

SUMMARY

NC/VA High Speed Rail Compact Meeting VIRGINIA MEMBERS ONLY Richmond, Virginia June 7, 2011

Members in Attendance: Senator John Watkins, Senator Yvonne Miller, Delegate Richard Anderson, Delegate Jeion Ward

Member(s) Absent: Delegate Ronald Villanueva

Senator John Watkins, Compact Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:08 p.m.

Senator Watkins opened the meeting by letting everyone know that the Virginia Members were meeting as an update meeting to stay in touch because the North Carolina delegation was not in a position to meet with us until early fall. Senator Watkins felt it was a benefit to the Virginia members to meet to discuss policy issues and table discussions to keep talks going and to keep Virginia members up-to-date.

Thelma Drake, Director, and Kevin Page, Chief of Rail Transportation, of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, gave a general passenger rail update on the activities of DRPT in the development of intercity conventional and high speed passenger rail. Mr. Page indicated to the members that DRPT is developing a web-link to Compact information. A link will be sent via email to the members. Mr. Page updated the members on federal and state initiatives; the history of the SEHSR rail corridor. He indicated that FRA has been looking at the Hampton Roads area since the Norfolk train is starting and that Hampton Roads will be an emerging area to start train service. Norfolk must be in place first to prove that ridership is there before the line is extended to Hampton Roads. 15 states now have state sponsored Amtrak State subsidized rail programs. Virginia was the fifteenth state to sponsor Amtrak Regional Service. 79% of revenue from Lynchburg train comes to us but that will soon stop. Amtrak service is still in negotiation. Senator Watkins wanted to know what provision is in place for when we start losing funding in 2013. Funding options: like the airports, we could request an excise fee on rental cars, possibly a 3 percent increase. Mr. Page indicated the need for a true federally funded inter-state intercity passenger rail system.

DRPT has initiated steps for a meeting with Tennessee Lieutenant Governor to discuss train service.

Discussion among Compact Members included questions from Senator Miller about why there still is no rail service from Norfolk and Hampton Roads area into D.C. given the number of Federal and military employees stationed in those areas. Director Drake

indicated that service is projected to be complete by 2013. It was discussed that in order to raise ridership, it should be as simple as possible for riders to get from the Hampton Roads area to D.C.

Senator Miller asked what the Senate needs to do to ensure that rail is built and to get more passenger trains on the tracks to facilitate getting people off the roads and onto trains.

Director Drake suggests reaching out to the Congressional Delegation and ask for their assistance with FRA.

A meeting will be arranged for all Compact Members (VA and NC) to meet with the Congressional Delegation sometime prior to the end of the year.

Danny Plaughter, Director of Virginians for High Speed Rail, gave a brief update. Mr. Plaughter stated that on the federal level no money from the second round of ARRA funds would be released until all ARRA funds already obligated were released. There is still \$2 billion in obligated ARRA funds to be released. Virginians for High Speed Rail does support the 3 percent increase in rental car tax.

Dwight Farmer from Hampton Roads suggested funding the Passenger Rail Operating Fund so Virginia can remain competitive if/when federal funds become available.

Michael Testerman, Virginia Association of Railway Patrons, was in DC in May to promote their concept of high speed rail and trying to get freight off roads at speeds of 79 to 110mph.

Suzette Denslow of Richmond City is supportive of the suggestion to meet with the Congressional Delegation and suggests that the city mayors be invited to go to meet with the Delegation also.

The Virginia Members Meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.