***Meeting of the Southern Rail Commission***

December 16, 2016

Bay St. Louis

Attendance: Greg White, Knox Ross, John Spain, Jerry Gehman, Roy Woodruff,

Kay Kell, Ashley Edwards, Blake Wilson, Jerome Wall, Jack Norris

By Phone: Angelia Mance

Commissioners Not in Attendance: Walt Leger (Roy has proxy), Patrick Sullivan, Steve Carter, Larry Watts (Greg White has proxy), Toby Bennington (Greg White has proxy), Claire Austin, Shawn Wilson, Tommy Clark

Others in Attendance: John Robert Smith, Dan Dealy, Rachel DiResto, Betsy Nelson, Dean Goodell, Phil Jones, Myrtis Frank, Renee Areng, Lacy Nelson, Wade Morgan, Debbie Vignes, Todd Stennis, Nikki Moon, Chris Ryman, Cliff Kirkland, Mayor Les Fillingame, Brenda Simkin, David Tadlock, Freddy Jackson, Mayor Billy Hewes

**Call to Order:** *Chairman Greg White at 9:04am*

**Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer by Jerry Gehman**

Welcome by Mayor Les Fillingame of Bay St Louis – he expressed enthusiasm about prospects about rail returning to the Gulf Coast, recognized the advocacy effort of Kay Kell as keeper of the flame for SRC on coast, He is In full support of the project.

Other dignitaries in attendance were recognized: Brenda Simkin: Pascagoula At-Large Council member, David Tadlock: Pascagoula Councilman, Ward #3, Freddy Jackson: Pascagoula Councilman, Ward #2, Billy Hewes: Mayor of Gulfport

**REGULAR BUSINESS:**

1. Approval of the minutes from the Sept 9, 2016 meeting – motion by Jerry Gehman to approve, Jerome Wall seconded, motion passes.
2. **FRA GRANTS**

The SRC will allocate $2,475,000 funding from FRA for a total of 11 grants. The MS and AL Congressional delegations worked to make funds available, and T4 assisted and also developed a program for grant allocations.

Senator Cochran’s personal intervention made a huge difference for the Mississippi Grants. Mary Martha was also incredibly helpful. Knox Ross specially recognized Murvis with Senator Cochran’s office who made funding possible.

Thanks to each city who invested in process and identified matching funds.

Both the grant and matching funds total $5m plus infusion into the gulf coast rail line and Crescent line.

MS – 3 projects

* Biloxi - $252,000
* Pascagoula - $659,543
* Gulfport - $190,000
* Bay St Louis - $55,000
  + SRC Funded each MS city who submitted and added $5k for signage and kiosks.

LA – 3 projects

* Baton Rouge - $250,000
* Gonzales - $50,000
* St John Parish - $75,000
  + Intercity Rail is proposed between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, connecting the two largest urban areas with multiple round trips. Rail was a huge evacuation issue post-Katrina. Baton Rouge does not currently have a train station. Funds awarded to Baton Rouge will be used to plan for two stations in downtown and the health district.
  + Gonzales is rebuilding a rail station on land where station used to be.
  + St. John Parish is proposing a new station to service commuters and connect to its town area.
  + There is also a proposed stop at the new airport terminal which offers direct flights to international locations, serves everyone on the coast. Rail will provide options for moving people and building economies – creates the interconnection between states.

Alabama – 5 projects

* Mobile - $125,000
* Anniston - $70,000
* Tuscaloosa - $314,457
* Birmingham - $150,000
  + 3 of the 5 cities have existing rail service on Crescent line
  + Atmore did not qualify because it is not on the high speed rail line
  + Mobile’s project is part of the larger plan to bring passenger rail back to city
  + Platform expansion in Anniston to make a single stop and accommodate bag and bike check-ins, passengers can carry bikes for trail between Anniston and Atlanta.
  + Birmingham is proposing a new multimodal center.
  + Tuscaloosa – Robin Edgeworth is here, big plans, 2011 was hit by tornado, aging Amtrak station, looking at path of tornado to revitalize area, connect station to shared use path to connect to university campus.

Next steps for Station projects –

* T4 will have an individual call with each city to establish scope, scale and budget and will set up tracking system with monthly calls, reimbursements; schedule changes to be reviewed, with serious accounting to FRA and DOT; site visits from time to time, and final report.

1. **Financial and Administrative Report-Debbie Vignes** 
   1. Financial statements were presented as of year ended 9/30/16
   2. Proposed budget for 2017 was also presented
   3. As of 9/30 – cash around $632K – with $80 unrestricted funds and no changes in deferred revenue.
   4. All state dues have been paid so hopefully there will be a surplus by next year
   5. Last year’s deficit was created by Inspection train trip, which was not budgeted, and Gulf Coast Working group expenditures – the working group was created in Fast Act in Nov 2015, and the first meeting was in Feb 2016 with monthly meetings throughout the year.
   6. SRC has accrued meeting and contracts costs related to the Working Group and has applied for reimbursement from FRA for these expenses.
      1. Motion to approve the Financials by Blake, seconded by Jerry, motion passes.
      2. Motion to approve the 2017 Budget by Blake, seconded by Jerry, motion passes.
   7. Rather than act on audit in early 2017 – Greg proposed to extend contract with the existing firm to conduct the 2016 audit again.
      1. Motion to approve Contract with Alexander, Van Loon, Sloan, Levens & Favre, PLLC to do 2016 audit (for approximate fee of $7500) by Jerry G, seconded by Ashley, motion passes.
   8. Greg stated that we received an unqualified opinion for the 2015 audit, and he will mail final report to all commissioners.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

1. Report On Executive Committee activities (White, Ross & Spain)
   1. Update on Gulf Coast Working Group & Update on November FRA Conference
      1. Knox made a presentation on behalf of SRC to DC group in a meeting of rail industry and government folks from across the county; shared rail working group concept, met with congressional delegations.
      2. Knox assured that FRA and congressional delegations and Amtrak are working hard toward a resolution to get this project done.
      3. FRA reps, CSX reps, Amtrak are working towards more realistic expectations for establishing 7-day-a-week service and understanding real operational challenges.
      4. There are still issues to resolve and will need political pressure to bring all parties together for solution. It is very significant to have Senator Wicker on Commerce Committee, and support from Bill Nelson in Florida.
      5. This is a bi-partisan effort but government is responding to requests from all of the constituents across the gulf coast.
      6. The FRA Working Group report will be completed in mid-January.
      7. Knox mentioned that a model is the North Carolina new Piedmont line which demonstrates compatible freight and passenger service. Also North Carolina identified new funding sources from FTA. SRC would like to bring representatives down in March – the model is applicable to BR/NO line.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

1. Legislative Affairs Update-John Robert Smith
   1. Trump has called for significant infusion in infrastructure – although there will be debate about how to fund it, but a package will be proposed. Passenger rail was in his list of priorities to connect via all modes.
   2. The Northeast rail corridor exists because the rest of nation built it – asset to the nation and we need it in the South as well.
   3. Elaine Chow – was appointed secretary of DOT- she previously served under Bush. Has experience can be key to the work of the SRC.
   4. Senator Cochran on Appropriations Committee is a huge asset for region.
   5. Senator Shelby is #2 on appropriations, will likely support Cochran.
   6. We need to provide these Congressional leaders local stories, continue to build support at home, and need to recognize Cochran’s efforts in progress.
   7. CRISI – REG – competitive grant programs authorized in FAST Act, but these were for re-establishing gulf coast rail, Cochran can help ensure funding is available within these programs.
   8. Louisiana will have a new Senator – need to communicate with him early.
   9. Perfect opportunity for all four states to come together – discuss possibly using BP funds for infrastructure when having meetings with senators- mention this project as good use of these funds.
   10. Also mention the funds that locals are contributing.
2. FRA update –
   1. Working to reduce the figure proposed by CSX to a more justifiable number
   2. Next FRA administrator will be important for this project
3. Lawsuit related to On Time Performance
   1. Congress gave Amtrak legal authority to operate on freight lines under SAFETEA, but there have been issues on how to measure it.
   2. The Surface Transportation Board said it will be measured at each station.
   3. Freight Railroads sued in 8th Circuit Court to question STB’s standing on ruling on OTP, arguing that OTP measured at every station is not what Congress intended.
   4. SRC joined NARP and others to intervene on behalf of Amtrak with pro-bono legal work on behalf of this group to make case for OTP measured at stations. Freight Railroads have opportunity to respond.
   5. The Gulf Coast line will not function well if OTB is only measured at end points.
   6. SRC filed a brief on behalf of Amtrak – points to be argued at 8th Circuit Court when they take testimony; SRC may be called to testify at Congressional hearing.
4. I-20 Corridor Update
   1. Study shows no subsidy is required, and rail is in good condition with lots of demand.
   2. This will take support from both Governors in MS, LA to keep momentum going; predicated on success of Gulf Coast first and then I-20.
   3. FRA may want to do a similar working group for this project.
5. State Reports
   1. Louisiana
      1. Update on BR-NO Rail project
         1. New commitment from DOTD - best opportunity LA has ever had
      2. How to pay for rail and upgrades needed - $250 capital costs to replace Bonnet Carre bridge, commercial interests will also benefit in upgrades.
      3. Governor Edwards is proposing increasing the gas tax for infrastructure, and rail is part of the package. This will be a tough fight, but if successful, funding would be available in July 2017.
      4. Fall back – gas tax may go to people for vote.
      5. Although there is an airport in BR, 60% of flying public uses New Orleans Airport – need to connect airport with modern train service.
   2. Alabama
      1. State continues to support SRC and Governor has challenged us to help him identify funding source for SRC dues.
      2. Senator Del Marsh sees value of Amtrak, and the City of Huntsville is interested in service; trying to identify funding that becomes permanent part of budget.
   3. Mississippi
   4. NARP – Betsy Nelson, new Director of Resource Development invited SRC to become a member
      1. NARP has developed 2 new programs:
         1. Summer by Rail: intern spent 39 days traveling Amtrak with bike and blogged about experience; will do it again in 2017; apply on website
         2. Fellowship – college student sent to DC for Spring meeting to demonstrate how associations work and meet with their congressional leaders to understand how it all works; please help get word out at universities.
   5. Amtrak –
      1. Todd Stennis said as soon as FRA report is available, Amtrak will be meeting with communities in January and February.
      2. New Amtrak CEO, Moorman wanted to be here today, but we hope to host him in the near future.
6. Communications and Media Update-CPEX
   1. Website is tracking FRA Working group activities and SRC Press along with information on FRA Station Grants
   2. FRA Station Grants press release was sent to all three states media outlets
   3. Facebook growth creates visibility and standing for our efforts.
   4. CPEX can help to promote local stories working with communities and progress on station construction and planning.

**SUMMARY AND SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS**:

* + - March 3, 2017 Louisiana – Baton Rouge
    - June 9, 2017 Alabama
    - Sept 2017

**ADJOURNMENT at 11:00am**