

NORTHWOODS RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSION

MEETING SUMMARY

GLTPA - Rhinelander

September 27, 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, Doug Swartz Iron County WI Board, Dale Kupczyk Ashland County, Charlie Glazman Douglas County Board, Joe Bonovetz Gogebic County Board, Tom Buelteman Marinette County Board, Alan Barkstrom Price County Board, Jeff Hallstrand Price County Board, Larry Phelps Menominee County Board, Ron Store Ontonagon County Board, Steven Viau Delta County Board, Dennis Kroll Oconto County Board, Don Bartels Oconto County Board, Scott Johnson Clark County Board, Peter Kaz Clark County EDC, President Kurt Schwoch Village of Dorchester, Mayor Jim Schmidt City of Colby, Sheila Nyberg Clark County EDC, Shawn Brantmeier WPC, Ken Lucht Watco, Jim Hoppe PCA, Jerry Wuorenmaa WUPPDR, Sheldon Johnson NWRPC, John Varda LSSA-WCG, Ben Mohlke WisDOT, Landis Holdorf Congressman Tiffany's Office, Ty Penca, David Dillon Dillon & Nash Ltd, Rick Bliese, Robert Pittman, Nate Mann, Unidentified, and Darryl Landeau NCWRPC.

Public Comment: Joe Bonovetz requested the Pledge of Allegiance in honor of our veterans.

3. Approval of NRTC Meeting Notes from April 19, 2024

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Kaz, the meeting notes from April 19, 2024 were approved with all in favor.

4. Chairperson's Report

Klein welcomed everyone to the meeting and indicated that Executive Committee crafted a letter of support for engineering of rail road bridge improvements across the state including 22 in northern Wisconsin, and provided comments on proposed WisDOT revisions to the FRAPP program.

5. Recognition of New Member County

Landeau reported that Clark County had approached him about NRTC membership due to concerns they have regarding rail service.

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Viau, Clark County, WI is accepted into Northwoods Rail Transit Commission membership.

6. Discussion with Clark County about Rail Service on Medford Subdivision

Clark County representatives expressed concerns they have with rail service on the Medford Subdivision since the transition from CN to Watco. They have been reaching out to various entities and organizations including the STB. They are working to form their own rail transit commission and a shipper's association. Watco responded that they have put a lot of effort into that segment. The track is in poor condition and will require significant investment. For example, the rail crossings would need to be completely replaced before resuming service. Although deteriorated crossing infrastructure has been removed during highway reconstruction projects, the crossings have not been abandoned. Rather, agreements have been made with WisDOT to re-install new rail crossings at a future date when they become needed. This segment is still a part of their long-term planning as they continue to slowly rebuild service that deteriorated under CN across northern Wisconsin and the UP. There were multiple questions and wide-ranging discussion on this issue.

7. Discuss Update on Request from Gogebic & Ontonagon Counties re White Pine Line

Landeau reported that Gogebic and Ontonagon Counties expressed similar concerns (as Clark/Medford Sub.) regarding the White Pine Line at the last Commission meeting on April 19, and they are looking at forming their own rail transit commission (Editor's Note: Rail Transit Commissions are a Wisconsin statutory construct, so I am not sure about the legal basis in Michigan.) Watco's response was similar. They have only had control of the lines for about 2 years, and they anticipated at least 5-years for planning and development to set the direction for the network. Although substantial investment is needed to restore the line, they see business potential and are not ready to give up on these lines.

8. Discuss Status of Lines from Park Falls-Mellen-Ashland

Landeau reported that an update was requested on the Park Falls-Mellen-Ashland lines. Watco responded that it is working on Park Falls as well as transload opportunities in Mellen.

9. Discussion/Approval of 2025 Budget & Administrative Services Agreement

Landeau reported that the NCWRPC is looking for a slight increase in the administrative services fee from \$6,500 to \$7,000 to cover increasing costs. Otherwise, the 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, will remain similar to previous years. On the revenue side, county membership dues continue at

the original \$500 per county for Wisconsin and increase another \$50 from \$350 to \$400 per county for Michigan as part of the process to slowly bring MI into Equity with WI.

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Johnson, the NRTC Administrative Budget for 2025 was approved as presented with all in favor.

Landeau reported that the proposed service agreement for 2025 was the same as 2024. 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 Viau, the NRTC Administrative Services Agreement for 2025 was approved as presented with all in favor.

10. Discuss Next Meeting Date

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

11. Adjourn

Chair Klein adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:30 am.