

***SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION FULL COMMISSION MEETING***  
***Biloxi, Mississippi***

Friday, June 5, 2015  
9:00am-12:00pm  
MINUTES

Attendance: Brent Warr, Claire Austin, J.W.Billy McFarland, Knox Ross, Michael Jackson, John Spain, Phil Jones, Roy Woodruff, Toby Bennington, Kay Kell

Others: Brenda Jones, Dan Dealy, Rachel DiResto, Tim Basilica, Bryan Jones, Jerome Trahan, Jim Mathews, Betsy Nelson, Paul Nelson

Commissioners Not in Attendance: Larry Watts (Bennington has proxy), Angelia Mance, Greg White, Steve Carter (Spain has proxy), Walt Leger (Spain has proxy), Natalie Laborde

**A. Full Commission Meeting**

1. Chairman Ross welcomed everyone to the meeting and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**B. New Business**

1. Presentation by Amtrak on marketing programs in support of passenger rail by Jerome Trahan
  - a. The Crescent Promotional Office was a 1999 initiative directed by the Amtrak Board of Directors and designed to address a lack of regionally focused, grass roots marketing
  - b. The CPO built marketing relationships in the region and at destinations along the route of the Crescent (City of New Orleans & Sunset) and reinforced a regional identity by using a Tourism Forward approach
  - c. The CPO had a Toll free number & targeted web presence and facilitated groups & revenue management and developed unique promotions & packages such as the “Big Easy Getaways – Crescent Casino Express” and cruise connections
  - d. Amtrak has enhanced Amtrak.com website (new innovations on the way)
  - e. Amtrak Mobile app is being developed now
  - f. The collaborative environment proved that local market knowledge has value
  - g. Jerome presented the current ridership demographic information which is collected from ridership surveys.
  - h. Partnerships to leverage include: Amtrak Vacations, Trails to Rails and Southeast Tourism Society ([www.southeasttourism.org](http://www.southeasttourism.org))
  - i. Also collaboration with State Partners like Virginia have opened doors to new ways of doing business, this relationship has helped VA spent it’s state marketing dollars more effectively.

- j. The next step is for Jerome to go back to the marketing team to develop the plan and analyze travel demand and key destinations along the Crescent route, then they can develop a marketing approach.
  - k. Discussions continued about the need for improvements to the Amtrak website for ticket purchases and signage at each station. It was explained that local municipalities are responsible for the design, staffing and signage at the stations.
  - l. Commissioners discussed the interest in becoming a member of the Southeast Tourism Society and Jerome will connect the SRC to the Southeast Tourism Society.
  - m. Bennington said the Mayor of Anniston will be very interested in marketing opportunities.
2. Recognition of 10 Year Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina – Dan Dealy
- a. As part of the Katrina +10 event in MS, a special panel featuring the topic of passenger rail will be hosted at the Ohr O’Keefe Museum at 7pm on June 17<sup>th</sup>.
  - b. The panelists tentatively include: John Robert Smith (via Skype), Todd Stennis, Jim Mathews, Brent Warr, Knox Ross and Paul Nelson.
  - c. CPEX will assist in promoting the panel on the SRC website and by creating a template email invite that commissioners can use to send out to their networks.
3. Discussion and adoption of new Commission policies:
- a. Conflict of Interest signed statements – Although the current bylaws contain a conflict of interest statement, it was suggested that each commissioner should sign a Conflict of Interest form that would be included in the SRC archives.
    - i. Commissioners discussed whether they were notified of the proposed change in bylaws prior to this meeting. The agenda served as the notice of this edit to the bylaws and the amended language is presented at this meeting: “Each Commissioner will annually sign a Conflict of Interest Form stating that they have read and understood these Conflict of Interest policies and agree to abide by them. These annual reports will be filed with the Secretary-Treasurer of the Commission.”
    - ii. John Spain made the motion to approve this amendment and to sign the conflict statements at the September meeting, Michael Jackson seconded the motion, and the motion passed.
  - b. Proposal on the issuance of RFP’s and RFQ’s – Commissioners questioned whether contracts have been approved by the Executive Committee without review by the full commission. The current contracts held by the SRC including T4, Dan Dealy and CPEX, were all presented and approved by the full commission. The terms of these contracts expire annually and originally there

was a committee formed to receive and review proposals. Commissioner Bennington offered to develop a template RFQ/RFP for future proposals.

- c. Policy on retention of documents – SRC has 38 boxes and 2 filing cabinets of documents that are in storage with a monthly rental charge. The commission needs to sort these, digitize the important documents and clean out the storage unit. It was suggested that a few long-serving commissioners who can determine the value of the documents agree to clear out the unit in the next month.
  - d. Policy on proxies – The current bylaws do not stipulate that proxies be assigned to other commissioners. This was presented as a good business practice since proxies should have some working knowledge of the business of the SRC to perform this role. Commissioners asked whether this has posed a problem in the past. Ross suggests that they end the practice of non-member proxies.
  - e. McFarland calls to vote on the suggested change and 12 for change, 4 for unchanged (McFarland, Austin, McDuff and Mance via proxy). Motion passes with 2/3 votes.
4. Identifying a new firm to handle our finances and accounting
- a. SRC must hire a new financial firm. Warr suggests SRC solicit a competitive bid from firms each state. Spain says there's a sense of urgency. Commission should consider increasing the hourly rate.
  - b. Jackson moves to grant the Executive Committee the authority to develop the RFQ process to solicit proposals from accounting firms and to hire the firm. McFarland seconds motion. Unanimously approved.
5. Discussion of Federal Railroad Administration Earmarks for various projects
- a. Kay and Ross met with Senator Cochran and his staff has researched the requirements for the earmarks. A total of \$2,475,000 is available to address critical corridor and safety needs. The funds must be spent on assets directly linked to the designated High Speed Rail Corridor and require a local match.
  - b. Commissioners questioned whether funds could be used to improve existing stations. FRA would have to answer this.
  - c. At a previous meeting, SRC voted to reserve \$1m for grade crossing improvements on the Baton Rouge to New Orleans corridor.
  - d. The goal is to have an answer from the FRA at the next meeting clarifying how funds can be used. The Senate Appropriations Committee may have to approve these expenditures.
  - e. MS and AL should make a priority list for how remaining \$1,475,000 should be spent. Bennington emphasizes getting support from the local areas. It was cautioned that funding should not be promised to anyone.
  - f. The LA project may decide to use the LA-SRC funds as a local match.
6. Washington Update –Joe McAndrew

- a. The Senate PRIIA bill is expected to be marked up in the Senate Commerce Committee on June 24. Senator Wicker is leading the bill for the Republicans alongside Senator Booker. Items we expect to be in the bill include: the Gulf Coast Working Group provision also found in the House's PRIIA bill; reform to the Amtrak Board to include seats for members representing State-supported routes and Long-distance service; eligible use of capital construction grants for up to 3-years of operating assistance on new or expanded service; and development of a TIGER-esque competitive rail program.
  - b. Senator Wicker and his staff have supported the SRC's policy requests and would appreciate support from the SRC and states, cities and MPOs. T4 has provided everyone letters of support and resolutions for the preservation of a national passenger rail system and the Gulf Coast Working Group provision. Please work to see that letters are signed and resolutions are passed prior to the June 24th markup. Please cc Joe McAndrew on all letters sent to Hill offices so he can ensure Senator Wicker receives all of them.
  - c. House Transportation-HUD bill expected to pass the House of Representatives on Tuesday, June 9 making cuts to Amtrak funding by \$250 million in FY16. Amendments had been offered by Rep Mo Brooks to eliminate all funds for Amtrak in FY16. The Brooks' amendments were both rejected by the House on Thursday June 4. Rep Roby voted against Amtrak; Rep Harper voted with Amtrak; and Rep Graves took a mixed stand on the two amendments. We aren't out of the woods just yet as Rep Sessions from Texas has offered two amendments that would cut Long-distance service in FY16 including the Crescent, the City of New Orleans, and the Silver Meteor.
  - d. The Senate Appropriations Committee has yet to release their FY16 Transportation-HUD bill, but Chairman Ross has received notice from Senator Cochran's staff that they are looking to provide funding to support planning and development to restore service east of New Orleans.
  - e. There is still an open seat on the Amtrak Board and the SRC should send a resolution to McConnell and Boehner to nominate Knox Ross. SRC should get a letter of support from Vitter also.
  - f. McFarland moves to make adopt a board resolution to support Ross' nomination to the Amtrak Board. Seconded by Bennington. Motion passes.
7. Presentation of the Executive Committees Amtrak meeting in Boston. -Knox Ross
- a. Ross compiled the findings from the trip to Boston in a blog posted on the SRC website.
  - b. The takeaways include the importance of local buy-in, dedicated management, willingness to pay and local support to grow ridership.

- c. These states have a history of funding passenger rail, marketing the system and have a great relationship with Amtrak.

8. Update on Website Center for Planning Excellence.- *Rachel DiResto/Tim Basilica*

- a. CPEX frequently posts to the website and social media, has supported the requests of Commissioners for communication needs and has sent out press releases about the last SRC meeting and to announce the appointment of new Commissioner Mance.
- b. CPEX will assist in promoting the upcoming SRC panel at the Katrina+10 event in MS.

### **C. Finance and Administration Report**

1. Monthly Cost Summary Report Review – Commissioners reviewed the financial statements and Spain made a motion to approve the financials, seconded by Warr. Motion passes.

### **D. Old Business**

1. Approval of Minutes of the December 5, 2014 meeting and March 6, 2015 meeting.
  - i. Austin recommended an edit to the March meeting minutes.
  - ii. Spain moved to approve the December 5, 2014 meeting and March 6, 2015 meeting minutes with the requested edit. Bennington seconded. Motion passes.
2. Spain requested approval to use \$30,000 of LA project funds to hire T4 and CPEX to develop a Governor's briefing book on the Baton Rouge to New Orleans rail project.
3. Bennington asked for SRC to be credited in the final paper and moved to approve the request. Jackson seconded. Motion passes.

### **E. Miscellaneous**

Next Meetings:

- September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 – Louisiana – Commissioners discussed meeting in Jackson to ride the train to New Orleans.
- December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 – Alabama
- March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016-Mississippi

### **F. Meeting Adjourned**