 America, in coordination with the SRC, worked with House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Rail Ranking Member Rep Corrine Brown (D-FL) in March and April on including creation of a Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Working Group in the next PRIIA bill. House T&I Committee included a provision to create a Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Working Group that includes SRC in the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act (HR 5449), which was introduced on September 11. The Working Group will coordinate with Amtrak, state DOTs, SRC, municipalities and planning organizations along the corridor. The bipartisan support for the Gulf Coast Working Group in the House shows further partnership and support for SRC's FRA application. It is anticipated that Congress will move slowly to enact the next PRIIA reauthorization, as well as the next surface transportation reauthorization, so the FRA grant application is a good stop gap measure in the interim. McAndrew suggested to work with CPEX to develop a statement commending the inclusion of the Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Working Group provision in the bill.

McAndrew also reported on development of an Amtrak station in Marks Mississippi for the New Orleans service. During a hearing in the Senate Commerce Committee to focus on rail service throughout the country, Senator Wicker (R-MS) did great job calling out CN in their unwillingness to work with Amtrak, the State of Mississippi and the City of Marks to develop a stop in Marks. Under questioning from Wicker, the CEO for the Association of American Railroads (rail carrier trade association) agreed to work with Senator Wicker and Amtrak to develop a flagstop in Marks. McAndrew recommended writing a letter to Wicker to give thanks and show support.

There will likely be another bill introduced shortly from Senators Murphy (D-CT) and Carper (D-DE) that they are calling internally 'TIFIA for rail.' The bill would enable funding for large passenger rail projects, with most of the funding going to NE corridor. This bill would potentially include \$150M for route and station planning, along with new planning and financing opportunities for multi-state passenger rail organizations. T4 will send summaries of this bill when it is presented.

4. New Business (continued)

Commissioner White reopened the discussion on the motion to increase full Commission meetings to 6 annually — rather than the current 4. Commissioner Bennington said it would be helpful to have the structure in place for 6 meetings since meetings could always be cancelled if deemed unnecessary.

Commissioner Kell mentioned that perceptions also needed to be considered. She cautioned that DOT partners may not see the value. Commissioner Ozier voiced his concern that it may not be the right time to adjust the meeting frequency based on the comments heard.

Commissioner Woodruff amended the motion on the table to decide on meeting frequency after giving it more thought. The amended motion was seconded by Commissioner Ozier.

Commissioner White moves to vote on the amended motion to delay the decision. The entire Commission voted “aye” except for Commissioner Bennington who voted “no.”

Commissioner White reported that an information request was received from a reporter based in New Orleans. The Executive Officers responded and provided the information requested, but have not received any follow-up from the reporter.

Reports on rail activity:

For the Alabama delegation, Commissioner Bennington gave an update about work underway to review the BP manual and work will continue with AL colleagues in developing a proposal to identify some of the topics brought up by the mayor. Will report at the December full meeting. For the Mississippi delegation, Commissioner Ozier reported that they were waiting for the governor to appoint Elaine Wilkinson to the Commission. Josh Stubbs with MSDOT reported that there is a heavy focus on freight. For the Louisiana delegation, Bryan Jones with HNTB Corporation detailed the newly completed feasibility study for rail from Baton Rouge to New Orleans and the start of a similar study for the Shreveport to Vicksburg route. He referenced a recent article where the Jindal administration was more “open to the project.” He also mentioned a renewed urgency due to the historic industrial investment being made in South Louisiana.

Commissioner White invited Dan Dealy, a strategic consultant working with Transportation for America, to address the Commission. Dealy detailed the efforts in applying for the TIGER and mentioned an increased level of attention from USDOT Secretary Anthony Fox and FRA Chairman Joseph Szabo. Dealy also mentioned the FRA grant application under completion by Beth Osborne. He encouraged continued conversation at the Southeast Multi-State Rail Workshop and encouraged thinking about rail as a means for community resiliency to move people out of natural disasters and restore services to Gulf Coast. He encouraged the Commission to emphasize issues such as resiliency and economic impacts of rail.

Commissioner White introduced Tim Basilica of the Center for Planning Excellence to provide a communications update. Basilica gave an update on the progress of the official SRC website that includes more history collected by Commissioner McFarland from the materials that were being kept in a storage unit. Basilica presented the current registration list for the upcoming Southeast Multi-State Rail Workshop which includes a representative from each state DOT.

Tim also presented the board resolution to appoint Commissioner Michael Jackson as the Southern Rail Commission designee to Louisiana Super Region Rail Authority. Commissioner White made a motion to approve Jackson's appointment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Woodruff and unanimously approved by the Commission.

5. Finances

Commissioner White referenced the extensive listing of activity. He presented a high-level overview of the provided budget. He moved to accept the budget report. The motion to approve was made by Commissioner Bennington and seconded by Commissioner Austin. The motion was unanimously approved. Commissioner White updated the Commission regarding the final version of the audit due to be ready on October 31.

6. Miscellaneous Business

Commissioner White informed the group that the next meeting is scheduled for December 12 in New Orleans. Several Commissioners were concerned about lower attendance due to proximity to the holidays. Commissioner White moved that December 5 be considered for the next meeting. Commissioner White mentioned that Secretary Spain (not in attendance) would poll the Commission to get feedback on the December meeting date.

Commissioner McFarland commended the branding and communications work performed by the Center for Planning Excellence. Commissioner Austin suggested a more in-depth media strategy and offered to help coordinate that effort.

7. Adjourned