

Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG)
PASSENGER RAIL COMMITTEE
Monday, July 30, 2007 at 10:00 a.m.

NOTES

I. Welcome, introductions; approve April notes & agenda

Bill Gill, Vice Chair, led the meeting in Dr. Miller's absence (due to medical issues). April notes were approved (motion by Charlie Sheets, second by Russ Critelli).

II. FY 2008: What's in Store?

--Staff

Review and begin outlining strategies for this year's activities (*see attached Work Program*)

The committee reviewed the TMACOG FY 2008 annual work program for passenger rail planning. Discussion focused on product 1., "hold a public informational event..." Getting information to the general public is important; use the media as much as possible. Support for holding a "rail day" open house at the Amtrak station. Attract more attention with a train that folks can tour (Historic engine—may be costly/difficult to get. Amtrak train—Derrick James will check. Thomas the Tank Engine—Bill Gill checking.) Other ideas: bring in a film crew and make a "movie" to promote passenger rail; also Russ Critelli mentioned a virtual simulator.

III. Amtrak Issues

-- Derrick James, Senior Government Affairs Officer, Amtrak

We are pleased to welcome Mr. James, new government affairs officer based in Chicago.

Mr. James is in charge of state and local government relations in the Midwest. Amtrak's vision is to grow the system, in relationship with states. Example: Illinois service has expanded in through working with Illinois DOT—they asked Amtrak to look at further expansions. States are excited at possibilities: meeting with Iowa and Minnesota. Wants to see continued grass roots efforts. Met with Ohio Rail Development Commission; discussed additional service in near term. He wants to work with rail groups such as this committee as well.

Lee Markham asked about the sale of the NS line, Ypsilanti to Kalamazoo. NS is in process of signing and agreement with a shortline; Amtrak is concerned this would downgrade tracks and passenger service. \$40 million was invested to bring the line up to 95 mph. John Guidinger said we need passenger rail to own or control this line. Thinks Michigan should own and Amtrak dispatch the route.

Charlie Sheets: 80 cities in US are thinking of trolleys; California is increasing trains; yet the administration in DC is trying to kill rail.

Derrick James: we have a challenge before us. Funding inequity: \$1 state or local money invested in highways gets \$5-\$9 back from federal government; rail just gets \$1.

Bill Gill: Local issue for Amtrak is the imminent cut back in station staff. Ticket machines can't answer questions. Current 3 staffers have trouble dealing with crowds; cut to 2 persons is bad new.

Derrick James: funds to operate come from Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) who are pushing to cut Amtrak operating costs. People can adjust to new technology. Also, Amtrak bears the cost of all staffing in Ohio; State of Illinois covers part of this cost.

John Guidinger: in Jackson, MI, cut back staff to daylight hours. Amtrak should talk to cities; discuss possible help; could be grant angles.

D James: Great American Stations Initiative—brought California Zephyr communities together to discuss opportunities for stations as a nexus of economic development and welcome center. Communities can partner to make stations a center of economic activity.

IV. State update: the Ohio Hub Study

--*Stu Nicholson /Don Damron, ORDC*

-Ohio Hub environmental study funding; -New ORDC director; -Release of the final study report and economic impact analysis

Stu Nicholson reported they didn't get congressional funds approved for the programmatic environmental impact study because Congress was limited in the number of earmarks. They will put in another request (March 2008) at encouragement of Cong. Kaptur and Ryan (\$5 m federal, 1.25 m state match, from ODOT and maybe ODOD). The PEIS would include looking at start-up service. In support of the Amtrak reauthorization bill, Cong. LaTourette sent a letter to Mr. Boardman (House proposes \$50 million, Senate \$100 million). It has a small grant in it for states.

In Illinois, there is a favorable political situation; now in Ohio, the new governor and his ODOD and ODOT directors have embraced the Ohio Hub. However it is still a Republican-controlled legislature (with some supporters). Don Damron noted an earmark is appropriate since there is no standing federal program yet.

Start-up service is envisioned as 3-C corridor (their foundational mandate, and strong potential ridership). Startup may also include lines to Chicago and the Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit corridor (also strong). See updates on the Web.

Matt Dietrich is to be the new executive director. NW Ohio reps on the ORDC are Jim Hartung, Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority, and Harold "Herk" Wolfe of Ada. The ORDC website is www.dot.state.oh.us/ohiorail/ and the Ohio Hub page can be reached directly from www.ohiohub.com. [TMACOG.org also has links posted from our Passenger Rail page.]

Ed Slack noted the confluence of the convention center, the ball field and sports arena; wonders if Amtrak can promote. Don Damron noted that travel time contours were mapped to activity (rail to trolley to destinations downtown).

V. Federal update

Bill Gill asked for an Acela update. Derrick James noted the success of the Acela (noted in the NARP newsletter). It has a significant share of the Boston-Washington travel, and income covers operating costs.

Senate bill 294 Passenger Rail Reinvestment Act includes a 5-year Amtrak reauthorization (providing more stability) at \$1.4 B/ year for Amtrak operations and capital. It also has a first-time federal matching program for state investments. A companion bill in the House is expected. Also under consideration is Amtrak's fiscal 2008 appropriation bill.

John Guidinger noted there has been no progress on reconnecting US and Canada passenger rail. Customs was a big headache when this used to exist in Michigan. Mr. James noted homeland security is a growing issue. They do have Vancouver to Seattle service, where they have a system similar to airports (secure boarding area).

VI. Projects in Progress -- reports on new developments

A. Michigan update

-- *Lee Markham; John Guidinger*

John Guidinger stated the sale of the Ypsi-Kal line is a big issue. Ridership on this Chicago line is increasing as the price of gasoline rises; trains sell out. Service has not increased. Number 1 rider complaint is no checked baggage available.

B. Rail Users Network; Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers --*Bill Gill, Beth McCray*
Bill Gill noted the June issue of RUN is available. The 5th International conference will be in Dallas in November; speakers include the Amtrak director. Local station issues: concern with adding Greyhound service. Mail express building is being torn down to Greyhound buses and maneuver and park. Eliminating high platform will increase train access to station. Also noted: need for more visible and inviting street access to station, and restore/redevelop area. Lee Markham asked about any progress for one train to load/unload at a time.

C. MLK Station Environs Plan-- Progress on redevelopment plan partnership --*Staff*
Working on a partners meeting this fall.

D. Ann Arbor-Detroit Commuter Rail Demo
SEMCOG is speaking with the railroads as it continues to pursue a demo.

VII. Announcements, Other Business

-Ohio Conference on Freight, September 17-18, Toledo

VIII. Adjourn