

VIRGINIA - NORTH CAROLINA

Interstate High Speed Rail Compact

c/o NC Department of Transportation
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SUMMARY

VA/NC High Speed Rail Compact Meeting Senate Room 3, Virginia State Capitol Richmond, Virginia January 9, 2012

Members in Attendance: Senator John Watkins (VA); Senator Yvonne Miller (VA); Delegate Jeion Ward (VA); Delegate Richard Anderson (VA); Delegate Ronald Villanueva (VA); Senator Fletcher Hartsell (NC); Paul Cooke (NC)

Member(s) Absent: Representative Grey Mills (NC); Representative Nelson Dollar (NC); Senator Clark Jenkins (NC)

Senator John Watkins, Compact Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. There not yet being a quorum, Item 1 on the agenda was bypassed temporarily (election of new Chairperson and approval of 9/19/11 minutes).

Kevin Page, Chief Operating Officer with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, provided an update on the Richmond to Potomac River Tier II environmental impact study and the Richmond-Petersburg-Norfolk SEHSR extension. Mr. Page cited that priority projects Virginia is currently facing are the Roberts Road storage and maintenance facility project and the New Bohemia long siding project.

At the arrival of Delegate Villanueva and a quorum reached, Chair Senator Watkins called for nominees for the next Compact Chairperson. Paul Cooke nominated Senator Fletcher Hartsell. Senator Yvonne Miller seconded the motion. Senator Watkins called for more nominations and there being none, Senator Miller moved to close the nominations. Delegate Jeion Ward seconded the motion. The new chair was elected by unanimous vote of the Compact members. New Chair Senator Hartsell presented the September 19, 2011 minutes for approval. Senator Miller made a motion to adopt the minutes. Senator Watkins seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted by unanimous vote.

Trip Pollard of the Southern Environmental Law Center, presented information on the benefits of High Speed Rail. He stated the top three state supported rail services in the country were in Virginia and North Carolina. He pointed out the economic benefits to both states of continuing to promote HSR systems.

Pat Simmons, Director of NCDOT Rail Division, updated the Compact on the status of implementing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funded projects between Raleigh and Charlotte, NC. He presented a status report on developing the Tier II Environmental Impact Statement for the Raleigh to Richmond portion of SEHSR, and highlighted on-going considerations with funding project maintenance and passenger train operations. Mr. Simmons cited that largest single project North Carolina is currently facing is a new main line grade separation of CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern Railway in Charlotte (a 3.5 year construction cycle) and finalizing Piedmont Improvement Program (PIP) agreements with Norfolk Southern by April. PIP includes 28 miles of new double-track, 2 new 2 mile long passing sidings, 18 new bridges and at-grade crossing closures.

A recommendation report for the Tier II EIS between Raleigh and Richmond will be completed shortly, presented to the Commonwealth Transportation Board and the North Carolina Board of Transportation and then to the Federal Railroad Administration. The Final EIS is scheduled for completion December 2012

Joe Millazzo, Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, Regional Transportation Alliance, presented information on “Connecting the Capitals”. He represented the business point of view and stated the business community are working together and strongly support the Richmond, Petersburg, Raleigh and Norfolk connections.

Senator Watkins requested a copy of the America 2050 Report for each Compact member. Those copies were provided during the lunch discussion.

Kevin Page and Pat Simmons gave a brief overview of existing passenger rail operations and funding challenges.

Jeff Mann, Assistant Vice President of Amtrak, presented information on Amtrak regional service in the southeast corridor. The projected average speed in the Richmond to Raleigh corridor will be 86 mph.

David Ewing, Consultant, presented information on federal surface transportation policy legislation that has been delayed for political, financial, and economic reasons. He stated that funding for intercity passenger rail capital investment and meeting operating expenses is blocked by this delay. SEHSR is directly challenged to respond to these conditions both in the short and longer term. In dialog with Compact members and Mr. Ewing it was recognized that the Compact needs to market itself better by developing marketing materials, getting information and working with advocacy groups such as Chambers of Commerce.

A 30 minute lunch break was held.

The Compact held a roundtable discussion to discuss Federal funding goals and challenges; key issues including coordination with freight railroads and their freight capacity and Amtrak; possibilities for advocacy and funding partnerships.

Pat Simmons presented on behalf of NC Deputy Secretary Paul Morris on a value capture approach to financing a rail freight and passenger project in North Carolina.

Senator Watkins described the Virginia Community Development Authority and a project where he generated \$26 million.

Senator Hartsell requested a copies of the Virginia statutes that created Community Development Authority and authorized Public Private Partnerships.

Joe Milazzo volunteered to continue to modify and use as a vehicle his one page "Connecting the Capitols" presentation that describes intercity high speed rail. Paul Cooke will work with Mr. Milazzo to produce this marketing tool to greater show what the Compact is and its goals.

Senator Watkins requested Thelma Drake and Pat Simmons to work together to produce a letter for Chair Senator Hartsell's signature. This letter will go to the local and state Chambers of Commerce in Virginia and North Carolina along the corridor. The purpose of this letter is to describe the purpose of the Compact and to ask their assistance with regard to marketing the name of the Compact to local, state and federal governments, and to the public. It should include our goals and the purpose of the Compact.

Chair Senator Hartsell would like the Chambers of Commerce invited to the next Compact meeting as presenters, as well as Norfolk Southern, CSX Transportation and the North Carolina Railroad to discuss freight rail and capacity.

Director Drake posed a point for thought -- how do we continue to run service when we have a specific timeframe to which we purchased service slots? In Virginia, the state cannot own a railroad.

Danny Plaughter from Virginians for High Speed Rail spoke during the public comment portion of the meeting. Mr. Plaughter reiterated that his organization advocates for high speed rail. He is in agreement that the one page fact sheet is a good way to start getting information out about the Compact and volunteered to aid the Compact in marketing strategies and ideas. VHSR and mayors along the northeast corridor came together and formed a letter to Congress stating their opposition to privatizing state supported trains along the corridor and as a result, many members of Congress rethought their votes on the issue.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Thelma Drake and Pat Simmons need to work together to produce a letter for Chair Senator Hartsell's signature. This letter will go to the local and state Chambers of Commerce in Virginia and North Carolina along the corridor. The purpose of this letter is to describe the purpose of the Compact and to ask their assistance with regard to marketing the name of the Compact to local, state and federal governments, and to the public. It should include goals and the purpose of the Compact.
2. Invite CSX Transportation, North Carolina Railroad and Norfolk Southern to the next meeting to speak on freight rail.

3. Invite the Chambers of Commerce to the next Compact meeting as presenters.
4. Virginia to provide a copy of the statutes authorizing Community Development Authority and Public Private Partnerships.
5. After working through marketing strategies, plan a meeting in Washington with Congressional staff and members for Compact members.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

In North Carolina – June 2012, either Monday the 11th or Monday the 18th

The Compact adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

Meeting handouts can be found at:

http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/projects/VA-NC_Compact.aspx