



# NH Railroad Revitalization Association

January 26, 2004

Tonight's meeting was called to order by Peter Griffin at 7:15 PM at the Manchester Public Library auditorium.

## Attendees:

Name	From
Peter Griffin	Windham, NH
Stephen R. Piper	Somersworth, NH
Thomas Noel	New Boston, NH
Ken Milender	Warner, NH
Frank Judge	Bedford, NH
Mel True	Derry, NH
Mark Shamon	Salem, NH
Jim Finch	Londonderry, NH
Wally Stickney	NH Transportation Coalition
Paula Walach	Derry, NH/Peabody, MA
Mark Richardson	Bedford, NH
Preston Lawrence	Manchester, NH
Jeff Rose	Manchester, NH
Jeff Brillhart	NHDOT
Bill Johnson	Wakefield, NH
Dick Joos	Hopkinton, NH
George Katsakiores	Derry, NH

## Guest Speakers:

Jeb Bradley	NH Congressman
Carol Murray	NHDOT Commissioner

**Jeb:** The transportation bill TEA-21 reauthorization is currently stalled. There have been three different versions submitted for consideration with three different funding levels to date. On the floor right now is a \$375 billion initiative that will require a federal gasoline tax increase to fully fund. Currently, states receive a minimum \$0.91½ for every federal gas tax dollar they contribute. There is a desire by some states to modify this minimum return appropriation to \$0.95, which, if enacted, could likely reduce NH's return. Many northern states require more federal money than southern states due to cold weather impacts, higher maintenance costs and older infrastructure. As the TEA-21 reauthorization has not been ratified, the nation is operating under a continuing resolution.

Funding for Amtrak stands at \$1.2 billion. I supported the same platform as President Bush, which would have funded \$900 million and require more accountability. I also feel that Amtrak needs to modernize, reduce the number of late trains and dismiss rude conductors. I think the

majority of the funding should go into the east coast routes that have high riderships and eliminate long distance trains that operate with large deficits.

**Carol:** Administrations on federal and state (NH) level are not supportive of a gas tax increase. NH enjoys a \$1.06 receipt for each dollar paid as federal gas tax. Big states are now organized to reappropriate gas tax payments. Issues pertaining to Amtrak are far from resolved. The administration is focusing on intercity service. NH has not yet engaged in Amtrak negotiations.

**Peter:** Long distance routes are questionable, but what ramifications occur if service is terminated? The cost of traffic congestion in the US is estimated at \$67 billion per year. Rail is part of a balanced transportation system.

**Mark:** There is currently no benefit to open rail line across the state. The place to start is the Merrimack valley. If funding becomes available, what should NH start with?

**Jeb:** Boston to Portland has been a success, but what happens when their CMAQ funding runs out? Traffic on I-93 is a safety issue – maybe rail could be an alternative. The state's ability to participate in Lowell-Nashua is uncertain.

**Mark:** How do other states fund rail?

**Carol:** Every creative way has been looked at. Lowell-Nashua makes sense. The cost/mile is reasonable. If we lose the lawsuit, we will look at alternatives. Buses on I-93 are full. We would start by constructing Park and Rides along the corridor first because they can be funded through gas tax money, then we would look at providing rail service as the demand dictates.

**Peter:** As of the last census, southern NH is part of the greater Boston urban compact. Why does everyone need to be convinced when examples such as the Old Colony rail line have been so successful?

**Paula:** I'm an avid supporter of rail and intermodal transportation, especially bikes. Why do trains have to stop at the Mass border? Backward conservatism dictates NH policies. Nashua to White River Junction is designated as a high speed rail corridor and I'm in favor of electrification. Power can be purchased from Quebec or we should consider wind. How would our high property taxes in NH be impacted by high speed rail?

**Carol:** Diesel trains are not the cleanest. They do, however, enable us to qualify for CMAQ funds for Lowell-Nashua. Highways and airports are supported by user fees.

**Tom:** Is funding for passenger rail above the radar?

**Jeb:** The Transportation Committee is increasing its dedication to public transit.

**Carol:** The USDOT is beating the drum for intercity as opposed to long distance runs.

**Wally:** Do you have any numbers for Nashua?

**Carol:** Investment cost per passenger is the lowest for most initiatives. The lawsuit forced NHDOT to miss an opportunity to purchase used rail equipment. Jeff Brillhart and I went down to Massachusetts to try to change MBTA bylaws about operating outside of the commonwealth. MBTA currently cannot cross into NH. "New Starts" money has provided most of the federal component, but we still need to come up with our state match.

**Question:** The average citizen is frustrated by the lack of a funding mechanism. Can we play the pork game (i.e., \$58 million for Iowa rain forest) to get money for NH?

**Jeb:** We have focused our earmarks on safety and improvements. By voting against certain legislation containing pork, NH loses money for other major endeavors (i.e., Manchester sewer upgrades).

**Carol:** Earmarks that we have received to date have been well deserved.

**Peter:** What affiliation do you have with other northeast congressmen?

**Jeb:** The gas tax returns. Due to lower social welfare costs NH looks good. It will take a minimum of 60 votes to change the allocation. MTBE was a terrible bill for us.

**Question:** Who in New England is on the Transportation Committee?

**Jeb:** I don't know.

**Carol:** I have the information and will send it. Some states are splintering out of our NASTO coalition (North Atlantic States Transportation Organization), specifically New York and Maryland.

**Mel:** Government has to subsidize transportation and this system doesn't really work.

**Jeb:** We are in a fledgling economic recovery and raising taxes right now is not a good idea.

**Mel:** The median population age is going up. We will need alternative transportation besides driving a car when we get older. What option do we have now? Kids? Taxis?

**Peter:** Contact AARP

**Carol:** Many older citizens are not as comfortable driving at night. We understand that we won't be able to drive forever.

**Peter:** Massachusetts is now talking about widening I-93 at some point in the future. Combined with our proposed widening, this highway will be under construction somewhere for the next 30 years.

**Tom:** CMAQ funding for the Downeaster will be done after this year. NNEPRA will likely approach NH for contributions

**Carol:** Maine Commissioner Cole has already come down. We're not shutting the door on getting involved, but we'd like to see expansion and increased efficiency and improvements. Docking space in Boston is an issue.

**Question:** How much is Carol a proponent of public transportation?

**Carol:** The state's General Fund is in trouble. There has been no operating budget for buses until this year and it's only \$125,000. Public transportation is less than 1% of the total highway budget. Our long range transportation plan is in its infancy.

**Bill:** What is the difficulty in using bonds for rail?

**Carol:** The F.E. Everett Turnpike reconstruction was bonded as was the Maine Turnpike work.

I-93 is being looked at (Garvey Bonds), but the legislature in this session will likely not approve bonding. Under our traditional system, the last reconstruction project for I-93 advertises in 2014.

**Tom:** Could they be used for rail?

**Carol:** No, just highways.

**Wally:** What about expanding communications for dispatching?

**Carol:** We obtained some homeland security money for traffic operation enhancements and response centers.

**Peter:** When is the lawsuit to be heard?

**Carol:** NH filed a good written argument as did the Motor Carriers. Oral arguments will be heard on February 11.

**Peter:** If no Garvey Bonds, what is the time frame for I-93?

**Carol:** The Exit 5 Park and Ride is scheduled to be advertised late 2004. The total project is to be completed by 2016.

**Question:** When could Nashua go if NH wins the lawsuit?

**Carol:** MBTA has already made their equipment order for this year. This pushes us back at least two years.

**Peter:** What about Boston-Montreal?

**Carol:** The study is stalled until NH can pay our share of the match.

**Question:** Wasn't this only \$16,000? This shows no political will for this.

**Carol:** The General Fund budget was just cut 13%

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Next meeting: Monday, February 23, 2004 at 7 PM  
Safety & Health Council of NH  
163 Manchester St  
Concord, NH

Minutes by: Stephen R. Piper - Secretary