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MAYOR'S COMMUTER RAIL STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
March 13, 2003

Present:

Commuter Rail Steering Committee members

Mayor Bernie Streeter - City of Nashua
Lori Cardin - Board of Aldermen, Nashua
Wayne Gagne - Railroad Operations, Nashua
Peter Griffin - New Hampshire Rail Revitalization Association
Kathy Hersh - Director, City of Nashua Community Development
Matt Leahy - U.S. Senator Judd Gregg's Office
Jay Minkarah - Merrimack Community Development Director
Kit Morgan - New Hampshire Department of Transportation
Bill Mosher - Representative Nashua
Ron O'Blenis - Parsons Brinckerhoff, Boston
Celia Phillips - Governor Benson's office
Mark Sanborn - Congressman Bass' office
Moni Sharma - Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, Manchester
Paul D. Sharon - Town Administrator, Hudson
Andrew Singelakis - Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Beverly Woods - Northern Middlesex Council of Governors, Lowell, MA

Other Guests

Richard Allard - Nashua
Dennis Anctil - Board of Mayor and Aldermen, Manchester
Scott Bogle - Rockingham Planning Commission, Exeter
Frank Bolmarcich - NRCP Chairman
Larry Burns - Hooksett
Albert Cernots - State Parks
Lars Christiansen - Representative, Hudson
Howard Coppar - Planning Department
John Cox - Nashua
Casey Crane - Representative, Nashua
Gordon Daly, Sr., Nashua, Mill Yard
Karin Elmer - NRPC Merrimack
Joseph Foster - Senator, Nashua
Joe Goodman - Nashua
Sal Goudreau - Nashua
Peter Goyett - Representative, Hudson
Alphonse Haettenschwiller - Nashua
Nelson Hermance - Nashua
William Hounsell - North Conway Consultant
Chad Hunter - Hudson
William Janis - NARRA
Richard Jous - Hopkinton
Robert Kluchko - Nashua
Bruce Kramer - Nashua
Sam Langley - NHRRR, Franklin
Betty Laskey - Representative District 65
James Lawrence - Representative from Hudson

Michael Lennon - Manchester
James LeVangie - NHRAA, Hooksett
Rosemary LeVangie - Hooksett
Sean LeVangie - Hooksett
Larry Lutton - Nashua
Rich Magoon - Manchester
Paul Martin - Lowell, MA
Charles Matthews - Nashua
Stephen Nodvin - Nashua
Thomas Noel - NHDES
John Palmer, Jr. - NHRAA, Derry
Herb Pence - Manchester
Nancy Perez - Nashua
Marilyn Peterman - Amherst Selectman
Holly Pettit - Nashua
Stephen Piper - NHDOT
Curtis Potter - Windham, NH
Barbara Pressly - Nashua
Don Provencher - Representing Councilor Ray Burton
Cliff Sinnott - Rockingham Planning Commission, Exeter
Gus Sheedy - Derry
Kevin Slattery - Nashua
Robert Sullivan - Nashua
Ruth Tamulonis - Nashua
Hein van den Heuvel - Nashua
Derrick Walcott - Inner City Task Force
Ron Wood - Nashua, concerned citizen

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Mayor Streeter welcomed the guests. He reiterated the importance of this issue. This is a unique opportunity to see the resumption of commuter rail. People throughout the state have come out to support the project. The project is at a crossroads, as the Executive Council has rejected a \$75,000 contract to continue preliminary engineering. The project cannot move forward unless the Executive Council reconsiders that vote. He explained that the proposed extension of MBTA service is based upon a solid plan, and so far over \$30,000,000 in federal funding has been obtained for the project. These are funds that are for alternative transportation and projects that improve air quality, and do not compete with the funding made available for highway projects. He also explained that the project was due to the hard work of the state's delegation, Senator Gregg, Senator Sununu, and Congressman Bass. The project is also strongly supported by Governor Benson.

Members of the committee introduced themselves.

Bill Mosher, state representative from Nashua, indicated his support for the project, and discussed the benefits of commuter rail.

Lori Cardin, Board of Aldermen, introduced legislation in 2000 to support commuter rail, and the project needs to be done and she's firmly in support.

Peter Griffin, President of the NH Rail Revitalization Association, stated rail service is a key component of a balanced transportation system and is essential if southern New Hampshire is to compete with the rest of the metro Boston area.

The Mayor asked members of the Legislature and State Senate present to identify themselves, and thanked them for attending.

Ron O'Blenis, project Manager for Parsons-Brinkerhoff, the state's consultant, gave a presentation and overview of the project and its procedural process. The project is currently in preliminary engineering. A Draft Environmental Assessment is ready to be released. Negotiations have been ongoing with the MBTA and Guilford Rail System. In addition, a recent analysis by Parsons-Brinkerhoff indicates that the project can operate for a twenty-year period without the need for an operating subsidy, which is highly unusual for a commuter rail project.

Andrew Singelakis, Executive Director of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission, provided an overview of project steps. He emphasized that this project is nothing new, and is well beyond the conceptual stage, and has been through several approval steps. The project was identified in the TEA-21 Legislation in 1988. NRPC completed and adopted a Major Investment Study for the project in 1999, the Executive Council approved a \$900,000 contract for preliminary engineering, and the project was included in the State's Ten Year Plan. It was also the highest ranked Congestion Mitigation (CMAQ) project, which has a committee that consists of representatives from all over New Hampshire. He also provided a funding summary.

Kit Morgan, Administrator of the New Hampshire Bureau of Rail and Transit, stated that the project is included in the State's Ten Year Plan and in the State's Transportation Improvement Program. Significant funding is provided through the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program and so far \$9,000,000 has been appropriated. Nevertheless, additional funding for the project through the program is needed, and this will require a competition for funds with other projects throughout the country. It is difficult for the congressional delegation to obtain this funding, and this is even harder if all branches of state government do not support the project. The preliminary engineering process has been going on for 2 years and was almost completed when the contract amendment was defeated by the Executive Council. NHDOT's position is that highway funds can legitimately be used to fund rail and other multi-modal transportation systems. If the contract does not go forward, an amendment to the

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capital budget proposal has been made which will allow flexibility and a source of revenue not from highway funds that would allow for the contract to be funded without gas tax monies.

Kathy Hersh, Community Development Director for the City of Nashua, said that a lot of work has gone into this project. The project is supported by the public and by elected officials at all levels of government. This is an extremely important project and we must do all that we can to make it become a reality.

Mark Sanborn, of Congressman Bass' office, read a message that reinforced the Congressman's support for the project. The Congressman has helped to secure \$9 million in funding for this project, and he was instrumental in including the project in the TEA-21 Legislation. Despite his efforts, recent developments have made it difficult for him to continue to advocate for this the project. He is hopeful that those issues can be resolved; particularly as the reauthorization process for TEA-21 begins.

Matt Leahy of Senator Gregg's office, said that the Senator understands how important this project is to Nashua and the state. It is important to point out that it is not easy to obtain federal funds and there are a variety of competing projects. It is important for the communities to continue to express their support for the project.

Celia Philips of Governor Benson's office, thanked everyone who has participated in the steering committee. Commuter rail is an important part of the state's infrastructure. Part of modernizing state government is modernizing the movement of people and goods. The governor is wholeheartedly in support of the project and will work toward making it a reality.

Wayne Gagne, of the steering committee, praised Mayor Streeter for his leadership on this project.

Mayor Streeter pointed out the resolution of support from the Board of Aldermen in both Nashua and Manchester. He sent a letter to the Executive Councilors outlying his concerns with their action, particularly their timing. Regarding the use of gas tax funds, they have been used for a variety of purposes and the use of these funds in this manner is nothing new. The same councilors have for years voted for non-highway funds with highway trust funds. This is the first step for New Hampshire. Other projects are in Hampton and Plaistow. If one does not reconsider their vote, no other will be able to get off the ground. Important now, the congressional delegation needs to know that this project is supported. He urged those present to send in letters.

The mayor opened the floor to comments:

Bill Hounsell, of North Conway, spoke on behalf of Don Provencher and Councilor Ray Burton. Those in the northern part of the state view New Hampshire as one state, and this project will be beneficial for the entire state's economy. There is broad public consensus throughout the state for the project. It's the first step for the entire state.

Dennis Anctil, from the City of Manchester Board of Mayor and Aldermen, adopted a resolution on March 5, 2003, supporting the project and describing its benefits for Manchester and Manchester Airport.

Joe Goodman of Nashua stated his support for the project, and his disbelief of the Executive Council's action.

Alphonse Haettenschwiller, Nashua, expressed his strong support for the project. The project is needed as an alternative to congested Route 3. All of the other modes of transportation (highways, air) are heavily subsidized.

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Gordon Daley, Nashua resident who also represents the Mill yard Association in Nashua, stated if Nashua is going to be considered to be one of the finer cities in the country, this project is necessary.

Sam Langley, Franklin, a member of New Hampshire Rail Road Revitalization Association, offered support for the project and indicated how he believed that rail is necessary for the state of New Hampshire. Simply widening highways will not solve transportation problems. The use of highway funds to supplement rail will benefit the highway user. Rail will also be more in demand as the population ages.

Cliff Sinnott, from Rockingham Planning Commission, and the other MPOs in the state, did cooperate in their approach to reestablishment of commuter rail. The others recognized that the success of the Nashua project is essential to other efforts in NH.

Jay Minkarah, Community Development Director of Merrimack expressed Merrimack's continued support, with participation in the steering committee, and recognizing the benefit of project Planning Board letters of support.

Joe Foster, State Senator, Nashua and Sylvia Larson, Senator, concurred, to show state wide support. Senators from the seacoast and Manchester also acknowledged the need for this project.

Robert Sullivan, Nashua, expressed support for the project, commended the steering committee, and referred to commuting nightmares.

Rich Magoon, Manchester, likes commuter rail, but has concerns about the plan as presented. Other types of railroads should be considered (solid waste, tourism). He expressed concerns that if rail goes forward, the ridership for the bus service provided by Vermont Transit will dry up; the proposed project does not go to South Station in Boston. There are travel time, no ridership, other issues to consider.

Andrew Singelakis responded that none of the commuter rail lines in the MBTA system located north of Boston go to South Station, yet the Newburyport line has proven to be a huge success. Since Vermont Transit goes to South Station, that would demonstrate a way that the two services would compliment each other.

Peter Griffin responded that rail will not be the perfect transportation mode, but simply a balanced transportation system. Since the 1930s one could travel to Portland, Maine, from Windham, his home town. He used to work at South Station and he'd take the train to North Station and take the subway. He asked why we keep insisting on having only one transportation option in New Hampshire. He urged everyone to talk to their elected officials.

Marilyn Peterman, Selectman from Amherst, encouraged Boards of Selectmen from the region to adopt resolutions and send them to their executive councilors. She urged people to write letters also.

Bob Kluchko who works in Boston, said that a factor in his decision to move to Nashua four years ago was due to the promise that commuter rail would come to it. He thinks that commuter rail would improve the quality of life in the city, and would bring additional revenue to the state. He could not believe that only \$76,000 is holding this project up. It's such a small amount and so much is at stake.

Larry Burns from Hooksett asked how the rail service would help the retail sector. He also commented that key to the success of the program is good commuter access. He felt that we also should be looking at freight and the high speed rail corridor to Montreal. It is foolhardy not to continue with this project.

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Ron O'Blenis said that most of the planning has involved traffic going to Boston, but that there will be a market for reverse commuting. Kathy Hersh stated that as the rail corridor progresses northward to Manchester airport and downtown Manchester NH's mobility will be increased.

Bruce Kramer from Nashua thanked Congressman Charlie Bass. He's very excited about commuter rail. He believes that it will be extremely successful. He's not sure if it will make money, but any investment will be worth it. He mentioned extensions of the MBTA system in Massachusetts and commented on how successful they were. Commuter rail will increase property values. He urged everyone to send letters to their elected officials.

Mayor Streeter urged everyone to contact Councilor Ray Wiecek to urge him to bring this item back onto the Council's agenda and vote for the contract extension. He represents Manchester. Along with Mike Scanlon, Town Councilor from Bedford, he stated that he believes this is a regional issue. Mass transit makes a big difference. He is positive that it will have a positive impact on the region's economy. The Town of Bedford Town Council will bring this issue up at a future meeting.

Don Provencher mentioned that there is a lot of support for this particular issue at the State House. He said there were a lot more people who would have come to this meeting if it were not snowing so hard. He urged the state to invest in rail.

Mayor Streeter asked for final comments from the committee. Comments were received from Peter Griffin, Bill Mosher. He then thanked everyone for attending. He thanked former Senator Bob Smith, Senators Smith and Gregg, Congressman Bass and Governor Benson for their support and promised to keep the committee informed about the next developments.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

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