***SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION FULL COMMISSION MEETING***

***MOBILE, ALABAMA***

Friday, December 4, 2015

9:00am-12:00pm

MINUTES

Attendance: Greg White, Claire Austin, J.W.Billy McFarland, Knox Ross, Michael Jackson, John Spain, Phil Jones, Toby Bennington, Kay Kell, Larry Watts, Steve Carter

Others: Brenda Jones, Dan Dealy, Rachel DiResto, Tim Basilica, Bryan Jones, Jerome Trahan, Jim Mathews, Betsy Nelson,

Commissioners Not in Attendance: Roy Woodruff (Bennington has proxy), Angelia Mance, , Walt Leger (Spain has proxy), Natalie Laborde

**I. Call to Order**: Chairman, Greg White welcomed everyone to the meeting and led the Pledge of Allegiance.Mayor Sandy Stimpson, City of Mobile, AL, gave welcoming remarks.

**II. Mayor’s Roundtable** (Moderated)

Crescent Mayors’ Comments:

* **Mayor Vaughn Stewart** detailed efforts in Anniston to make it “Bike City Alabama”. The downtown station is a multimodal hub with mixed use, mixed income development. They are currently looking at opportunities to make future developments along the new routes appealing to the seniors, students and others. Interested in best practices for enhancing rail service.
* **Andy Mayo**, Economic Development Director for Mayor Bell in Birmingham, detailed the complete transformation of the Amtrak facility into the railroad park. The station area has also been enhanced with the addition of the Birmingham baseball stadium, museum and other cultural features. Development in all sectors, such as hotels and condos, has occurred around the intermodal facilities.
* **Mayor Walter Maddox** said Tuscaloosa previously had the most underperforming Amtrak facility along the line. Other priorities often distract from issues like rail. After tornado destroyed 12% of the city, planning for public and private development around the rail station began to take shape, which includes mixed use development on 12 acres. Economic analysis shows that ridership would exceed 12,000 riders per year. Rail will service University while also supporting Complete Streets development including bike and pedestrian connections. Funding includes a combination of disaster recovery dollars and public/private partnerships.
* **Mayor Johnny Dupree** from Hattiesburg explained that the original train station was built in 1910. In 1998, the city purchased building from Norfolk Southern and invested $10M in improvements. That has resulted in over $70 M in economic development that stem from rail station. City was awarded bronze level for bike infrastructure. The goal is to have everyone live one mile from a park. Rail ridership in has increased more than 60%. More recently private citizens and businesses have started using their own money to develop around that area. The rail is a way of tying a city’s past to the future and is a great tool for economic, social, and cultural development.
* **Zach Butterworth of New Orleans** said that the TIGER grant to connect the Amtrak depot to neighborhoods by streetcar has generated over $2B in private investment within 3 block radius of the streetcar corridor. 80% of the riders are locals.

Gulf Coast Mayors’ Comments:

* Mayor Jim Blevins said Pascagoula is a bike friendly-city attracting millennials. With a Rails to Trails project and kayak launches, eco-tourism is growing and attracting visitors.
* Mayor Connie Moran said Ocean Springs is a small arts community with festivals and other cultural assets. Rail service can be part of a resiliency and economic development strategy need
* Revitalization of urban centers is an important signal to attract new visitors.
* Mayor Jim Staff said Atworth is a town of 10,000 people that started with a history of the railroad station in middle of downtown. When the Sunset Limited was operating, they had a great relationship with Amtrak and large ridership because they programmed events around the rail station.
* Mayor Stimpson of Mobile said Mobile is ready to engage in this process and everything downtown would be complemented by rail service. With 5 first class railroads, 2 interstates, and access to 2 airports, Mobile is at the apex of the region.

III. **Gulf Coast Service Updates, and Community Considerations**

1. SRC Legislative Affairs Update: Joe McAndrew of Transportation for America
   1. Joe said that with the inclusion of passenger rail in the STB and the passage of the Fast Act, the dedicated work of this commission has come to fruition.
   2. The STB bill includes the establishment of a working group to conduct a study led by FRA, SRC and MPOs who will determine the best approach to restoring service along the Gulf Coast.
   3. The STB bill also includes two new grant programs that will be relevant to projects on the Gulf Coast. One is a discretionary grant program for capital improvements to stations, grade crossings and other needs.
   4. Another is the capital operating assistance program which provides assistance for passenger rail operations costs for up to three years for all lines and USDOT should prioritize the Gulf Coast. (Federal funds could cover 80% in year 1, 60% in year 2 and 40% in year 3)
   5. There are also provision for low-interest financing through TIFIA/RIF programs that can be helpful for TOD development around station areas.
   6. T4 is working with the FRA to free up the old earmark funds of $2.4 million that can be used on the Gulf Coast High Speed Corridor. T4 wants to ensure these funds can be used for station improvements and access.
   7. The challenge will be that these programs are not fully capitalized, so the SRC must advocate during the appropriation process with Senator Cochran, Shelby and Cassidy.
2. Amtrak Report – Todd Stennis
   1. The Amtrak report will be presented in Executive Session immediately following the commission meeting.
3. Baton Rouge-New Orleans Corridor progress: Rachel Diresto – CPEX
   1. With the election of a Governor who has expressed support for the NO/BR project, the momentum is growing. The LA Super Region Rail Authority continues to promote the next steps detailed in the Gubernatorial Briefing Book that was commissioned by SRC.
4. Jim Matthews of NARP reported that they are working alongside T4A and mayors to mobilize the grassroots effort to support the inclusion of rail in the FAST Act. He is pleased that the bill recognizes passenger rail’s right to exist in the surface transportation bill. NARP is preparing for the next round of work in the appropriations process.

**IV. REGULAR BUSINESS**

A. Greg White made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 11, 2015 meeting, seconded by John Spain. Blake Edwards requested that his name be corrected. Motion unanimously passed.

B. Financial and Administrative Report – New accountant, Debbie presented the financial statements with for fiscal year ending 9/30/15. Knox Ross made motion to approve the financials, seconded by Toby Bennington. Blake Edwards asks if there’s a budget and Greg answered that development of a budget is underway. Motion unanimously passed.

**V. OLD BUSINESS**

1. Update on the Birmingham to Mobile study
   1. Robert Smith from Alabama department of Economic and Community Affairs reported that they previously received a FRA grant of $200K to complete a Feasibility Study of the Gulf Breeze route. Phase One of the study which included Birmingham to Montgomery, was completed 1.5 years ago with revenue and cost estimates.
   2. Phase Two which studies feasibility of Montgomery to Mobile is yet to be started and has been slowed with the retirement of Brenda Jones. The draft SOW has been submitted to FRA and the matching funds have been identified. HDR will commence the study in early 2016 to be completed over the summer. The findings should be available to present at the September 2017 meeting of the SRC.
2. Report on Executive Committee activities – Sec/Treas Knox Ross
   1. SRC Commissioners met with DOT Secretary Foxx at the CPEX Smart Growth Summit and also presented an update on SRC projects to the conference audience.
   2. Knox attended the NW Transportation Forum in Destin and had the opportunity to meet with CSX folks.
   3. SRC maintains ongoing communication with Governor Bryant and is working with Senator Cochran’s office on finalizing the earmark funding eligibility –
   4. SRC Executive Committee met with Sarah Feinburg of FRA in New Orleans and toured NOUPT – all of these efforts are raising our profile.
   5. MS is leading the way with the Governor and Senators aligned in support at the federal level and putting real work behind passenger rail efforts
3. Consider proposal from 9/11/15 meeting to form a Technical Advisory Committee – deferred until next meeting
4. Consider memberships in Southeast Tourism Society
   1. Toby Bennington reported that he contacted staff at the SE Tourism Society and suggested that SRC should consider membership. Their next conference is in April in Baton Rouge. Dues would be $250 a year
   2. John moves to join SE Tourism Society, Toby seconds and motion unanimously passed. Toby will represent SRC at upcoming meetings.
5. Consider membership in Municipal Leagues/Assns
   1. Billy McFarland said each state should consider a membership in the Municipal League
   2. The League has an upcoming conference in Huntsville event and Billy suggested SRC sponsor at the $2500 level which comes with benefits including free registration and exhibit opportunity. March 1 is deadline for sponsorship
   3. Many city council presidents and mayors attend this conference so it is a good way to continue that connection and have a presence.
   4. Billy suggested sponsoring this year and evaluating to see if it is worth it. Billy would attend and represent SRC.
   5. John Spain moved to approve the sponsorship for the Huntsville conference at $2500, Toby seconded and motion unanimously passed.
6. Discussion of State dues
   1. Greg suggested that the dues for each state be raised from $60k to $70k in 2016. Discussion about contributions by other entities to cover this expense should be considered. Larry suggested that a small group determine if SRC can legally accept contribution from other entities.
   2. In the meantime, invoices will be sent with dues set at $65K.
   3. Knox moved to increase the dues from $60k to $65K, Toby seconded and motion unanimously passes.
   4. Greg moved that the budget for 2016 will reflect this change with revenues anticipated of $195, Knox seconded and motion unanimously passed.

**NEW BUSINESS**

* 1. Legislative Update
     1. Joe McAndrew said that SRC needs to advocate for the rail programs in the new bill to be funded including: TIGER multi-modal, rail operating grant assistance program, capital construction grant
     2. Between now and spring, SRC should work with appropriators in three states -Shelby, Cochran, Cassidy
     3. SRC Executive Committee should tentatively plan a trip after march quarterly meeting to meet with FRA and others in DC.
     4. With the 3 states partnering and championing station area development and multi-modal connectivity modes.
     5. SRC should consider extending an invitation to the mayors who attended today to join in DC. Also SRC should request that the Mayors carry the “ask” of the SRC when they come on their own too.
     6. Kay Kell commented that T4 America provides an incredible benefit for SRC as a strong advocacy arm at the federal level.
  2. Communications and Media Relations Update
     1. CPEX reported that the SRC website reflects recent press stories and SRC activities.
     2. CPEX has coordinated with commissioners on press opportunities.
  3. Consider contract renewal proposals – CPEX and T4A
     1. The Executive Committee suggests that SRC renew both contracts for 2 years. Each contract stipulates a 30-day notice period to end the contract.
     2. John Spain made a motion to renew the T4 and CPEX proposals for two years, Larry Watts seconded and motion unanimously passed.

D. Michael Jackson suggested that the SRC extend the invitation to Florida to join the SRC. The legislation requires the membership to be contiguous, so SRC should consider inviting GA and TX also. Michael made the motion, Knox seconded to take whatever steps are necessary to extend these invitations.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Amtrak presented draft findings for the restoration of service along the Gulf Coast in Executive Session

**SUMMARY AND SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS**

March 4, 2016 – Mississippi

June 3, 2016 – Louisiana

September 9, 2016 – Alabama

December 9, 2016 - Mississippi

**ADJOURNMENT**