

NORTHWOODS RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSION

MEETING SUMMARY

GLTPA - Rhinelander

April 19, 2024

1./2. Call to Order / Roll Call-Introductions and Public Comment

The meeting was called to order at approximately 10 am by Chair Kelly Klein. Those in attendance included the following: Kelly Klein Iron County WI Economic Development, Dale Kupczyk Ashland County, Joe Bonovetz Gogebic County Board, Jeff Ratcliffe Houghton County/KEDA, Tom Buelteman Marinette County Board, Alan Barkstrom Price County Board, Barb Kramer Dickinson County Board, Steven Viau Delta County Board, Dennis Kroll Oconto County Board, Don Bartels Oconto County Board, Larry Phelps Menominee County Board, Gary Mertig Ashland County Board Chair, Richard Rossway Congressman Bergman's Office, Jim Rosenberg WEDC, Matt Pleshek City of Shawano, Shawn Brantmeier WPC, Ken Lucht Watco, Brad Peot Watco, Jim Hoppe PCA, Jerry Wuorenmaa WUPPDR, John Varda LSSA-WCG, Ty Penca, Ben Mohlke WisDOT, Dylan Stenz Congressman Tiffany's Office, Don Nelson WPC, Unidentified, and Darryl Landeau NCWRPC.

Public Comment: None.

3. Approval of NRTC Meeting Notes from June 9, 2023

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Barkstrom, the meeting notes from June 9, 2023 were approved with all in favor.

4. Chairperson's Report

Klein welcomed everyone to the meeting and indicated that Joe Bonovetz had a statement he would like to read into the record. Gogebic and Oconto County have been working on a joint effort to develop the Snowbelt Rail Transit Commission focusing on the White Pine Line. Basically, there are concerns about the progress on restoring service post-CN. The removal of rail crossing infrastructure at a number of locations was cited as an indication of continued reduction in service.

Watco responded that CN left them with a severely deteriorated system that will take time to build back, noting that they are only 2-years in at this point. They have been working hard to maintain and improve service for existing customers while exploring potential new business opportunities across the region. They are making progress on a number of high priority projects on their system around the state, as well as working on a number of major efforts here in the Northwoods (Editor's note: refer to item 6 for more

on these projects). Watco also clarified that the referenced rail crossings have not been abandoned. Deteriorated rail infrastructure was removed during highway reconstruction projects, but agreements were made with WI and MI DOTs to install new rail crossings at a future date when they become needed.

Watco continues to evaluate the potential of all its rail lines including the out-of-service segments, and after only 2-years it's too early to give up on pieces such as the White Pine Line.

5. Election of Officers

Landeau reported that election of officers was due, and that the Treasurer position was open due to Russ Fisher's departure from the Oneida County Board.

Vice Chair Kupczyk assumed the gavel to open nominations for NRTC Chairperson. Kupczyk nominated Kelly Klein, Iron County. Bonovetz moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Klein. Viau seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Chairperson Klein opened nominations for NRTC Vice Chair. Bonovetz nominated Dale Kupczyk, Ashland County. Viau moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Kupczyk. Bonovetz seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Chair Klein opened nominations for NRTC Secretary. Viau nominated Joe Bonovetz, Gogebic County. Buelteman moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Bonovetz. Barkstrom seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Chair Klein opened nominations for NRTC Treasurer. Bonovetz nominated Jeff Ratcliffe, Houghton County. Viau moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Fisher. Bonovetz seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

6. Update on WATCO Rail Operations

Ken Lucht and Brad Peot gave an update on Watco activities. In addition to major bridge projects in the Fox Cities and work with the Port of Green Bay, they are working on a grant to restore 22 bridges across their system, including: Wausau, Merrill, Tomahawk/Bradley and Rhinelander. Another grant from the MI DOT will provide \$2.2 million to improve track from Trout Lake to Munising

In Merrill they are installing a new rail spur and developing a transload hub. They are working to restore service to Mellen and develop a transload site which will hopefully be a more economical option for moving the copper ore. And they have also been working to convert wood movement back to rail. They have purchased an additional log car and are testing that market.

The Watco team took a number of questions, and there was wide ranging discussion. Viau brought up new county materials management regulations in MI and was wondering if rail might be a part of the solution for materials movement.

7. Approval of NRTC 2024 Administrative Budget

Landeau reported that the proposed budget for 2024 was the same as 2023. On the revenue side, county membership dues continue at the original \$500 per county for Wisconsin and \$350 per county for Michigan. On the expenditure side, the administrative services fee will continue at \$6,500 with set asides for potential miscellaneous expenses and the reserve to ensure maintenance of operations in case of reduction in membership as has happened in the past.

On a motion by Viau, seconded by Ratcliffe, the NRTC Administrative Budget for 2024 was approved as presented with all in favor.

8. Approval of NRTC 2024 Administrative Services Agreement

Landeau reported that the proposed service agreement for 2024 was the same as 2023. The agreement provides for the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) to provide administrative services to the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission (NRTC) to maintain operations for the rail commission. Activities include organizing meetings, preparing agendas and minutes, webpage maintenance, financial management and miscellaneous day-to-day functions.

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Bartels, the NRTC Administrative Services Agreement for 2024 was approved as presented with all in favor.

9. Discuss Next Meeting Date

Klein proposed meeting again in September. If something needing more immediate attention arises a meeting can be called at that time.

Barkstrom referred to correspondence Price County received regarding emission standards for locomotives. Lucht indicated it would potentially put half their fleet out of service. WMC and Chamber across WI are taking the matter up. It was determined that this should be an agenda item at the next meeting. Lucht will provide more information.

10. Adjourn

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Viau, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:30 am.