***Meeting of the Southern Rail Commission***

March 10, 2023

New Orleans and Company Office, New Orleans, LA

**Call to Order:** *Chairman Knox Ross*

**Roll Call**

**Commissioners Attending:** Wiley Blankenship, Knox Ross, Kay Kell, Brian Fulton. Frankie Castiglia, John Spain, Renee Lapeyrolerie, Roy Woodruff, Walt Leger

**Commissioners Attending By Zoom:** Toby Bennington, Chris Christianson, David Clark, Jerome Wall

**Guests:** Phil Jones; Dean Goodell; Marc Magliari, Todd Stennis; Maggie Woodruff; Aron Rau, Amtrak; Rob Eaton; Carly Berlin; WWNO; Kevin Keller, HDR; Colin Alexander, City of Birmingham; Rep. Francis Thompson; Stephen Kenny, Transportation for America; John Robert Smith, Transportation for America; Ruston Mayor Ronny Walker; Monroe Mayor Friday Ellis; A.P. Steadham, Syndicated Radio; Kim Priez, New Orleans and Co; Judy Young, Coastal MS Tourism; Mark Goodson, CSRS; Nikki Moon, Coastal MS Tourism; Dan Jartres, City of New Orleans; Darren Harris, Downtown Development District; Brian Greenrood, Jefferson Parish Council Chairman; Derek Chishom, AECOM; Win Ellington; Sen. Hyde Smith’s office; Gonzales, Mayor Barney Arceneaux; Jackie Bauman, City of Gonzales; Chris Chanderl, Amer Mellin, Jennifer Ansarti, Stephanie Riegle; Mathew Martinec, CSRS; Sen. Gerald Long, Cassidy’s office; Paula Long; Al Jacer; LA DOTD

**Guests** **Attending By Zoom:** Rep. Francis Thompson, Peter Wagner, Mayor Sandy Stimpson, Armendia Pierce, Bob Noonan with WPMI-TV, Jason Lathbury, Georgia Transportation Committee Cochair, Elizabeth Kennedy Lawlor, NS Government Relations, Peter LeCody, Texas Rail Advocates, Dennis Stripling, West Alabama Regional Commission, David Strohmaier, Virgil G. Payne, William Stepp, L. Jarod Pearson, Tamika Jenkins, Trent Machner, Tara Lambeth, Peter Schwartz, Eric Cova, Haley Perot, Robert Frampton, Chelsea Williams, Mike Reso, CAO of Bay St Louis, Steve Davis, Angelle Bradford, Representative Pat Moore, Sarah Warnock

**Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer**

**Recognition of special guests**

**REGULAR BUSINESS:**

1. Approval of the minutes from the meeting of December 9, 2022
   1. Commissioner Castiglia moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Woodruff seconded the motion – motion passes.
2. Financial and Administrative Report - *Knox Ross*
   1. The overall budget forecast is good.
   2. The financial audit for 2022 was distributed and no significant findings were reported.
   3. Commissioner Castiglia moved to approve the financials, and Commissioner Kell seconded the motion – motion passes.
3. New Orleans Airport – Special Guest presentation by Kevin Dolliole**,** Director of Aviation, Louis Armstrong International Airport
   1. Almost 85% of all passengers flying into LA fly through MSY.
   2. The airport is planning for a rail stop to terminal connection along with these:
      1. **North South Connector Road** – Connects the South Campus to the North Terminal through an Airport exclusive road. Can later serve as the foundation to a future Automated People Mover (APM).
      2. **InterModal Transit Stop** – Intermodal center adjacent to Baton Rouge to New Orleans rail stop, which will also serve as a transit bus.
      3. **InterCity Rail Automated People Mover** – Passenger light rail/automated people mover (APM) adjacent to heavy rail from Baton Rouge to New Orleans providing a stop at an Airport InterModal Center (IMC). Provides last-mile connection from rail stop to airport facilities and employment center.
   3. These projects are aligned with the IIJA priorities and have significant state and regional economic impact.
   4. $8 M in BIL funding has already been secured for the North South Connector Road.
   5. Will be seeking additional funds for APM system and roadway from other sources, not just FAA.
4. Communications and Media Update – Rachel DiResto
   1. The SRC continues to see interest by the media in the many initiatives underway and project progress has been featured regularly in local press.
   2. There was notable media coverage for the I-20 Corridor Convening.
   3. Facebook current page likes: 1,388 page followers
      1. In Q3, social media promotions results:
         1. 148,804 impressions, 111,291 audience reached, 8,184 post engagements, 136 new page followers, 1,950 page visits, 3,608 link clicks
   4. SRC has worked with Amtrak to amplify the current safety campaign underway featuring animated video shorts warning people to stay off the tracks.
5. Amtrak Special Report – Nicole Bucich, Vice President of Network Development, Amtrak
   1. Her role is new and represents Amtrak’s commitment to expanding the network for the first time in recent history.
   2. Amtrak will lead the Federal State Partnership application for the I-20 corridor to submit in April which is an extension of the Crescent form Meridian to Dallas.
   3. The momentum by Mayor Friday (Monroe), Mayor Walker (Ruston), Mayor Arceneaux (Shreveport) and Mayor Flaggs (Vicksburg) has helped validate and moved the project forward.
   4. This is a catalyst project that will spur economic development activity and provide essential transport for the underserved populations across these regions.
   5. The project fits Amtrak’s new vision statement “More Trains for More People.”
   6. The FRA is also conducting a long-distance study – Amtrak will be in line to coordinate with that effort.
   7. Knox thanked the Mayors who put their reputation and funding on the line. Their efforts will ensure this project gets done.
6. Legislative Affairs Update - *John Robert Smith*
   1. The stars are aligning as there is growing support of the SRC vision on the hill.
   2. FRA has leadership aligned in supporting SRC– Amit Bose, Jennifer Mitchell and Peter Schwartz – they are not caretakers, but want to be change makers at FRA and want to see wins while this administration is in office.
   3. STB is pending the decision of the acquisition of KCS by CP, which is the only A plus rated freight railroad year after year.
   4. This is the generational opportunity to make it real.
   5. With Corridor ID funding available, FRA has encouraged SRC to apply for funding and remain engaged in long-distance analysis.
   6. State of LA is filing CIDP grant for the New Orleans to BR segment.
   7. There is growing interest in Florida to connect to panhandle, especially to Pensacola.
   8. T4A is also assisting SRC in applying for new funds available for federal compacts – SRC will be the first multi-state compact created (it’s the oldest) to get federal matching dollars for dues up to $1 million per year.
7. Amtrak report by Todd Stennis, Rob Eaton

**SRC BUSINESS:**

1. Updates from Amtrak - *Todd Stennis and Marc Magliari*
   1. Update on the New Orleans to Mobile service – Todd Stennis, Rob Eaton, Marc Magliari of Amtrak
      * 1. Amtrak is running the first safety qualification runs along the New Orleans to Mobile route on all weekdays so the crews can familiarize themselves with the physical characteristics of the route.
        2. Safety at the crossings is the priority since trains will be running at higher speeds than freight.
        3. Amtrak’s first hires to operate train are in Mobile.
        4. Although we don’t know start date, it may be in the Fall of 2023.
        5. The SRC submitted a proposed name to Amtrak which is under legal review. The name accurately reflets the spirit of our coastal communities, and once approved, SRC will have some press events and a media tour along the route working with the tourism bureaus.
2. State Reports:
   1. Mississippi Updates – *Commissioner Knox Ross*
      * 1. SRC has a great meeting with Coastal MS Tourism and excited about working with them on marketing efforts.
        2. The gulf coast communities have been investing in their downtown and station development and want to attract visitors to the unique cultural offerings.
        3. Although Mayor Reeves was unable to attend, he is working with Amtrak, exploring bus connections from Mobile to Pensacola.
        4. Todd Stennis report that the MS coast station platforms are complete with Phase 1, but Phase 2 will be full rebuild of platforms by Amtrak.
        5. They are temporary ADA accessible for now, but the build out of the new platforms will take longer – 24-36 months.
   2. Louisiana Updates: *Commissioner Renee Lapeyrolerie*
      * 1. Commissioner Lapeyrolerie reported that Shawn Wilson is no longer with DOTD since he is a candidate for Governor, and his replacement is Eric Kalivoda.
        2. Baton Rouge to New Orleans Update:
           1. LA submitted the multi-crossing safety grant request in Oct. 2022 for crossing improvements like gates/lighting for safety improvements along that corridor.
           2. LA is also pursuing Federal-state partnership rail application which is being prepared by consultant.
           3. LA DOTD also submitted CRISI grant request for Bonne Carre bridge for Baton Rouge to New Orleans Corridor in December 2022.
           4. CRISI funds would cover engineering, design, construction for both freight and passenger upgrades.
           5. The state has funded an Environmental Study with ARPA funds which is underway by HDR to be completed in 2024.
           6. The City of NO and BR both received RAISE grants to develop stations and the cities must also complete an environmental review before using RAISE funds, so those areas will be prioritized in the NEPA process.
           7. Knox thanked LA DOTD staff who have been tireless workers – Phil Jones, Dean Goodell and Renee and SRC is looking forward to seeing success of their efforts.
           8. Knox also expressed thanks to Senator Cassidy for passing IIJA bill and also his advocacy in frequent meetings, as a strong voice for these routes.
           9. Colin Arnold of the New Orleans Office of Homeland Security expressed thanks to Amtrak as a great partner in planning for critical transportation needs in time of hurricane. He said the BR to NO project is a once in lifetime opportunity to make a huge difference in being prepared for evacuation needs.
           10. The Baton Rouge suburban station is the medical health district which allows evacuation from nursing homes and hospitals to ensure medical needs are met.
           11. This was a lesson learned during Katrina for the need to move people in large numbers to safety during disasters.
           12. Mayor Friday also stated that Monroe can augment housing in temporary shelters so state can stand up assets quickly and move people to safety during disasters.
   3. Alabama
      1. Commissioner Bennington acknowledged that Birmingham has a rail point of contact.
      2. Commissioner Blankenship complemented Bennington for all the letters of support he has gathered.

**SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETING**:

1. June 9th Mississippi in Bay St. Louis

**ADJOURNMENT**

1. Commissioner Spain moved to adjourn, and Commissioner Woodruff seconded the motion – motion passes.