

Gulf Coast Working Group (GCWG)

Teleconference Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

I. Welcome/Introductions

The following members were able to participate in the call:

Guy Busby (Baldwin County)	Vikki Garrett (GCWG Member)	Meera Ponnappa (Urban MTAC for FRA)
Dick Cogswell (FRA)	Jerry Gehman (SRC)	Will Roseborough (CSX)
Dan Dealy (DSD Services for SRC)	Kevin Harris (Mobile MPO)	Knox Ross (SRC)
Marc Dixon (FRA)	Alvin Jackson (Suwanee County)	John Robert Smith (T4A)
John Edwards (NS)	Quintin Kendall (CSX)	Joe Spraggins (with MS)
Rebecca Ferguson (Pensacola)	Cliff Kirkland (Biloxi)	Todd Stennis (Amtrak)
Ricky Fitzgerald (FL DOT)	Ed Lee (FL DOT)	Josh Stubbs (MS DOT)
Garrick Francis (CSX)	Jason Maga (Amtrak)	Elaine Wilkinson (GRPC)
Margarita Gagliardi (Urban MTAC for FRA)	Mark Murphy (Amtrak)	Ron Williams (City of Live Oak)
	Karen Parsons (NORPC)	Fred Wise (HNTB for FL DOT)

FRA provided an update to the GCWG on the current status of the report in light of the Commerce Committee's expectations to receive the final report by late March/early April 2017 – an additional extension will not be permitted. FRA began with a recap of the GCWG's technical meetings and related activities that took place from Dec. 2016 through February 2017. Furthermore, in light of the time needed for all stakeholder to hold follow-up discussions on CSX's revised scope, FRA explained their approach to provide a complete report to Congress with all the content required per the FAST Act.

II. Updates

- A detailed description of the three-step process for identifying the necessary and desired infrastructure improvements over the CSX-owned right-of-way was presented, as follows.

1) CSX Initial Assessment

In order to determine infrastructure needs, CSX engaged a consulting firm to perform rail service modeling. The Rail Traffic Controller (RTC) model was used to forecast future shared freight and passenger operations, estimate the infrastructure that would be required to operate safely and reliably over the route, and test proposed train schedules to see if they would work.

The outcome of this initial effort yielded a very robust list of infrastructure improvements, including lengthening of existing passing sidings throughout the route,

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installation of new tracks and yard improvements and other projects. These projects would support CSX's intent to comply with current requirements (Section 213 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008) setting an 80% threshold for passenger service on time performance (OTP). Even with this consideration, the GCWG subsequently found the recommended improvements to be excessive given financial constraints and the level of proposed passenger service and asked for additional technical review.

2) Review & Refinement of Initial CSX Recommendations

A follow-up technical review meeting was held on December 15, 2016. The meeting participants (with representation from the FRA, CSX, Amtrak, SRC and both FRA and SRC consultants) reviewed key infrastructure needs and developed next steps for resolving outstanding issues. The key areas discussed included: Gentilly Yard and the need for a bypass track through this very congested area; the installation of a second track in the Pascagoula Yard area; improvements to Sibert Yard; Positive Train Control signal improvements; possible station relocation in Jacksonville; selected track upgrades to permit higher operating speeds; extension of existing sidings to provide improved operating flexibility; and other projects.

CSX then conducted site visits, and took a closer look at the options, focusing on improvements that could be implemented without excessive environmental impacts and other complications. A revised list of improvements, costing approximately \$700 million, was presented by CSX at a meeting on February 8, 2017.

3) FRA Evaluation

Following the February 8, 2017 meeting, FRA took a leadership role in further refining the list of infrastructure needs due to time constraints and ongoing negotiations needed for CSX's revised scope. FRA has to submit a complete report, including cost estimates, to Congress as soon as possible and cannot ask for another extension. In the report, FRA's improvements will be characterized as "FRA's recommendations" and not be described as "this must be done".

FRA's list of improvements were divided into two segments: New Orleans to Mobile which would see two daily trains in each direction, a long distance train operating between New Orleans and Orlando plus state supported train operating between New Orleans and Mobile; and Mobile to Deland which would host only the daily long distance train operating between New Orleans and Orlando.

Proposed improvements were categorized as the minimum set of improvements needed to restore service (stations and PTC) and those that would provide sustainable reliable service.

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These improvements and their associated capital costs will be included in the draft report to Congress.

- Bridge Tender Log Analysis

The FRA, their consultant and Amtrak, working with the Coast Guard staff, conducted an assessment of the bridge tender logs along the Gulf Coast route. The objectives of the analysis was to identify the bridges that had the most opening activity and evaluate how the activity related to the anticipated scheduled passenger train passing times developed by Amtrak. Rail bridge tender log data, provided by CSX, was used to create visibility of operational trends of the eight bridges examined (Pascagoula, Chickasawbogue, Biloxi, Mobile, Chef Menteur, Bay St. Louis, Three Mile Creek, and Rigolets) and provide an analysis of the scheduled train viability. The analysis of the tender logs revealed that the potential of interference with the proposed passenger rail service appears to be an operational concern of the bridges due to the irregular nature of vessel traffic and conditional bridge cycling by the tender.

III. Timeframe for Reviewing Draft Report

FRA conferred with the Commerce Committee staff who advised that their expectation was for the report to be submitted as soon as possible (later March/early April 2017), in order for funding to be considered either as part of the DOT Continuing Resolution (April 2017) or Federal FY 2018 appropriations, if the April timeframe cannot be met.

The FRA will brief the committee on March 30th with the report to follow shortly thereafter.

Logistics for the Report:

- FRA Consultant to provide the draft report to FRA by Wednesday, 3/22/17
- FRA to provide GCWG draft report by **Friday, 3/24/17**
- Representatives by state to collect comments and submit to FRA by **Monday, 3/27/17, 12noon CT.**

IV. Discussion

- There was a discussion of the state supported daily train from New Orleans to Mobile, and prior discussions on extending this segment to Atmore. The report will discuss the potential for the service to Atmore as a “next step,” since operations and maintenance cost information is not currently available for comparative purposes.
- Also discussed was the definition of “minimum” improvements and those that would support a sustainable reliable service. These definitions will be addressed in the draft report.

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- A question was raised regarding whether the report would be submitted solely by the FRA, or reflecting the GCWG as a whole. The draft report will reflect the collaboration among the FRA, the GCWG and its individual members. Just a reminder that the FRA serves as the Chair of the GCWG and Patrick Warren, Executive Director, has replaced Sarah Feinberg as FRA's senior official during this transition period.