

NORTHWOODS RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSION

MEETING SUMMARY

Virtual – Google Meet

November 12, 2021

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

The meeting was call to order at approximately 10:05 am by Chair Wendy Gehlhoff. Those in attendance included the following: Wendy Gehlhoff Florence County Economic Development, Kelly Klein Iron County WI Economic Development, Charlie Glazman Douglas County Board, James Ceser, Douglas County Economic Development, Gary Frank Oconto County Board, Jeff Verdoorn Oneida County Economic Development, Dale Kupczyk Ashland County, Joe Pinardi Oconto County Board Chair, Al Christensen Marathon County Board, Joe Bonovetz Gogebic County Board, Bob Kopisch Price County Board Chair, Marlene Broemer Ontonagon County Board, Robert Barron Delta County Board, Ken Lucht Watco, Rich Kedzior WisDOT and Darryl Landeau NCWRPC.

There was no public comment:

3. Approval of NRTC Meeting Notes from June 8, 2021

On a motion by Klein, seconded by Frank, the meeting notes from June 8, 2021 were approved with all in favor.

4. Chairperson's Report

Gehlhoff reported that it has been fairly quiet as we wait for the STB decision and invited Kedzior to give a recap of the State Rail Conference which was held virtually Wednesday. Kedzior noted that the conference included updates by WisDOT Rails and Harbors, the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads and their rail crossing safety action plan, as well as the individual Railroads. There were presentations on the new state multimodal transportation plan, the Wisconsin Railroad Association, Wisconsin passenger rail, and the Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA) grant program. Stephan Loeb of Watco gave a presentation on the (anticipated) expansion of their operations. The session was not recorded but presentation slides are available at: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/multimodal/rail-conf.aspx>

5. Membership Update

Landeau reported that earlier this year the counties of Price in Wisconsin and Gogebic in Michigan have rejoined the NRTC. It was suggested that a motion was in order to acknowledge their reentry.

On a motion by Kupczyk, seconded by Christensen, Price and Gogebic counties are re-accepted into the NRTC, with all in favor.

6. Rail Line Sale Update

Ken Lucht from Watco provided a brief update on the status of the line purchase from CN. It is really just a wait and see situation on STB approval, and they don't plan on making any additional filings on the docket. Watco has been in contact with STB staff and feel approval could come any day now. Had the approval come quickly this summer, they would be up to full steam at this point, but now winter will slow things down as snow covered tracks are difficult to inspect, for example. Watco has been ready since July having brought on extensive personnel and equipment as well as lining up all the necessary business arrangements such as insurance and leases - representing a \$12-million investment.

Kopisch asked how soon they would be able to begin operations after STB approval? Lucht indicated about 30-days. (Editor's note: of course, service to areas where extensive track repair and restoration is required will need more time.) Gehlhoff asked about support for northern industries like logging. Lucht indicated they want to support and help northern industries grow no matter how many cars they want to ship. Watco has 308 log cars and equipment to support them, and they are looking at expanding that. Frank asked about bringing in funding to build up the service. Lucht said that they've had to pass on 2-cycles of federal funding while the sale has been under review, they are optimistic about increased funding availability with the infrastructure bill.

7. 2022 NRTC Budget

Landeau presented the NRTC budget for 2022. Basically, the budget remains the same as previous years except for two factors: 1) Membership fee for Michigan counties increases by \$50 as part of the incremental step process to bring to parity with the Wisconsin counties. 2) An increase in the amount for administrative services of \$500 to cover increasing costs. Frank asked about the reserves for miscellaneous costs. Landeau stated about \$7,400 at this time.

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Kupczyk, the NRTC administrative services agreement for 2022 was approved as presented, with all in favor.

8. 2022 Administrative Services Agreement

Landeau presented the NRTC administrative services agreement for 2021. Basically, the services agreement remains the same as last year except that it reflects the increase in the fee. It contracts with the NCWRPC to provide administrative services including meeting coordination, NRTC communications, website maintenance, fiscal, clerical and other support functions.

On a motion by Pinardi, seconded by Verdoorn, the NRTC administrative services agreement for 2022 was approved as presented, with all in favor.

9. Discuss Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will likely depend on timing of STB action and the need to address anything related to that. The next administrative action required would be elections, generally in April.

10. Adjourn

On a motion by Broemer, seconded by Kopisch, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:55 am.