



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Virginia Passenger Rail Authority Board

Jennifer L. Mitchell
Chairperson

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DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority Monday, April 26, 2021 · 10:00 am Electronic Board Meeting

In light of the continuing state of emergency declared by Governor Northam, where it is impracticable or unsafe to assemble a quorum in a single location, and as allowed by the General Assembly during the continuing state of emergency, this meeting to take action to discuss or transact the business statutorily required or necessary to continue operation, the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority held an electronic meeting on March 22, 2021.

All board members participated remotely using a GotoMeeting platform. Members of the public were able to witness the meeting online via live-streaming and were provided with the opportunity to provide public comment telephonically at the outset of the meeting using a dial in number provided in the online meeting public notice. The online internet public notice for the meeting noted that this meeting would be conducted using an electronic process due to the COVID-19 state of emergency and as a precaution to reduce the risk and spread of the novel coronavirus. The online meeting public notice also furnished the Agenda and Board materials as well as information regarding the availability of online live-streaming of the meeting at the noted link. Online viewers were furnished a telephone number to call to notify staff of any interruption of the live streaming of the meeting in accordance with Item 4-0.01.g. of Chapter 1289 and Section 2.2- 3708.2 of the Code of Virginia.

The audio and meeting documents and presentation materials are on the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's website, <http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/vpra/board-meetings/>

MEMBERS PRESENT

Sharon Bulova, Deborah Butler Painter, Victor Cardwell, Patricia Doersch, Roderick Hall, Wick Moorman, Cynthia Moses-Nedd, Hossein Sadid, James Spore, Mariia Zimmerman, Rich Dalton (Ex-Officio), Bruno Maestri (Ex-Officio), and Jennifer Mitchell (Chair).

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF RAIL AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION STAFF PRESENT

Bridget Davis, Suzanne Ellison, Haley Glynn, Joy Harris, Jeremy Latimer, Michael McLaughlin, Steve Pittard, Nick Ruiz, Emily Stock, DJ Stadtler, Emily Stock, and Andrew Wright.

GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT

Rob Churchman (Cherry Bekaert), Corey Hill (Kimley-Horn), and Lisa Wright (Office of the Attorney General).

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The Chair, Jennifer Mitchell, presided and called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the procedures and instructions for the electronic meeting, including all votes will be conducted by roll call vote. The following statement was made:

"On November 19th, Governor Ralph Northam signed House Bill 5005, Virginia's revised biennial budget, which includes new language for meeting electronically. In light of the continuing state of emergency declared by Governor Northam, we are conducting this meeting in a remote setting, keeping safety top of mind and mitigating the impacts and spread of COVID-19."

Executive Assistant Bridget Davis then called the roll and confirmed a quorum was present.

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 22, 2021 AND APRIL 7, 2021 MEETING

Ms. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. Spore to approve the minutes of the March 22, 2021 and the special meeting on April 7, 2021. The vote was conducted by a roll call vote and the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Mitchell opened the meeting up for public comment. There was none.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

The following item was presented for information:

1. Board Chair Update

Presented by: Jennifer Mitchell, Chair

Chair Mitchell provided the following updates:

- **Transforming Rail in Virginia:** USDOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg joined Governor Northam as well as representatives from the Commonwealth, CSX, and Amtrak on March 30 to recognize the execution of the definite agreements with CSX, Amtrak, and VRE. The event was held at the Alexandria VRE-Amtrak Station, and attendance was limited due to Covid. With the signing of the Amtrak and CSX agreements, Financial Close with CSX was completed on April 14.
- **Western Rail Initiative:** A binding term sheet was signed on April 2, 2021 between DRPT and Norfolk Southern (NS). This agreement involves acquisition of the NS Virginia Line from Salem to Christiansburg with passenger service rights through Roanoke/Roanoke Yard, funding for capacity improvements, securing an additional round trip between Alexandria and Roanoke, and a study for rail improvements for a station at Bedford, VA.
- **VPRA Executive Director and CFO Appointed:** *Donald A. ("DJ") Stadtler, Jr.* has been appointed as the first Executive Director of VPRA. At Amtrak, DJ Stadtler served as the Executive Vice President of Finance (CFO), the Executive Vice President of Operations (COO), and Executive Vice President of Administration (CAO). He led administrative functions for the railroad overseeing human resources, labor relations, police and corporate security, real estate, stations and facilities, and procurement and logistics. He was also responsible for providing executive oversight for over 18,000 employees, operating more than 300 daily trains, and attracting and retaining loyal customers resulting in the growth of revenue and ridership. Additionally, he spent 11 years at the Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration where he oversaw accounting, procurement, and real estate.
The VPRA has appointed *Steve Pittard* as the new Chief Financial Officer of the VPRA. Steve brings his experience of the last 17 years at DRPT, where he built up a great team, improved DRPT's financial position and put into place many policies and procedures which have proven to serve the agency well.
- **American Jobs Plan:** President Biden released an overview of his \$2.5T American Jobs Plan on March 31. It also includes \$80B to address Amtrak's repair backlog, modernize the NEC, improve existing corridors, connect new city pairs, and enhance grant and loan programs that support passenger and freight rail safety, efficiency, and electrification.
- **Statewide Rail Plan:** DRPT is kicking off its Statewide Rail Plan, as required by FRA every four years. Be on the lookout for outreach materials for long-range planning. We expect to finalize the report in early 2022.
- **Amendment to the 2019 DC2RVA Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act Memorandum of Agreement:** DRPT is working with fellow signatories to amend the 2019 DC2RVA Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act Memorandum of Agreement. The first amendment was finalized in early April to add FHWA as a signatory, and will be working on another amendment

as a result of changes to an important resource in the City of Richmond, the Shockoe Hill Burying Ground Historic District. Through this process DRPT will be re-evaluating preliminary project plans and impacts in this area in collaboration with Section 106 Consulting Parties and other stakeholders, including the City of Richmond.

[PASSENGER AND COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS:](#)

- **50% Capacity Restriction on Amtrak Trains Lifting in May 2021:** Amtrak moved from 'Travel Restricted' to 'Travel Allowed' phase in March 2021. Amtrak will move to 'Travel Encouraged' phase in May 2021. 50% capacity restriction on Amtrak trains as well as on Amtrak Thruway buses will be lifted on May 23rd.
- **Bikes on Virginia Sponsored Amtrak Trains:** Virginia will begin offering the option to reserve and bring bikes on board *all* Virginia sponsored Amtrak trains starting May 1, 2021 (National Bike Month). Amtrak completed a retro-fit of the luggage racks on-board Amfleet passenger cars, which allows luggage racks to be reserved for a bike and converted into a bike rack for that trip. Each luggage rack conversion allows one bike, and total reservations per train are limited to 2-4 bikes to preserve luggage space.
 - Previously bikes were only allowed onboard trains where checked baggage was offered, which required a baggage car. Except for one Newport News daily round trip to Boston, Virginia trains did not have a baggage car.
 - Virginia has received positive feedback from New York, and North Carolina who began offering the service on the Carolinian when this option became available in early 2021 when their baggage car was removed during the pandemic.
 - DRPT staff joined Champe Burnley in late February to test out the boarding and alighting with a bike on a passenger car on the Carolinian, which requires the passenger to handle their own bike when boarding. While it is a cumbersome process to board with a bike, especially at low-level platforms, and then remove a front tire to fit it in the bike rack and reverse the process when alighting, we do think it will have minimal impact on the boarding process.
- **American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA):** The newest round of federal stimulus in response to the pandemic has allocated \$1.7b total to Amtrak, with \$175M going to all state sponsored services. Virginia is expect to receive about \$12.6M in funding through ARPA.
- **Long Distance Service Restoration:** Amtrak is fully restoring reduced Long Distance service to daily service between May 24 and June 7, which was made possible through the latest round of federal stimulus funding. Long distance routes Crescent, Palmetto, Silver Meteor, and Silver Star which pass through Virginia are scheduled to be restored on June 7.

[Amtrak Service:](#)

- **Change in Route 46 - Washington D.C.-Roanoke (Train 156) Weekend Schedule:** Starting May 24, 2021, weekend Virginia supported northbound train from Roanoke to New York Penn Station (train 156) will depart Roanoke at 8:55am (15 minutes later than current schedule) and arrive at NYP at 6:01pm (15 minutes later than current

schedule). This change is being made to resolve potential conflict with a new schedule for the Crescent (train 20) arriving at the same time as train 156 at the Lynchburg station.

- **Amtrak 50 Year Anniversary Sale:** Virginia will participate in a nationwide Amtrak sale in conjunction with their 50th Anniversary celebrations. The details of the sale are as follows:
 - Sales Dates: 4/28 – 5/5
 - Travel Dates: 6/2 – 11/13
 - Details: 50% off with a \$50 maximum fare (the maximum fare will not apply to the states as none of them have pricing that would reach that level)
- **Virginia Sponsored Service Schedule:** Virginia is working with Amtrak to look at the feasibility of restoring the Washington-Richmond route in 2021, with a date TBD. The Richmond route is the last remaining route of Virginia supported service to be restored to 100% of pre-pandemic level. This Route will terminate at Richmond Main Street Station instead of Staples Mill Station as part of the Transforming Rail service plan.

[Amtrak Ridership:](#)

- **Ridership on Virginia sponsored service:** March 2021 ridership was down 60.1% compared to March 2019 (pre-pandemic) ridership. Year-to-Date ridership in March 2021 (FY2021) was down 66.7% compared to March 2019 (FY2019).
- M-o-M ridership change for Virginia sponsored service: March 2021 ridership was 53.4% higher than February 2021 ridership (+9,852). February 2021 ridership was 18,440.
- From February to March 2021, all three operational routes saw an average increase in ridership of ~3,000. With a single roundtrip to D.C., Roanoke route had the highest gain in month-over-month ridership of all three routes.
- **Amtrak Bookings:** The volume of bookings and Yo2Y comparisons vs FY19 continue to improve. 7-day moving average for bookings is ↓55.5% Yo2Y. All business lines have improved since the beginning of CY21.

[VRE Service:](#)

- **COVID-19 Service Schedule:** VRE trains are operating on an 'S' Schedule Plus (special schedule for holidays and snow days, supplemented with Train 300 for the northbound commute and Train 307 for the southbound commute on the Fredericksburg line).

[VRE Ridership:](#)

- Average daily ridership (ADR) in March was 1,379. The average for the last two months was 1,155, so VRE did have a noteworthy increase in ridership in March. ADR in March 2020 was 8,764.
- VRE system wide on-time performance rate for March 2021 was 93%.

2. Executive Directors Report

Presented by: DJ Stadtler, Executive Director

Executive Director Stadtler provided the following updates:

- Executive Director Stadtler expressed that he was thrilled to have both Steve Pittard, Chief Financial Officer and Michael McLaughlin, Chief Operating Officer at VPRA.
- The Board was given insight on key deliverables to expect by the next meeting. These things included the following:
- Mr. Stadtler would work with the executive team to develop a set of standard reports that will be used for each Board meeting. This would be consistent and include things such as operating statistics, ridership revenue, financial and project updates.
- Work is being done to develop, prioritize and implement policies and procedure for VPRA that will be brought to the board for feedback.
- Each member of the board can be expecting communication in the near future in regards to setting up a one on one meeting with Executive Director Stadtler, so he can listen to their feedback and suggestions for improvement.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

The following items were presented for information:

Amtrak Ridership & Revenue: COVID Impacts

*Presented by: Jeremy Latimer, Director of Rail Programs – DRPT
Haley Glynn, PR & Marketing Specialist – DRPT*

- Mr. Latimer and Ms. Glynn provided background information on ridership and the impacts of covid-19.
- There was also a focus on the determination of fare prices, as well as information regarding the role of the state in marketing.

Statewide Rail Plan

Presented by: Emily Stock, Manager of Rail Planning – DRPT

- Ms. Stock provided information about the statewide rail plan. An area of focus was the regulations of the Federal Railroad Administration. This is because an approved rail plan make states eligible for federal funding.
- The plan has to be approved every four years (last SRP adopted by CTB 2018).
- It's also able to show a four year and a twenty year planning horizon, and obtain data points/metrics that can be replicated and compared plan to plan and state to state.

Rail Station Policy, Needs Assessment, and Prioritization Strategies for Station Funding

Presented by: Emily Stock, Manager of Rail Planning – DRPT

- Ms. Stock reported on Recent Changes Related to Stations, Current Station Responsibilities of Amtrak and the Commonwealth, Potential Funding

Prioritization, New Station Roles (VPRA, DRPT), Rail Plan will Help Establish Data-Driven Priorities

Administrative Updates

Presented By: Jennifer Mitchell, Chairperson

Steve Pittard, Chief Financial Officer – DRPT

- Mr. Pittard spoke about the RFP and solicitation that was used to bring Rob Churchman on board as the auditor to assist with the Commonwealth's annual budget.
- Mr. Churchman has thirty years of public accounting experience, and came from Cherry Bekaert.
- Mr. Pittard plans on bringing monthly reporting of finance results to the finance committee in May along with adopting an investment policy.
- Wells Fargo is the financial institution chosen for banking services. They also already have working relationships with the Department of Treasury.
- Currently the contractual process is being worked through.

MOTION FOR CLOSED SESSION

Following the presentations, Ms. Bulova made the following motion:

"I move that the Board convene in a Closed Session pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 (A)(6) of the Code of Virginia, for the purpose of discussing potential transactions where bargaining is involved and where the financial interest of the Commonwealth would be adversely affected if the discussion were made public at this time,

And, pursuant to Va. Code Sec. 2.2-3711(A)(8), for the purpose of consulting with legal counsel regarding provisions in the agreement requiring legal advice.

"Additionally, I move that staff and attorneys attend the Closed Session because their presence is deemed necessary, and will aid the Board in its consideration of this matter."

Ms. Deboorah Butler-Painter and Mr, Wick Moorman also made public declarations regarding personal interest. More information regarding the language that was used may be found here: <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title2.2/chapter31/section2.2-3110/>

The motion was seconded by Ms. Butler Painter and carried unanimously by Board roll call vote.

The Board suspended the open session at 12:10 p.m. on April 26, 2021 to move into closed session

RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION

The Chair reconvened the open session meeting at 1:12 p.m. on April 26, 2021. Upon reconvening the meeting, the Chair made the following statement:

"We are now going to take a roll call vote, and I ask that each member indicate their agreement with the following:

To the best of my knowledge, during the Closed Meeting, the only matters heard, discussed or considered were those matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, and only those public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the Closed Meeting was convened."

The motion was seconded by Mr. Moorman and carried unanimously by Board roll call vote.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 1:17 p.m. All presentations to the Board and meeting video can be found at www.drpt.virginia.gov/vpra/board-meetings/.

Respectfully Submitted:

Joy Harris, Executive Assistant

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