

Meeting of the Southern Rail Commission

Friday, September 8, 2023 – 9:00 -11:30 AM
The Grand Hotel, 1 Grand Blvd, Point Clear, AL 36564

COMMISSIONERS: Steven Brom, David Clark, Dennis Stripling, Ellis Foster, Stephen Worley, Knox Ross, Kay Kell, Brian Fulton, Frankie Castiglia Jr., Jerome Wall, Roy Woodruff, Renee Lapeyrolerie, John Spain, Adrian Perkins

ATTENDEES: John Robert Smith, Alyssa Panepinto, Makenzie Morgan, Maggie Woodruff, Todd Stennis, Marc Magliari, Nicole Bucich, Arun Rao, Gerald Long (Senator Cassidy), Casey Rogers (Governor Ivey), Eric Kalivoda, Ben Dodson, Jeff Mann, Mike Jerew, Andrew Hinkebein (Senator Tuberville), Friday Ellis, Laura Luce, Wiley Blankenship

ZOOM: Toby Bennington, Katie Hood, Walt Leger, Dana McCain (Senator Britt), Eric Wright, Tamika Monterville, Stephen Coleman Kenney, Bob Johnston, Phil Jones, Stephen McNair, Max Nassar, Corrigan Salerno, Mia Monet, Jason Lathbury, Jon McGraw, Doug Rogers, Melissa Foreman, Dean Goodell, Tom Piper, Kevin Lynch, Kate Holzhauser, Bruce Heniken, Larry Lloyd, Trent Machner, Brey Brennan, Joseph Littlejohn, Mike Reso, Jon McCraw, Jay Trapani, Jolene Applegate, Ryan White, Sarah Moss, Richard Rusnak, Michael Adcock, Betsy Adcock, Randall Woodfin, Bryant Whaley, Brad Gunther, Robert Smith, Tom Piper, Dov Block, Anne Daigle

CALL TO ORDER: *Chairman Knox Ross*

ROLL CALL

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND PRAYER

RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS AND NEW COMMISSIONER

REGULAR BUSINESS:

- I. Approval of the minutes from the meeting of June 9, 2023
 - a. Commissioner Ross moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Kell seconded the motion – motion passes.
- II. Financial and administrative report – Commissioner Ross
 - a. The SRC is solvent.
 - b. Financial and administrative reports include overviews of travel to Washington, D.C. for advocacy work surrounding rail funding, collaboration with Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration, and rail compacts.
 - c. Commissioner Lapeyrolerie moved to approve the reports, and Commissioner Castiglia seconded the motion – motion passes.
- III. Communications and media update – Makenzie Morgan
 - a. Louisiana budget windfall; Mississippi and Alabama platform progress; and the economic impact of passenger rail yielded many headlines.
 - b. Current Facebook page:
 - i. 1,455 page followers
 - ii. 2,000 people reached
 - iii. 124 engagements
- IV. Legislative affairs update, grant updates – John Robert Smith
 - a. Appropriations highlights:
 - i. The President's FY24 Budget Request for key rail programs – Amtrak (NEC), Amtrak (National), Federal-State Partnerships, CRISI Grants, Restoration & Enhancement Grants, and Railroad Crossing Elimination – far exceed appropriations within FY24 House THUD and FY24 Senate THUD proposals.
 - ii. Notably, House and Senate proposals have no funding appropriated for R&E Grants and Railroad Crossing Eliminations.
 - iii. Transportation for America predicts a 10% cut to 2023 funding levels based on proposed appropriations.
 - b. MSY – MEGA Grant

- i. Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY) is applying for a MEGA grant to fund the intermodal station and Airport People Mover.
- c. Gulf Coast Corridor Improvement Project – CRISI Grant
 - i. SRC and Amtrak have submitted identical CRISI grant applications for the project.
 - ii. The total project cost is \$223 million, with \$179 million in anticipated federal funding and \$45 million in non-federal dollars.
 - iii. Funding supports improvements to:
 - 1. Stations in Bay-St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi, Pascagoula, Mobile
 - 2. New Orleans crossovers
 - 3. Gentilly Bypass
 - 4. Mississippi grade crossings
- d. Interstate Rail Compact
 - i. SRC is seeking to become one of 10 rail compacts, enabling the commission to receive up to \$1 million in matching funds. Funds can be used to establish new service.
- e. Corridor Identification & Development Program
 - i. SRC seeking \$500k and ongoing support from FRA.
 - ii. SRC has submitted:
 - 1. New Orleans – Mobile
 - 2. Meridian – Dallas
 - 3. Baton Rouge - Shreveport
 - iii. LADOTD has submitted:
 - 1. Baton Rouge – New Orleans
- f. I-20 Passenger Rail Project
 - i. Amtrak and SRC applied for a Federal-State Partnership program grant, with Amtrak leading.

NEW BUSINESS:

- I. Federal Railroad Administration update – Tomika Monterville
 - a. FRA is in support of extending R&E grants past the six-year life cycle, pending a renewed application for funding.
 - b. The key for continued support is to encourage stakeholder coordination at the local, state, and regional level to ensure an aligned voice and perspective on project priorities.
 - c. A united coalition has greater potential to move projects and funding forward; all stakeholders must be united in vision.
 - d. FRA believes the restoration of Gulf Coast passenger rail service will transform the economic vitality of the region, and will see a return on investment through tourism, economic and workforce development, and enhanced regional mobility.
 - e. FRA encourages SRC and its stakeholders to explore all available avenues for funding in order to enhance any funding received from the FRA.
- II. Report on Executive Committee activities – Commissioners Ross, Spain, and Bennington
 - a. Commissioners Ross and Spain have participated in several trips to Washington, D.C. to meet with congressional delegations for member states, lobbyists, and key stakeholders.
 - b. Trips are intended to strengthen legislative support projects and empower legislators to advocate for passenger rail funding, which is vital to the commission’s efforts.
- III. Amtrak update – Arun Rao, Director of Network Development, and Nicole Bucich, Vice President of Network Development
 - a. Amtrak project teams have visited several station sites to track construction progress; key projects are moving forward.
 - b. FRA Corridor Development
 - i. FRA Corridor Identification Program is the primary vehicle for funding distributions. The volume of Corridor ID applications submitted for the region is a testament to the SRC’s commitment to passenger rail.
 - ii. Corridor ID Applications Submitted:
 - 1. Meridian – Dallas/Fort Worth (I-20), SRC
 - 2. New Orleans – Baton Rouge, LADOTD
 - 3. New Orleans – Mobile, SRC
 - 4. Baton Rouge – Shreveport, SRC
 - 5. Pensacola – Jacksonville, City of Pensacola
 - 6. Daily Sunset Limited, Amtrak

- iii. FRA received over 90 eligible applications under the Corridor ID program; applications are currently under review with a selection announcement anticipated in November 2023.
- iv. Corridor ID Process:
 1. Systems Planning
 2. Project Planning
 3. Project Development
 4. Final Design
 5. Construction
 6. Operation
- v. Process for Selected Corridors:
 1. Scoping – uses Service Development Plan SOW framework to develop the scope, schedule, and budget for corridor SDP. Additional funds from the scoping phase can be applied to the Service Development Plan phase.
 2. Service Development Plan – develops a service development plan in accordance with Corridor SOW and FRA; includes a Capital Project Inventory.
 3. Preliminary Engineering/NEPA – completes preliminary engineering and environmental review for capital projects.
- c. I-20 Crescent Extension Corridor Service update
 - i. Multiple applications have been submitted to fund the Project Planning and Project Development phases for this project.
 1. CRISI Application – submitted by LADOTD with local match commitment; decision anticipated in September 2023.
 2. Federal-State Partnership Application – submitted by Amtrak and SRC with a local match commitment from MDOT and LADOTD; decision anticipated in late 2023.
 3. Corridor ID Application – submitted by SRC and LADOTD; decision anticipated in November 2023.
 - ii. Amtrak is considering early action items for mechanical needs assessment for train splitting in Meridian, coordination with station partners, outreach to host rails, and operating schedule analysis.
- d. New Orleans – Baton Rouge Corridor Service update
 - i. LADOTD submitted applications to the FRA's Corridor ID, CRISI, and Federal-State Partnership programs to advance the project through planning, development, final design, and construction.
 - ii. Amtrak provided technical support for LADOTD's Baton Rouge – New Orleans Intercity Passenger Rail Feasibility Study in early 2023; the study is nearing completion.
 - iii. LADOTD and Amtrak are working on an MOU for advancing service.
- e. New Orleans – Mobile Corridor Service update
 - i. The service is in the construction and implementation phase, the final stage before service begins.
 - ii. Several critical path items need to be completed before service begins:
 1. Design and construction of a new layover track and temporary platform in Mobile
 2. Land use agreement for Mobile station
 3. Elimination of a Positive Train Control gap near New Orleans
 4. Operating agreements with Louisiana, Mississippi, and the City of Mobile
 5. Official name and start date determination
 - iii. Service is anticipated to begin in 2024 following the completion of these critical path items.
- IV. Hy Stor presentation – Laura Luce
 - a. Hy Stor Energy presented an overview of their proposed Clean Hydrogen Hub project.
- V. State reports
 - a. Louisiana updates – Commissioner Lapeyrolerie
 - i. LADOTD has applied for federal funding to support a station in Baton Rouge's Health District for the Baton Rouge – New Orleans rail project; the station will be suited to accommodate gurneys, wheelchairs, ambulance access, and other medical services in the event of hospital evacuations.
 - ii. The state will allocate funding from its budget windfall to further support efforts to advance the project.
 - iii. CSRS is leading the effort to re-route the freight track in Gretna, which currently runs through the roadway in a residential neighborhood. CSRS is seeking federal partners.
 - b. Mississippi updates – Commissioner Ross
 - i. Progress is underway in the state of Mississippi; platform construction projects will support the Gulf Coast Passenger rail effort.

- ii. The Seaway Rail Truck project, sponsored by Harrison County Development Commission would increase freight rail capacity between Gulfport and Jackson via Hattiesburg.
 - iii. Senator Hyde-Smith is set to provide \$3 million of the \$4.25 million needed via earmark.
- c. Alabama updates – Commissioner Bennington
 - i. Alabama commissioners are working to support the I-20 Corridor project; the project is critical from a regional standpoint.

OLD BUSINESS:

- I. Safety campaign and other updates from Amtrak – Marc Magliari and Todd Stennis
 - a. The week of September 18 is Rail Safety Week; Amtrak will share safety content and hold several events to promote safety messaging to the general public.
- II. RailNation Conference – Commissioner Ross
 - a. SRC is participating in the RailNation Conference in Meridian from October 6-8.

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETING:

- I. December 1 – New Orleans

ADJOURNMENT