

NORTHWOODS RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSION

MEETING SUMMARY

GLTPA - Rhinelander

September 23, 2022

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: Wendy Gehlhoff Florence County, Kelly Klein Iron County WI Economic Development, Dale Kupczyk Ashland County, Joe Bonovetz Gogebic County Board, Jeff Ratcliffe Houghton County/KEDA, Russ Fisher Oneida County Board, Bill Korrer Oneida County, Joe Pinardi Iron County Board Chair, Gary Frank Oconto County Board, Tom Buelteman Marinette County Board, Dave Baker Marathon County Board, Mike Cassidy Marinette County, Marlene Broemer Ontonagon County Board, Larry Phelps Menominee County Board Chair, Charlie Glazman Douglas County Board, Tom McNamee MI Senator McBroom's Office, Rick Bliese Lincoln Wood Products, Ken Lucht Watco, Brad Peot Watco, Brian Buchanan Watco, Jerry Wuorenmaa WUPPDR, John Varda LSSA-WCG, Jack Hiller, Rich Kedzior WisDOT and Darryl Landeau NCWRPC.

Others may have been in attendance but did not report their presence on the audio line.

There was no public comment:

3. Approval of NRTC Meeting Notes from April 29, 2022

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Gehlhoff, the meeting notes from April 29, 2022 were approved with all in favor.

4. Chairperson's Report

Klein welcomed everyone to the meeting.

5. NRTC 2023 Administrative Budget

Landeau reported that the proposed budget for 2023 was similar to 2022 and prior years. On the revenue side, county membership dues continue at the original \$500 per county for Wisconsin and would again be increased by \$50 to \$350 per county for Michigan to continue the gradual move toward parity. 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 Pinardi, seconded by Korrer, the NRTC Administrative Budget for 2023 was approved as presented with all in favor.

6. NRTC 2023 Administrative Services Agreement

Landeau reported that the proposed service agreement for 2023 was the same as 2022. 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 Kupczyk, the NRTC Administrative Services Agreement for 2023 was approved as presented with all in favor.

7. WATCO Update on Northwoods Rail Service

Ken Lucht, Brian Buchanan and Brad Peot from Watco provided a report on the over the first nine months of operations. They have been working closely with major customers like 3M in Wausau to improve operations. Representative Tom Tiffany was provided a tour of their operations, and they have been working closely with Senator Tammy Baldwin on grant funding for major system projects outside the northwoods area.

Watco engineers have been working with Michigan Tech on some innovative design concepts to address culvert and bridge washouts. Rail conditions on the Medford line have caused them to suspend service. They will continue to work with customers there to address the situation. In general, they have been working to find ways to bring service back but getting information and commitments has been proving difficult. They have been inspecting the lines and working on estimates for restoring service.

One example is the Marengo-White Pine line where a possible customer (mine) presents an opportunity, but the track is so overgrown that limited access has hampered evaluation of the line. The costs to clear will be substantial. This is an area where public sector assistance may be a needed catalyst.

Log shipping has been resumed to mills in Michigan, and they are working on ways to maximize box car efficiency to address box car shortages. They are also working on a possible trans-load development in Mellen.

The Watco team took a number of questions, and there was wide ranging discussion.

8. Possible NRTC Course of Action on Rail Line Restoration

Klein presented the Executive Committee's discussions on moving forward with an NRTC based course of action to assist the independent efforts of Watco, LSSA/WCG

and Rail Line Committees to help advance restoration of some of the Northwoods out of service lines such as Rhinelander to Goodman or Park Falls to Ashland. Executive Committee would coordinate development of a possible grant application (such as CRISI) for one or more projects on out of service corridors in the Northwoods. WisDOT has offered its assistance and collaboration with a variety of parties would be involved.

Landeau suggested a motion was in order to authorize such an effort.

On a motion by Korrer, seconded by Pinardi, the NRTC Executive Committee is authorized to take actions to promote the development of grant applications to restore out of service rail lines in northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula, with all in favor.

9. Update on WCG Concept for Rail Line Corridor Planning & Cost Benefit Analysis

Varda presented LSSA/WCG concepts for seeking funding through foundations or other entities to aid in planning and development of cost-benefit analysis to support applications for funding to restore rail lines.

10. Discuss Next Meeting Date

The next meeting was tentatively set for first quarter next year, unless something needing more immediate attention arises.

8. Adjourn

On a motion by Cassidy, seconded by Korrer, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:10 am.