

METRO-NORTH RAILROAD COMMUTER COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 2017

A meeting of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC) was convened at 4:30 PM on Thursday, April 20, 2017 in the 12th floor conference room at the Metro-North Offices – Graybar Building at 420 Lexington Avenue, New York City.

The following members were present:

Randolph Glucksman

The following members were on the phone:

Francena Amparo
Richard Cataggio
Francis Corcoran
Orrin Getz

The following members were absent:

Rhonda Herman

In addition, the following persons were present:

William Henderson	-PCAC Executive Director
Ellyn Shannon	-PCAC Associate Director
Bradley Brashears	-PCAC Transportation Planner
Mike Schiffer	-Metro North
Elisa Van Der Linde	-Metro North
Brian Stermann	-Metro North
Jim McCormack	-Metro North
Richard Schulman	-Concerned citizen

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Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The agenda for the April 20, 2017 meeting was approved. The minutes of the February 16, 2017 meeting were approved.

Chair's Report

Randolph Glucksman gave the Chair's report. The written Chair's report is attached to these minutes.

Introduction of Michael Shiffer, Vice President, Planning to discuss Port Jervis Line Improvements.

Mr. Shiffer began the presentation by discussing the objective of improvements to the Port Jervis Line, which grow out of the question "what can we do to improve service?" He said that the means of improving service that were identified are changes that allow for more frequent service on the line and reverse peak service on the line.

Mr. Shiffer said that the approach to meeting the objectives that were laid out involve an operating strategy that breaks the line into inner and outer service areas. The goal is to make West of Hudson service more like that in the East of Hudson territory, and the tools that can be used are passing sidings in the inner service area and a midpoint yard on the line. Currently service is not convenient to the line's customers. There are large gaps in time between trains, only one reverse peak train, and a lack of ability to offer riders guaranteed ride home service. Schedules do not follow an easy to use "memory" format where trains depart at the same point in every hour, allowing riders to easily plan their trips.

Metro-North is prevented from doing these things by its facilities, which include only one yard for Metro-North Railroad equipment at either end of the Port Jervis Line, Mr. Shiffer explained. This limits the possibilities for designing service that fits riders' needs. The result is that while ridership grew rapidly at times, it also dropped in response to disruptions like storms, 9/11, and the 2008 recession. In addition, there was a slight dip in ridership last year that may be due to low gasoline prices. Ellyn Shannon asked if there were service cuts implemented 2010, and Mr. Shiffer responded that no cuts were made in Port Jervis Line service. He said that one factor driving potential customers to commuter buses is the need to change trains at Secaucus, while the buses provide a one seat ride.

Orrin Getz responded that the commuter buses have gained ridership, but congestion is slowing down buses. The Lincoln Tunnel bus lane is currently at 115 percent of capacity and the Port Authority Bus Terminal is very crowded,

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which limits potential bus ridership gains. Brian Sterman said that Metro-North has included the existence of capacity problems in bus facilities in their report.

Mr. Shiffer said that the three strategies that Metro-North is pursuing are to improve train speeds, creating one seat rides to Manhattan, and increasing train frequency. Currently it is difficult to decrease travel time and creating a one seat ride will require both capital improvements and additional space at Penn Station. In the short term, increasing train frequency is the easiest improvement to make.

Mr. Getz asked wanted to know if this service plan requires more equipment. Mr. Shiffer said that it does, and ultimately they will need facilities in which to locate this equipment. Mr. Sterman said 94 percent of the Port Jervis Line ridership is from Middletown or stations closer to the City. Mr. Shiffer said to accommodate the service plan they will need a midpoint yard and passing sidings, in this case consisting of 3 passing sidings requiring 6 miles of track work and reconstruction of 11 bridges and culverts, but this work can be accomplished entirely in the right of way. The right of way would also support a double track configuration, but this would cost five times as much as the current plan.

Elisa Van Der Linde said that the selection of the yard site was a multi-step process with 40 sites narrowed to 3 finalists at Harriman, Salisbury Mills, and Campbell Hall. The site at Harriman was suitable but close to New Jersey. The Salisbury Mills site had nearby neighbors and geological and topographic issues. The Campbell Hall site is the most promising with good topographical characteristics and a low residential density nearby.

Mr. Shiffer said that there is a conceptual service strategy that operates in three zones. From Campbell Hall in, the number of trains will grow from 27 to 44, Between Middletown and Campbell Hall, the number of trains will grow from 27 to 37, and between Port Jervis and Middletown the number of trains will grow from 25 to 26 trains but will be more evenly spaced throughout the day.

Going forward in 2017, Metro-North will continue providing briefings on the project and work toward a project scope. Richard Schulman asked whether New Jersey Transit participated in the process. Mr. Shiffer replied that both New Jersey Transit and Norfolk Southern have been consulted. Ms. Shannon asked if this project will be included in the 20 Year Needs Assessment being prepared in advance of the next Capital Program. Mr. Shiffer replied that it will be included.

Randolph Glucksman stated he also wants Metro-North to look at the Pascack Valley Line and the two passing sidings that have not been built there. Mr. Shiffer said that Metro-North is still interested in getting them in place.

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Old Business

No old business was discussed

New Business

A motion was made to nominate Mr. Glucksman to serve as MNRCC Chair, Mr. Getz to serve as MNRCC Vice Chair, and Mr. Glucksman to serve as PCAC First Vice Chair, all for two year terms. Nominations were closed and a motion was made to elect the MNRCC officers and to recommend the election of Mr. Glucksman as First Vice Chair at the upcoming PCAC meeting. This motion was approved unanimously.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

William Henderson
Executive Director