



RTAC MEETING SUMMARY
April 7, 2011
Hermantown Public Safety Building
Hermantown, MN

Attendees:

Doug Grindall	Koochiching County
Jim Heilig	Duluth Transit
Bob Manzoline	Regional Rail Authority
Alan Goodman	Area County Engineers
Bill Bennett	Chambers (LHB)
Jack Larson	Arrowhead Transit/Rural Transit
Denny Johnson	Mn/DOT
Walter Leu	Mn/DOT
Paul Bergman	Lake County
Steve Kniefel	St. Louis County Townships
Mike Forsman	St. Louis County
Catherine McLynn	Itasca County
Don Mohawk	Mn/DOT
Bryan Anderson	ARDC
Liz Sarabia	ARDC
Ellen Pillsbury	ARDC
Josh Bergstad	ARDC

1. Welcome and Introductions

Call to order by Steve Kniefel at 12:25 p.m. and introductions were made by the attendees.

2. Committee Business

Call for motion for the approval of the meeting agenda. Motion by Mike Forsman/Jack Larson; passed unanimously.

Call for approval of January Meeting Summary. Motion by Bill Bennett / Bob Manzoline; passed unanimously.

Election of Vice Chair as Paul Bergman will now be chair. Nomination of John Welle made from the floor by Doug Grindall. Motion to close white ballot by Walter Leu/Mike Forsman; passed unanimously. John Welle will be Vice President.

3. Rail Presentation by Dave Christianson, Mn/DOT Rail Office

Though Dave Christianson had been hired to work on freight, there had been a need for someone to handle rail. He was asked to take on that role and continues in that capacity working with Bill Gardner, co-project manager for Freight Rail and Commercial Vehicles. Mr. Christianson provided an overview of the House Transportation bill which had been presented two weeks prior to this meeting.

There are approximately 4,600 miles of rail in Minnesota. These rails are owned by 4 major carriers: Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Union Pacific, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific. There are 14 short lines (less than 350 miles) and two major intermodal yards for international containers; both in Minneapolis that are used by Canadian Pacific and BNSF. Tonnage (freight) moved by rail in Minnesota is approximately 38% while it is only 12% for the nation. In part, that is due to the type of freight: taconite, agricultural products, lumber, container traffic as well as port traffic.

He expressed that an area of concern is funding for grade crossings. For twenty years, grade crossing safety funding allowed for the upgrading of crossings. There are approximately 4,000 grade crossings and of those, one quarter needs to be upgraded and more will need upgrading as equipment changes. The volume of traffic has exceeded the peak of WWII by 50%. However, the new authorization bill has no specific grade crossings funds and there is no way to fill the gap with state funds or other sources. Grade crossing signals are currently being replaced 1 every 50 to 60 years; they need to be at a rate of 1 every 20 to 30 years.

A new program he noted that had been included for funding was the Minnesota Operation Lifesaver program which is part of National Operation Lifesaver, Inc. The program is a presentation to learn about safety around railroads and trains. It is designed for drivers and pedestrians with a fun section for elementary and high school kids.

Mr. Christianson also mentioned the Rail Improvement Program for which Mn/DOT is responsible. The program has a revolving loan fund/grant for shippers, railroads, and county rail authorities. Currently its' focus is on short lines with improving their tracks and loading work.

A quick overview of Projects in 2010 included the following:

St. Croix Valley – Bridge work

When the bridge was taken out, it affected everyone in area – the flour mill, the short line railroad; workers had to be laid off. Now that the bridge has been repaired everyone is back to work

State Rail Bank

This program provides funds to buy up railroad lines that could be used in the future. There are currently 200 miles in preserved beds, grades, etc., with many used by the DNR for trail use. However, any of those could be put back into service if needed.

Intercity Passenger Rail/Northern Lights Express

The NLX is currently in a holding pattern. Mr. Christianson did provide clarification on rail speeds for passenger travel. Long distance passenger rail is generally 70 mph or less (Amtrak) while the Twin Cities to Duluth could be up to 110 mph. High Speed rail is 110+mph but requires grade separation and could mean building overpasses or underpass for ~100 grade separations.

Further discussion and questions covered topics such as the State Rail Plan, other corridors, the impact of the Rails to Trails program, budget concerns, some of the studies of freight movement in the region.

4. Projects Updates - Ellen Pillsbury, Josh Bergstad, Bryan Anderson

Ellen Pillsbury has been working on the Hibbing Transit Plan which started with the forming of a Transit Advisory Committee. It is anticipated that there will be four meetings to define assets and set goals. The draft plan is expected to be completed in May with the final plan completed in June.

The International Falls Bike Pedestrian Trail has had its sidewalks inventoried and conditions mapped by Ellen Pillsbury and Jon Mason. A meeting will be held with the City to review projects coming up, and to identify what makes a good walking environment. Draft plan should be completed in May

Josh Bergstad presented the current status of the Babbitt Comprehensive Plan – Transportation Component. The City had requested a more in-depth transportation section as part of their comprehensive plan. Meetings have been held for visioning, identifying transportation and needs. A meeting with the Planning Commission was held on March 16th to set goals.

Though the Ranier Transportation Evaluation is still in the proposal stage, an overview of the project was presented by Josh Bergstad. The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission is proposing an evaluation of the entire transportation system as well as future needs.

Bryan Anderson provided the update on the Local Human Services Coordination Transit Plan. The survey has been sent and a steering committee formed with their first meeting on April 28th. In June there will be an overview meeting and workshop.

The Floodwood Depot Area Impact Study was briefly discussed. There had been numerous delays with this project. The City has provided income and revenues statements that are being reviewed along with the agreement between Mn/DOT and the City.

5 In Kind Grant Program.

The announcement of the FY 2012 In kind grant program was made by Bryan Anderson. RTAC will be continuing with the program as in the past with \$25,000/year which is used on 3 to 4 projects. The application has stayed the same, this year it is due May 13. Projects will be reviewed and awarded at the June 23rd RTAC meeting.

6. Project discussion

Jack Larson, Arrowhead Transit, reported that they are moving from using plain paper miles/rides and going electronic; currently on the buses plus they have a centralized dispatch. With their new system they have GPS tracking for the buses, mapping capabilities, can track miles, and passengers. Additionally, they've installed cameras due to liability issues.

&. Other business

The June meeting will be at the Mesabi Trail Head. Bob Manzoline will check on availability for June 23rd at 10 AM. It may include a field trip or tour.

Note this meeting was requested for 10 AM, but was changed to 1 PM.