

**SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION
FULL COMMISSION MEETING
Friday, March 7, 2014**

MINUTES

A meeting of the Southern Rail Commission was held on Friday, March 7, 2014 in the Kantrow Conference Room at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's office. Committee members in attendance were Chair Knox Ross, John Spain, Larry Watts (Proxy for Aubry Miller), Charles Ozier, Greg White, Billy McFarland, Kay Kell, Michael Jackson, Phil Jones, Roy Woodruff, Representative Steve Carter, Walt Leger III, John Robert Smith (Transportation for America), Natalie Cook by phone (Accountant, Southeast Alabama Regional Planning) and Amber Cefalu (Baton Rouge Area Foundation).

I. WELCOME/CALL TO ORDER

Knox Ross welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Committee members and BRAAF for their participation in the process of identifying, investigating and recommending the agenda for Meeting.

Chairman Knox Ross led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Meeting minutes were approved from the December 6, 2013 meeting Full Commission Meeting.

II. NEW BUSINESS

John Robert Smith with Transportation for America, thanked the commission for allowing him to be the consulting voice for the Southern Rail Commission. Mr. Smith proceeded with a presentation to give an update from Washington, DC and on the TIGER grant. Mr. Smith explained to the commission how he is seeking the TIGER Grant funding for the Mississippi-Alabama Rail Study. Deadline to submit the application for TIGER Grant is April 28, 2014. The recommendation was made by Mr. Smith to apply asap. Walt Leger III made a motion to grant the Executive Committee the authority to make the decision to expend the funds for the TIGER Grant. Knox Ross seconded the motion and the commission passed the motion

Mr. Smith updated the commission on the possible meetings in Atlanta and Washington.

Mr. Smith proposed a resolution for the Mississippi State legislature to support and fund the rail study from Vicksburg to Meridian. Knox Ross made a motion to approve, Greg White seconded and the commission approved.

John Spain gave an update on the New Orleans-Baton Rouge passenger rail and his trip to meet with Transportation Secretary Foxx. Mr. Spain explained that he, Mayor Holden, Vice Mayor of New Orleans Andy Koplin, and Bryn Jones from HNTB met with Secretary Foxx and updated him on the passenger rail. Secretary Foxx expressed interest and their FRA support.

Mr. Smith brought the Transportation for America proposal for administrative services to the commission's attention and explained what services will be provided.

Rachel Diresto, Vice President of CPEX, presented a proposal for strategic marketing and communication support. This includes website design, SRC brochures, and presentations. A motion was made by Knox Ross to approve the contract with CPEX and the commission unanimously approved.

III. FINANCE REPORT

Ms. Natalie Cook updated the commission on the financial report. Ms. Cook asked the commission to approve the format in which she has organized the SRC finances. Greg White made a motion to for the commission to approve, Knox Ross seconded, and the commission approved. Ms. Cook inquired about states dues and the commission agreed to discuss this at the next full commission meeting.

IV. NEXT DATES

Mr. Ross brought the next dates of the commission meetings to the attention of the commissioners. It was decided that the next meeting will be in Biloxi, MS on June 27th at 2:00pm.

V. ADJOURN

With no further business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Southern Rail Commission
Minutes of the Regular Commission Meeting
Montgomery, Alabama
December 6, 2013

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:00AM with ten Commissioners in attendance as follows:

Alabama: Toby Bennington, J.W. McFarland Jr.; Greg White, Larry Watts

Mississippi: Knox Ross, Kay Kell

Louisiana: John Spain, Michael Jackson, Phil Jones, Steve Carter

Chairman Ross led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The first order of business was the approval of the minutes of the September 6, 2013 meeting.

Government Relations Contract

John Robert Smith proposed a government relations contract to the Commission that would take advantage of TIFIA and TIGER funding programs. John Robert Smith directed the Commission to come up with a prioritized list of projects.

Brenda Jones stated that the feasibility study for the Montgomery-Birmingham line is waiting for FRA and local government's approval. Surveys have been conducted in both cities.

John Robert Smith offered his assistance in drafting a proposal for TIGER support and TIFIA modification as well as pursuing additional sources of funding.

Upon a motion by John Spain and a second by Toby Bennington to enter into a contract with John Robert Smith and Reconnecting America, Chairman Ross brought this matter to a vote. The Commission passed the motion unanimously.

John Robert Smith has drafted a letter to the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee in support of continued federal funding for Amtrak services. The letter is available online for mayors and city councilmen to sign. He requested that Commissioners support this effort.

2014 Washington Trip

Commissioner Spain stated the need to meet with Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx in Washington, D.C. concerning rail projects in the South. Commissioner Spain added that Delegates from Louisiana will be heading to the Washington Mardi Gras during the week of February 17-22 and that this would be an opportune time for the Commission's visit if possible.

Commissioner Bennington expressed support for a trip during the week suggested.

John Robert Smith stated that he would be talking with higher-ups in Washington later this month to advocate for meetings with the Southern Rail Commission. He also stated that the Commission needs a direct ask and not to just smile and shake hands. The traveling party should consist of no more than two commissioners per state.

Commissioner McFarland suggested that the trip be extended a few more days in order to work with John Robert Smith.

Commissioner Spain offered support to John Robert Smith in looking for ways to improve the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program (RRIF) that would expedite the loan process and make funds available for railroad infrastructure.

Commissioner Spain also asked for John Roberts Smith's support in asking the FRA Atlanta office to convene a multistate meeting on passenger rail similar to the one held in Dallas earlier this year. .

John Robert Smith stated that the Commission should not rely on general government funds for transportation as MAP-21 expires in 2015. He told the commission to assume federal budget cuts of 40 percent as a benchmark.

JRWA Presentation

Rod Wilburn proposed a partnership between ADECA and ALDOT. He stated that ALDOT is looking for a list of potential projects to bring to Washington, but because of limited funding the list must be prioritized.

Rod Wilburn stated that a copy of the revised Alabama Rail Plan is available online and an electronic file will be available upon request.

Rod Wilburn stated that the state of Alabama is in favor of infrastructure improvement projects and projects that support economic development for surrounding areas. He promised to research an exact figure of previously allocated state of Alabama funds expended for passenger rail, and send it out in an email to the Commission.

Commissioner McFarland questioned the ALDOT plan and its ability to gain federal funding.

Commissioner Bennington proposed bringing in MPOs and RPOs to facilitate the projects.

SRC Power Point Presentation

Commissioner McFarland moved to approve a new SRC power point presentation to replace the existing one. He suggested that input from CPEX and John Robert Smith would be helpful in

creating the new presentation. Commissioner White suggested that there will likely be a cost associated with creating the new power point. He also moved to give spending authority to the chairman.

Chairman Ross brought this to a vote and the commission unanimously agreed to give authority to expend necessary funds to the chairman.

N.O. Baton Rouge Rail Study

Commissioner Spain then provided copies of the final draft of the HNTB study on the New Orleans-Baton Rouge passenger rail proposal. He stated that meetings have been held with both Kansas City Southern and Canadian National freight rail companies who have agreed to work with the state on the use of their tracks for the proposed service. Spain also reported that the City of New Orleans was planning to build a new passenger terminal at Louis Armstrong Airport and the plans included a direct connection from the proposed passenger rail service and the airport passenger terminal. Finally Spain informed the commission members that as part of the next phase of the work on the New Orleans-Baton Rouge passenger rail project, the Louisiana commissioners may request a grant from the SRC for use as a local match in the next phase of the work.

Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Summit

Dan Dealy gave an update on the proposed gulf coast summit for passenger rail. He pointed out a number of issues that had been raised in the initial summit in Mobile, AL in 2013. Among those were the idea to target retirees moving to more coastal regions and the impact of passenger rail service on regional economic development.

Dan Dealy recommends that the Southern Rail Commission consider hosting the Summit event. He believes this is an appropriate focus for the Commission. Mr. Dealy proposed that his firm be hired by the Commission to coordinate this upcoming event on their behalf. A draft proposal has been forwarded to staff, but was not available for consideration at the meeting.

Dan Dealy stated that sponsors covered the entire cost of the previous summit and \$4,000 of sponsorship money is available for the next summit. The Commission expressed interest in sponsoring this event, and they will consider the proposal from Dealy.

Scheduling the Next SRC Meeting

Chairman Ross suggested that the Commission have future SRC Meetings along the Gulf Coast because the geographic location is convenient for all Commissioners.

Commissioner McFarland stated his disagreement with this proposal, and suggested that each state delegation should determine meeting locations when they are the host state.

Commissioner Spain stated that the drives must be equal for all Commission members in order for attendance to increase.

Commissioner McFarland also suggested that the Commission increase the frequency of meetings from once every three months to once every other month. He stated that having meetings every second month would prevent things from "falling through the cracks" No decision to change the frequency of meetings was made. No action was taken on either of these suggestions.

Finance Report

Commissioner White recognized SEARP&DC for an excellent job in accounting services. He proposed that the Commission discuss the current year budget at the next SRC meeting.

A written financial report was provided by SEARP&DC, and was briefly reviewed by the Commission.

Missing Funds

Commissioner McFarland addressed his concern of missing financial documents. He stated that two checks were written for unknown amounts. He also stated that three months of files from December 1, 2012- February 21, 2013 were missing from records that he received from South Alabama Regional Planning Commission.

Commissioner McFarland stated that he suspects malfeasance and that he is concerned because the SRC has not had outside auditing for the past two years.

Commissioner White and Chairman Ross suggested that action on these concerns be delayed until the upcoming audit is completed. The firm that audits the accounts of SEARP&DC has been directed to audit both of the two most recent years of SRC accounts and is expected to complete this by June 2014. It is expected that any "missing" bank activity can be identified by the auditor, and that copies of documents can be obtained from the bank.

Commissioner Bennington moved to proceed into .Executive Session to discuss problems with the Commission's administrative services contract. Upon proper second, the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Ross excused all non-commission members, and moved into Executive Session at 12:05PM.

Chairman Ross reconvened the Commission at 12:20. A motion was made by Commissioner Bennington and seconded by Commissioner Spain, to take appropriate action to terminate the services of Efficiency LLC in accordance with the terms of our contract. This motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Chairman Ross **adjourned** the Commission meeting at 12:25