

Meeting of the Southern Rail Commission

December 9, 2022

Regions Banks, RSA 29th Floor, 11 North Water Street, Mobile, Alabama 36602

Call to Order: *Chairman Knox Ross*

Roll Call

Commissioners Attending: Toby Bennington, Wiley Blankenship, David Clark, Knox Ross, Kay Kell, Brian Fulton, Frankie Castiglia, John Spain, Shawn Wilson, Jerome Wall, Renee Lapeyrolerie, Roy Woodruff

Commissioners Attending By Zoom: Steven Brom, Chris Christianson

Guests: Dean Goodell, Marc Magliari, Todd Stennis, Algy Semien, Maggie Oliver with Port Authority, Elizabeth Stephens, Maggie Woodruff, Bryan Jones, Guy Busby, John Sharp, Andrew Hinkenbein

Guests Attending By Zoom: John Robert Smith, Stephen Coleman Kenny, Beckie Feldman, Bryan Fuenmayor, Darrel Saizan, Donald Lambert, Jr., Ed Lackugi, Phil Jones, John Murphy, Jonathan Byrd, Raymond Lang, Richard Anderson, Stephen McNair, Toby Ruth, Virgil Payne, Will Fuller, Shannon Flaherty, Brent Richard

Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer

Recognition of special guests

REGULAR BUSINESS:

- I. Approval of the minutes from the meeting of September 9, 2022
 - a. Commissioner Spain moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Bennington seconded the motion – motion passes.
- II. Financial and Administrative Report - *Knox Ross*
 - a. Over the last quarter, SRC has spent funds to support the CRISI grant submission and for the Monroe convening
 - b. SRC is currently issuing dues invoices to Alabama and Mississippi
 - c. IJJA provides match on dues collected, which has the potential of doubling our budget, so want to talk to DOTDs about increasing their funding in this renewal
 - d. SRC is holding invoice for MS until Knox is able to have that discussion and explain the match opportunity
 - e. Commissioner Bennington moved to approve the report, and Commissioner Castiglia seconded the motion – motion passes.
- III. Communications and Media Update – Rachel DiResto
 - a. The SRC continues to see interest by the media in the many initiatives underway and project progress has been featured regularly in local press.
 - b. There was notable media coverage for the I-20 Corridor Convening.
 - c. End of Q3 Facebook current page likes: 1,248 page followers
 - i. In Q2, social media promotions results:
 1. 28,937 impressions, 29,844 audience reached, 4,123 post engagements, 29 new page followers, 905 page visits, 1,115 link clicks
- IV. Legislative Affairs Update - *John Robert Smith*

- a. With the new round of CRISI grants, entities can use unobligated funds with 80/20 match.
- b. On December 1, the SRC submitted a grant application for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Investment (CRISI) program to make rail infrastructure improvements.
- c. CRISI grants usually require a 50% non-federal match, but after conversations with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), they agreed to a 20% non-federal match this time around because the SRC spent very little of its FY2018 award due to the pending STB case.
- d. On November 22, the STB announced that Amtrak, CSX, and Norfolk Southern had reached a settlement that would grant Amtrak the right to restore long-awaited passenger rail service to the Gulf Coast. It also guarantees substantial infrastructure investments from CSX and Norfolk Southern along the Gulf Coast from New Orleans to Mobile.
- e. The good news is that all parties reached an agreement which allowed us to move forward with submitting the grant package, however due to the NDA on the settlement agreement, SRC is unable to discuss those details today.
- a. On the leadership front, Sen. Wicker will remain on the Commerce Committee but with a lessor role and will also join the Armed Services Committee which narrows the window that he can have impact on SRC issues.
- b. The SRC continues to develop strategic relationships such as with Sen. Cantwell and remaining and new members of the Commerce Committee.
- c. FRA recently released a NOFO for the Federal and State Partnership for passenger rail program – will send a summary memo
- d. SRC Executive Committee and T4A had a call with FRA to discuss the corridor identification program and T4 sent a summary memo about the program.
- e. FRA said to dream big and that SRC is an ideal applicant and could submit multiple applications.
- f. Each individual application needs to connect to Amtrak’s larger vision of network connectivity.
- g. T4 will work with SRC on this and prepare the initial letter of interest.
- h. Stephen McKenny reported that the Corridor ID Program is about the early stages of development for planning new service lines.
- i. On the federal front, Republicans are the majority in the House as a result of recent elections.
 - i. Democrats are eager to pass budget
 - ii. Senate appropriation package was friendly to rail programs
 - iii. Most cuts to transportation program came to bike/ped programs
 - iv. As we move to end of year, expect omnibus package to pass by end of year but have no insights on this yet
- f. On Monday, November 28, President Biden called on Congress to prevent an early December railroad worker strike that would cripple the U.S. economy. On Wednesday, November 30, the House of Representatives voted to impose the PEB recommendations, which includes 4%-to-7% wage increases through 2024, a 3.5% retroactive increase for 2020 and 3.5% for 2021, an additional paid day off, and removing the cap on monthly employee healthcare contributions.

- g. This action force rail workers to accept a contract with paid sick leave which soured relationships between labor and freight companies.
- h. Commissioner David Clark asked how the new CRISI application differs from the previous one:
 - 1. SRC originally had a CRISI grant previously with 50/50 match requirement, but we are asking for a swap with better terms 80/20 match requirements.

OLD BUSINESS:

- I. Report on Executive Committee activities - *Spain, Ross, Bennington*
 - a. Update on the Gulf Coast passenger service and STB Hearings
 - 1. All parties are happy with STB resolution which results in better fluidity for benefit of both freight and passenger and will be a great win for communities on the coast
 - 2. SRC's goal is to be a trusted partner to make this work for everyone
 - 3. The service prior to Katrina was not attractive or flexible – restoration was to improve service and routes with 4 daily passes across the coast
 - 4. Service will be better and will spur economic development and will help our cities who have made investments in stations to bring in tourists
 - 5. Knox expressed thanks to everyone in the Alabama delegation who worked hard to champion the project
 - b. Monroe I-20 Corridor Convening
 - 1. Meeting was a great success with 2 US Senators in the room and 2 via zoom
 - c. Ray Lang from Amtrak reported that Amtrak and all parties reached a settlement that we are pleased with although the settlement is confidential
 - 1. Hopeful for 2023 start of service between New Orleans and Mobile
 - 2. FRA is about to announce the corridor identification program with no need for local match
 - 3. Thankful for the commitment and hard work by passenger rail stakeholders
 - 4. The Corridor ID process early phase does not require a match
 - 5. FRA will be providing half a million dollars per quarter to entities for scoping, service development planning and NEPA and once you submit an application, requires match of 10% for NEPA and service development plan
- II. State Reports:
 - a. Louisiana-Updates: Brief on BR-NO & North Louisiana and BO-Mobile - *Commissioners Wilson & Renee Lapeyrolerie*
 - 1. Conversations were preceded with meetings with Gov and Amtrak
 - i. TX MS supported the CRISI application
 - ii. What's not included in the grant request is station development, so other funding oppos through IJJA can help
 - iii. Project is anticipated to be completed late 2025
 - iv. LA DOTD also completed CRISI grant request for Bonne Carre bridge for Baton Rouge to New Orleans Corridor
 - v. Still in discussion on how to deliver the project and address areas of concern from safety point on corridor

- vi. \$86m is total grant request with \$20 million match from state
 - vii. Concerned about project and inflation costs
 - viii. Project anticipated to be completed in 2029
 - ix. CRISI funds would cover environmental CE as well as engineering, design, construction for both freight and passenger upgrades
 - x. Also working on assessment of capital needs working with freights, and the preliminary final report expected by end of year
 - xi. Will identify additional improvements for that corridor
 - xii. Also submitted application for funding for multi- crossing improvements like gates/lighting for safety improvements along that corridor
 - xiii. Additional match may be required and will have to identify sustainable revenue to support project
 - xiv. We are no different from other places and workforce is a challenge, manpower is hard to find
 - xv. Shawn responded to a question to note that the new bridge north of Bonne Carre was replaced with 100% of costs borne by CN (who had insurance proceeds from fire) – Total cost: \$109 M
- b. Mississippi
- i. New Orleans to Mobile
 - ii. Know recognized former Commissioner Greg White on zoom, and thanked him for his previous contributions
 - iii. Also appreciate the support of Senator Hyde Smith and Senator Wicker
 - iv. Knox also recognized Sen. Cochran and the late Dick Hall – sorry they can't see this progress
- c. Alabama
- i. Support for the I20 in Alabama – *Bennington*
 - ii. Following the Monroe meeting, leaders from planning agencies in North Alabama took great interest and submitted support letters for CRISI
 - iii. Sen. Tuberville, Congressman Mike Rogers, Sen. Shelby and local mayors submitted letters
 - iv. Atlanta Regional Commission is on the call today with interest and ARC has been a big advocate in the past
 - v. Atlanta news media did a nice story on I-20 meeting
 - vi. Recognized Maggie from Mobile Port Authority and Mr. Driscoll who has been working with us; SRC intends to be a good partner

NEW BUSINESS:

- I. Updates from Amtrak - *Todd Stennis and Marc Magliari*
 - a. Thank you for CRISI applications, Amtrak submitted letter of support
 - b. MS station projects temporary platforms will be complete by December in time to get service underway in 2023
 - c. Amtrak will come back to 4 of these to complete full ADA projects in next 2-3 years
 - d. Sen Wicker moved to get new board nominees to Amtrak board
 - e. Were pleased to see TX DOT attended meeting in Monroe I-20

- f. Amtrak's agreement with CP allows for partnerships to use freight tracks
- g. It was important that the federal consultants to FRA were at that meeting with FRA administrator and staff, which demonstrates a great interest to fill a huge gap in Amtrak network in south
- h. The US in 2022 is different today than it was when Amtrak system was planned in 1970 especially with commerce channels
- i. This administration has provided lots of funding opportunities and we need to have speed while we have support and funding in place
- j. SRC remains a model for other areas of the US
- k. The President of Amtrak has visited LA 3 times in last few months – we appreciate a remarkable relationship with Amtrak and also with FRA. Administrator Amit has joined us each time we have invited, and he was on the inspection train

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETING:

- I. March 10th Louisiana
- II. June 9th Mississippi

ADJOURNMENT

- a. Commissioner Bennington moved to adjourn, and Commissioner Woodruff seconded the motion – motion passes.