

DRAFT MINUTES
SRPC Rail Working Group
June 17, 2015
4:00 pm to 5:15 pm

Convener: Bob Jaffin, Rochester

Members: Kenyon Karl, Maine Sierra Club; Peter Griffin, NH Railroad Revitalization Association; Rick Healey, SRPC Commissioner and Rochester Planning Board

Staff Present: Shayna Sylvia, Communications and Outreach Specialist

B. Jaffin asked the group if they were familiar with the Statewide Community Flow Study that Maine Emergency Management funded. The group was not. K. Karl shared that he was familiar with the Portland Comprehensive Transit Study. B. Jaffin opined that it would be beneficial if individuals from different disciplines within rail and transportation entities created and open line of communication.

1. Review of Submitted Tiger Grant Projects

S. Sylvia opened the excel document with sample rail and transportation projects submitted by B. Jaffin. He reviewed the submitted projects. He shared that Market Basket in Rochester will be the one of the anchors for the Granite Ridge development on Route 11. This relates to the first project he submitted which is focused on Route 11 traffic, pertaining to economic vitality which is one of the group's focuses.

B. Jaffin shared the second project concerning signalization at the Allen St. and Glenwood Avenue crossing. He opined that this project could be tied in with work being done on the existing TIGER grant project for NH Northcoast. A discussion ensued concerning whether this is a private or public way. B. Jaffin shared a rural project concerning the completion of a rails to trails project running from Sanbornville to Wolfeboro. B. Jaffin encouraged group members to submit projects. P. Griffin asked if submitted projects had to be in the Strafford Region. B. Jaffin shared that they must relate to the Strafford region in a general sense. B. Jaffin opined that if the project affects the corridors that come through the Strafford region, then it would be an appropriate project to submit as part of the group's project database.

B. Jaffin shared that the Strafford Rail Working Group could facilitate information sharing to other stakeholders in the state. He added that this group could collaborate with the NH Rail Transit Authority.

The listing of projects in the Ten Year plan was discussed. The group discussed the potential for listing rail projects within the Ten Year Plan project listing. B. Jaffin asked R. Healey for trail ideas in addition to rail projects. B. Jaffin shared a project being undertaken by MARAD for cargo shipped by articulated tug barges into Portland. This effort could be tied in with rail projects focused on shipping of freight. A discussion ensued concerning the future of articulated tug barges. B. Jaffin shared that he envisions the group creating a database of projects.

B. Jaffin added that he conveyed Steve Pesci's project idea concerning digital real-time signage along the Amtrak Downeaster route. P. Griffin opined that this is a good project and is in line with what the MBTA is planning to do on their lines. B. Jaffin suggested that these systems could eventually tie in with the NH and Maine Traffic Management Centers, the hubs for statewide Intelligent Transportation Systems. This could help with integration of a multi-modal system between COAST and the Amtrak commuter trains.

B. Jaffin addressed the possibility of trains carrying ATVs and snowmobiles. K. Karl suggested that the group reference Alaskan projects concerning trains and carrying of these vehicles. A discussion ensued concerning the logistics of ATVs on the Amtrak Downeaster. A discussion ensued regarding need for upgraded track(s) and bridges that were accommodating for a variety of train types to pass through.

2. Discussion

a. Involvement of NH Northcoast and PANAM

P. Griffin opined that the Strafford Rail Working Group needs to have a discussion with NH Northcoast in order to understand their goals for their rail line. B. Jaffin agreed. P. Griffin added that the group should request that NHNC attend a meeting, or that the group should go to NHNC. This could be followed by meetings with PANAM and Golden Eagle. B. Jaffin suggested that the group meet with NHNC in September.

P. Griffin suggested that inviting NHNC and other rail companies would encourage individuals to attend the Rail Working Group meetings. The group brainstormed new contacts to invite to the group. The group discussed the next meeting including dates and presenters.

B. Jaffin added that the group needs to hear what the rail companies do and do not want. P. Griffin opined that we are lucky to have active rail companies in our region and that we need to understand how we can help them in their business practices. B. Jaffin suggested contacting Sprague Energy and Eversource. R. Healey agreed that we should contact companies who use the rail to find out what changes need to be made (i.e. zoning changes) to encourage further and increased use of rail. Contacting Irving and Eastern was discussed as well. Limestone slurry is being moved the most now. The group discussed the uses of limestone slurry.

B. Jaffin shared that we need to encourage rail business and freight before addressing passenger rail. R. Healey agreed with this statement. B. Jaffin encouraged the group to send him any and all ideas. K. Karl suggested adding a project addressing double tracking from Dover on south. K. Karl shared that capacity needs to be expanded in order to support northern bound passenger rail. The group discussed types of passenger trains that could be purchased to run on existing rail lines, and where they could be manufactured.

R. Healey mentioned that the company he works for, Westinghouse, ships products using flatbed trucks. The products are too heavy to ship with the current rail setup and existing rail cars. He explained that the old plant has rail right up to the building.

Further discussion about the types of rail cars that could support passenger services on existing rail was discussed. The group discussed Westinghouse and their business needs.

The group discussed the General Sullivan Bridge. B. Jaffin suggested that the General Sullivan Bridge be rehabilitated to connect the rail on either side. K. Karl shared that the Turnpike Authority now owns some of the right of way in that area. The highway right of way might be able to be utilized. The idea of connecting rail over the Piscataqua was discussed.

P. Griffin shared an article that was in the Boston Globe about rail running to Newburyport. A discussion ensued concerning restoring the bridge over the Merrimack with rail. Rail running through Portsmouth was discussed. Improvements that could be made to Rockingham Junction were discussed.

B. Jaffin asked if rail currently services Pease, and discussion ensued. This was discussed. The purchase and use of DMUs was addressed again. B. Jaffin opined that commuter rail service in to the Shipyard could be a good project. P Griffin stated that maybe this would create incentive to restore the old prison at the Shipyard.

b. Changing Group Name

This item was tabled.

c. Involvement of DRED and the NH Tourism/Restaurant Industry

This item was tabled.

3. Next Steps

The group will contact Boston Sand and Gravel, PANAM, Golden Eagle, and NNEPRA to come in and meet with the group in the future or for meeting at their respective offices.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 pm.

The next meeting will be held on September 15, 2015.