

ROXBURY ARPA COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 10, 2022
10:03AM – 11:25AM
THIS MEETING WAS HELD IN PERSON AT THE COMMUNITY HALL

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING: Rene Bouchard, Brock Freyer (via Teams), Don Randall, Elizabeth Carney, Sean Cummings

PUBLIC: Mr. Charles (Charlie) Moore, President allEarth Rail (via Teams)

Mr. David Mullett, General Counsel allEarth Rail,

Kahwa Douoguih, Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Resilience and Security, Norwich U.

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:03 am

Introductions were made.

2. Discussion with representatives of allEarth Rail, President Charlie Moore & General Counsel David Mullett

It was explained to the members of the Public that the purpose of the meeting was meant to put a stick in the ground as at November 2022 in terms of where things stand on a Commuter Rail System in Central Vermont. There has been and continues to be much chatter locally about the possibility of rail service and we are trying to see if this dream is close to becoming a reality.

Before jumping in on the questions previously submitted to allEarth Rail (AER) by the Committee, David spoke about this being a great reset time for discussing rail in Vermont post-pandemic. He noted he and Charlie having had pleasant discussions late last year with other residents of Roxbury, touring the non-profit building at the corner of Warren Mtn Rd and having had discussions with the President of Norwich University. AER knows that there is strong Community interest here and in the area.

He went on to express the need to clarify that AER Rail is interested in leasing the rail cars they own for use in a Community Rail System (CRS) as opposed to actually operating a railroad.

The candor was appreciated and we moved forward through our questions with this important distinction now in mind.

allEarth Rail

We have seen the Seven Days article from 2017 and the VT Rail website. So exactly where do things stand today with regards to CRS in and around Montpelier? Has there been a formal application to Vtrans yet?

The Seven Days article had a 2017 price tag of 300+M for a larger St Albans-Montpelier Service. Is financing a smaller venture in today's environment more doable and do you think a Randolph/Roxbury-Montpelier line would make money and so prove sustainable?

David asked to cover questions 1 & 2 together, with no objections.

- a. allEarth Rail has yet to find a partner to operate a CRS in Central Vermont
- b. the first partner that comes to their mind is Vt Rail System as they currently operate freight service in our area.
- c. there is a lot of support from the Governors office, Capitol politicians, Libby Bonesteel at the Montpelier/Roxbury school system and the Communities between Montpelier and Roxbury
- d. Charlie Moore sits on Governor Scott's Vermont Rail Advisory Council
- e. the section of rail running through Roxbury to Montpelier Junction is in good shape
- f. the section of track between the Junction and Montpelier/Barre is in terrible shape
- g. in the 300+M price tag as noted in the 2017 article, about half the amount was for the purchase of trains and that purchase has been made
- h. AER has a fleet of 10 operable cars, most sitting Barre. They have also leased some to the Finger Lakes district in upstate NY for shuttling tourists
- i. the Budd stainless steel rail cars are beautifully made from the late-50's
- j. they operate on diesel but with a good load of people are more fuel efficient than a Toyota Prius. Moving people on mass transit is much better for the climate.
- k. AER can see moving to electric cars in the future
- l. as for proving sustainable, Charlie reported that no rail system in the US makes money so not the best criteria for evaluation. This endeavor would require public funding.

What impediments do you see in implementing a CRS on this line?

- a. **Track Rights** - while the track on this line is upgraded one would still need to secure rights to operate on it. This means negotiating with far off Genesee & Wyoming as the parent company of New England Central Railroad. Part of the fallout from the Amtrack bankruptcy in the 70's is that private arrangements now have to be made amongst many players.
- b. **Cost** - securing track rights may take a lot of money
- c. **Funding** – one would need to come up with funding to cover the various expenses
- d. **Montpelier Junction to Montpelier/Barre Spur Line** – this line is in such bad shape that there exists a federal restriction of "No Passenger Service Allowed". The line is owned by the State of Vermont and they pay a railroad operator to maintain the line such that it is.
- e. **Amtrack** - need to work with Amtrack so as not to impact service, even if Amtrack trains are running late

What is allEarth Rails timeframe... is a CRS seen as doable within the next 2-4 years?

- a. 2 years unlikely
- b. 4 years perhaps more doable, all depends on finding a partner with financing

What Government & Private entities are involved in getting a CRS up & running?

- a. VTrans (freight rail predominates the VTrans budget, need to change that)
- b. Governor's Office
- c. Congressional support at both the State and Federal level (Sen. Lahey leaving)
- d. Montpelier/Roxbury School System
- e. Norwich University
- f. the greater Community and in particular, a strong group of citizens
- g. VCIL – the Vermont Center for Independent Living could play a vital role

What do you see is involved on the part of AllEarth & the Town of Roxbury in terms of permitting, etc... with a venture such as this?

- a. touched on items in earlier questions
- b. these trains load/unload passengers at near ground level so a simple platform in Roxbury is all that is needed.

Rail Link

Would a Commuter link on this line mesh with getting riders to Amtrak in either Montpelier or Randolph?

- a. yes it could, but a question is how much does one want to bite off at one time. Should the line run from Randolph and that Amtrack station to the Moretown/ Red Hen area or just Roxbury to Montpelier Junction? In the Moretown/Red Hen area there exists a small historical train station.

A discussion was held around the Committee's belief that a stop in Roxbury allowing for a connection to Amtrack in either Randolph or Montpelier Junction would prove a real draw from the Mad River Valley and other surrounding areas. It was agreed that Sugarbush could have a real interest as the old Ski Train to Waterbury was mentioned. It was noted the incredible amount of traffic passing through Roxbury on any given Friday evening and Sunday afternoon during ski season. It was also mentioned that the Mad River Valley has done much in making the Valley a destination in all seasons (except maybe mud season!).

All that being said, Sugarbush, the Mad River Valley and Vermont Tourism could be a tremendous advocate on behalf of a rail system in Central VT.

It was noted that the ridership numbers on the recently opened Ethan Allen Extension between Middlebury and Burlington has exceeded expectations. They also are expecting high ridership around University breaks in both towns.

We have a VTrans commuter lot by the tracks near the Town Garage and there is a move afoot to rebuild a new Town Garage on another site. If this is done, then the existing building could be torn down and so the Park & Ride could be expanded.

Would an expanded schedule of roundtrips to Randolph/Montpelier per day make economic sense?

- a. maybe

The brick Bank building located beside the tracks in Northfield has recently been vacated. Are you aware of Northfield's Rail plans and if so, would an initiative like ours mesh with theirs?

- a. AER has heard of the building vacancy but have not been by yet to see it. It is believed that Northfields recent interest in rail as seen in Front Porch Forum is also due to ARPA queries.

We have been told Norwich U. may possibly be interested in something like this, have you heard anything?

- a. as mentioned earlier, AER has spoken with the President of Norwich who is very interested
- b. Norwich expressed the long term view of being able to recruit students with the promise of easy access both to/from the school as well as other Vt cities like Montpelier, Burlington and beyond (Boston/NYC)
- c. Kahwa offered to connect David with Tom Davis the Economic Development person in Northfield

MRVS

The following questions were to have been posed to MRVS Principal Ms Kellogg but she never returned our phone call. Luckily David did have and was able to provide some statistics from 2021 for our conversation.

How many children are bussed to Montpelier each AM, each PM and late?

- a. David had statistics from 2021 which show 26 students ride the bus
- b. while not a huge market in terms of potential train ridership it would be consistent
- c. train would not replace bussing as busses would still be needed to shuttle children both within Roxbury and also on the Montpelier side

What is Roxbury's portion of the annual Montpelier/Roxbury transportation budget?

- a. David had a figure of approximately \$689k but that was the whole school system transportation budget not just Roxbury's share

Does the School have any idea on projected ridership in 3 / 5 / 10 years?

- a. unknown and to be explored if the conversation continues

Given school bussing within Roxbury, one or more busses would still be needed per the school bus schedule. Does the supplementing of bussing with rail between Roxbury & Montpelier make economic sense and is it feasible given school ridership & budget?

- a. unknown and to be explored if the conversation continues

- 3. Additions/Deletions to Agenda - none
- 4. Approve Minutes of 03-Nov-22 - deferred
- 5. Discussion on Progress-To-Date on the various assigned Projects - deferred
- 6. Discussion on Open Items Remaining - deferred

7. Other Business

- a. Next mtg set for 17-Nov-22 @ 10am
- b. Last Nov mtg set for 01-Dec-22 @ 10am

With no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 11:25am.