

Northwoods Rail Transit Commission

Members: Ashland, Florence, Forest, Iron, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Marinette, Oconto, Oneida, Price, Rusk and Vilas Counties of WI and Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Marquette, Menominee and Ontonagon Counties of MI

Meeting Summary

Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association - Rhinelander WI

10:00 am January 27, 2017

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

2. Introductions of attendees and Public Comment Period
 - a. Commissioners in attendance were: Roger Luce – Oneida County Economic Development, Wendy Gehlhoff – Florence County Economic Development, Alan Christensen – Marathon County Board, Dave Hintz – Oneida County, Grant Verhulst – Vilas County, Bruce Jilka – Price County Board Chair, *Angie Close – Langlade County, Andy Albarado – Rusk County, Brian Bousley – Dickinson County, Dale Kupczyk – Ashland County Economic Development, Joe Bonovetz – Gogebic County, Joseph Pinardi – Iron County, WI, Ed Wenger – Florence County, Kevin Koth – Lincoln County Board, Sherry Abitz, Marathon County Board, Joe Stevens, Dickinson County Board, Gerald Piche, Menominee County Board.*

 - b. Others in attendance were: Dennis Hastretter – Oneida County, Jim Hoppe – Packaging Corp of America, Collin Buntrock – WDNR Forest Products Services Specialist, Steve Kienitz - WisDOT, Henry Schienebeck – Exec. Director GLTPA, Jane Severt – Exec. Director WCFA, Lakeland Times reporter, Don Nelson – Domtar, Jim Kvelaras – CN, Rick Bliese – Lincoln Wood Products, Janet Bewley – Wisconsin State Senate, Bill Korrer – Wisconsin Counties Association, Barb LeMue – Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, *Darryl Landeau - NCWRPC, Jeff Hagan – EUPRPDC, John Duncan Varda – Wisconsin Central Group, Pasi Lautala – Michigan Technological University, Rich Kedzior – WisDOT, Steve Lasco – WUPPDR, Tim Lynott – Highland Copper, Tom Klimek – E&LS RR, Wally Townsend, Sandra Verhulst – Vilas County, Peter Van Steen – CUPPAD, Mike Berg – Patrick Engineering, Kari Divine - Renewable Resource Solutions*

3. Ron Heikkinen's name was corrected in the June 24, 2016 Meeting Notes. Approval of Meeting Notes from June 24, 2016 was motioned by D. Hintz, seconded by A. Christensen and unanimously approved.

4. 2017 Administrative Services Scope of Work and Contract were reviewed. The scope of work and contract amount will remain the same. The ad-hoc committee had discussed the need for more expertise in forest industry guidance and collaboration to move our mission forward and decided to work with the Renewable Resource Solutions. An information sheet on Renewable Resource Solutions was handed out. A. Christensen motioned that NRTC will begin utilizing Renewable Resource Solutions for administrative services rather than the NCWRPC in 2017, E. Wenger seconded, unanimously passed. The NRTC thanks the NCWRPC for its service over the last 5 years.

5. The update on the CN short-line request was discussed. In October, CN requested Ad Hoc Committee meet with a short-line operator exploring light density line operation feasibility. The short-line expects to get back to the Ad Hoc Committee with their outcome in 2017 first quarter. The Ad Hoc Committee was asked to keep name confidential. Grant opportunities and willingness to help locate potential new customers was offered to the short-line.
6. The draft letter to State and Federal entities regarding the damaged rail line to Ashland was reviewed and discussed. WEDC representative would like to further discuss the possibility of building funding for rail data collection into the grant for forestry markets. Need to look at resources outside of forestry. E&LS RR hopes to be fully certified for log car production in late 2017. E&LS currently has about 80 log cars always in use. CN Rep did not know how many log cars are idle compared to a year ago. Life expectancy and condition of cars was discussed. A large number of cars are mandated to be retired, which will lead to increased truck traffic. GLTPA will be advocating for the Michigan 11 axle trucks that carry more weight but less weight per axle to have additional highway access into Wisconsin so log transportation can be efficient and economical. Will need to put out an RFP for a freight rail consultant grant work. Discussion was held about the studies and data collection that has already been completed. Previous lack of participation by industry because of confidentiality concerns. Indexing or averaging the data may encourage better participation. P. Lautala will provide the studies that have already been completed. The complexity and market swings of the forest industry affects stable demand for rail. Need to consider additional products for rail besides logs and intermodal. Suggestions for changes to the letter regarding trucking, and removing statement re CN's lack of action. H. Schienebeck, J. Bewley and W. Gehlhoff will help re-draft the letter.
7. Ad-hoc Committee's 2017 Work Plan Outline:
 - a. Gather examples from businesses in NRTC region detailing decline in rail services, loss of service and/or large price escalations since 2001
 - b. Work with Governors' offices, state and federal legislators, state associations and state departments to identify any funding sources to hire a consultant to collect actionable shipper data throughout our two state NRTC region
 - i. Review possible funding sources, determine most likely and then secure funding
 - ii. Complete a Request for Proposal process to identify the best consultant entity
 - iii. Implement the data collection project
 - c. Work with federal legislators to connect with the Surface Transportation Board to learn more about our options within the STB framework
 - d. Draft a statement related to "Mining will bring anchor tenants who will provide new rail investment monies that will improve the transportation options for all Northwoods businesses".
8. The next meeting date is pending. Chair, W. Gehlhoff will call a meeting when action items arise. Agenda items for the next NRTC meeting include developing a stance regarding mining, developing a strategy for outreach to state and federal elected officials regarding rail,
9. Motion to adjourn at 11:38 by D. Hintz, seconded by G. Verhulst, and unanimously passed.