**Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00AM with nine Commissioners in attendance as follows:

Alabama: Toby Bennington, J.W. McFarland Jr.; Greg White, Larry Watts

Mississippi: Knox Ross, Kay Kell

Louisiana: John Spain, Michael Jackson, Phil Jones,Steve Carter

Chairman Ross led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The first order of business was the approval of the minutes of the September 6, 2013 meeting.

**Government Relations Contract**

John Robert Smith proposed a government relations contract to the Commission that would take advantage of TIFIA and TIGER funding programs. The Commission approved the contract. John Robert Smith directed the Commission to come up with a prioritized list of projects.

Brenda Jones stated that the feasibility study for the Montgomery-Birmingham line is waiting for FRA and local government’s approval. Surveys have been conducted in both cities.

John Robert Smith offered his assistance in drafting a proposal for TIGER support and TIFIA modification as well as pursuing additional sources of funding.

Upon a motion by John Spain and a second by Toby Bennington to enter into a contract with John Robert Smith and Reconnecting America, Chairman Ross brought this matter to a vote The Commission passed the motion unanimously.

John Robert Smith has drafted a letter to the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee in support of continued federal funding for Amtrak services. The letter is available online for mayors and city councilmen to sign. He requested that Commissioners support this effort.

**2014 Washington Trip**

Commissioner Spain stated the need to meet with Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx in Washington, D.C. concerning rail projects in the South. Commissioner Spain added that Delegates from Louisiana will be heading to the Washington Mardi Gras during the week of February 17-22 and that this would be an opportune time for the Commission’s visit if possible.

Commissioner Bennington expressed support for a trip during the week suggested.

John Robert Smith stated that he would be talking with higher-ups in Washington later this month to advocate for meetings with the Southern Rail Commission. He also stated that the Commission needs a direct ask and not to just smile and shake hands. The traveling party should consist of no more than two commissioners per state.

Commissioner McFarland suggested that the trip be extended a few more days in order to work with John Robert Smith.

Commissioner Spain offered support to John Robert Smith in looking for ways to improve the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program (RRIF) that would expedite the loan process and make funds available for railroad infrastructure.

Commissioner Spain also asked for John Roberts Smith’s support in asking the FRA Atlanta office to convene a multistate meeting on passenger rail similar to the one held in Dallas earlier this year. .

John Robert Smith stated that the Commission should not rely on general government funds for transportation as MAP-21 expires in 2015. He told the commission to assume federal budget cuts of 40 percent as a benchmark.

**JRWA Presentation**

Rod Wilburn proposed a partnership between ADECA and ALDOT. He stated that ALDOT is looking for a list of potential projects to bring to Washington, but because of limited funding the list must be prioritized.

Rod Wilburn stated that a copy of the revised Alabama Rail Plan is available online and an electronic file will be available upon request.

Rod Wilburn stated that the state of Alabama is in favor of infrastructure improvement projects and projects that support economic development for surrounding areas. He promised to research an exact figure of previously allocated state of Alabama funds expended for passenger rail, and send it out in an email to the Commission.

Commissioner McFarland questioned the ALDOT plan and its ability to gain federal funding.

Commissioner Bennington proposed bringing in MPOs and RPOs to facilitate the projects.

**SRC Power Point Presentation**

Commissioner McFarland moved to approve a new SRC power point presentation to replace the existing one. He suggested that input from CPEX and John Robert Smith would be helpful in creating the new presentation. Commissioner White suggested that there will likely be a cost associated with creating the new power point. He also moved to give spending authority to the chairman.

Chairman Ross brought this to a vote and the commission unanimously agreed to give authority to expend necessary funds to the chairman.

**N.O. Baton Rouge Rail Study**

Commissioner Spain then provided copies of the final draft of the HNTB study on the New Orleans-Baton Rouge passenger rail proposal. He stated that meetings have been held with both Kansas City Southern and Canadian National freight rail companies who have agreed to work with the state on the use of their tracks for the proposed service. Spain also reported that the City of New Orleans was planning to build a new passenger terminal at Louis Armstrong Airport and the plans included a direct connection from the proposed passenger rail service and the airport passenger terminal. Finally Spain informed the commission members that as part of the next phase of the work on the New Orleans-Baton Rouge passenger rail project, the Louisiana commissioners may request a grant from the SRC for use as a local match in the next phase of the work.

**Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Summit**

Dan Dealy gave an update on the proposed gulf coast summit for passenger rail. He pointed out a number of issues that had been raised in the initial summit in Mobile, AL in 2013. Among those were the idea to target retirees moving to more coastal regions and the impact of passenger rail service on regional economic development.

Dan Dealy recommends that the Southern Rail Commission consider hosting the Summit event. He believes this is an appropriate focus for the Commission. Mr. Dealy proposed that his firm be hired by the Commission to coordinate this upcoming event on their behalf. A draft proposal has been forwarded to staff, but was not available for consideration at the meeting.

Dan Dealy stated that sponsors covered the entire cost of the previous summit and $4,000 of sponsorship money is available for the next summit. The Commission expressed interest in sponsoring this event, and they will consider the proposal from Dealy.

**Scheduling the Next SRC Meeting**

Chairman Ross suggested that the Commission have future SRC Meetings along the Gulf Coast because the geographic location is convenient for all Commissioners.

Commissioner McFarland stated his disagreement with this proposal, and suggested that each state delegation should determine meeting locations when they are the host state.

Commissioner Spain stated that the drives must be equal for all Commission members in order for attendance to increase.

Commissioner McFarland also suggested that the Commission increase the frequency of meetings from once every three months to once every other month. He stated that having meetings every second month would prevent things from “falling through the cracks” No decision to change the frequency of meetings was made. No action was taken on either of these suggestions.

**Finance Report**

Commissioner White recognized SEARP&DC for an excellent job in accounting services. He proposed that the Commission discuss the current year budget at the next SRC meeting.

A written financial report was provided by SEARP&DC, and was briefly reviewed by the Commission.

**Missing Funds**

Commissioner McFarland addressed his concern of missing financial documents. He stated that two checks were written for unknown amounts. He also stated that three months of files from December 1, 2012- February 21, 2013 were missing from records that he received from South Alabama Regional Planning Commission.

Commissioner McFarland stated that he suspects malfeasance and that he is concerned because the SRC has not had outside auditing for the past two years.

Commissioner White and Chairman Ross suggested that action on these concerns be delayed until the upcoming audit is completed. The firm that audits the accounts of SEARP&DC has been directed to audit both of the two most recent years of SRC accounts and is expected to complete this by June 2014. It is expected that any “missing” bank activity can be identified by the auditor, and that copies of documents can be obtained from the bank.

Commissioner Bennington moved to proceed into .Executive Session to discuss problems with the Commission’s administrative services contract. Upon proper second, the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Ross excused all non-commission members, and moved into Executive Session at 12:05PM.

Chairman Ross reconvened the Commission at 12:20. A motion was made by Commissioner Bennington and seconded by Commissioner Spain, to take appropriate action to terminate the services of Efficiency LLC in accordance with the terms of our contract. This motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Chairman Ross adjourned the Commission meeting at 12:25.