

MINUTES

COMMUTER TRANSIT FEASIBILITY STUDY TASK FORCE

MARCH 18, 2008

IN ATTENDANCE:

TASK FORCE MEMBER AGENCIES

Aroma Park – Mike Grimsley
Bourbonnais – Ed Hayes
Bradley – Mayor Kent
Illinois Department of Transportation – no attendee
Kankakee – no attendee
Kankakee County – Sam Nicholos
Manteno – no attendee
Monee – Henry May
Peotone – George Gray
Will County – no attendee

OTHERS PRESENT

Stan James and Mike Lammey, Kankakee County; Dennis Gary, Earth Tech; Rick Harnish, Midwest High Speed Rail Association; Bill Yohnka, Kankakee Chamber of Commerce; Shane Saathoff, WKAN; and Laura McElroy, Herald

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Nicholos called the meeting to order at 1:05 P.M.

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Nicholos introduced Mr. May, the returning member for the Village of Monee, and asked the rest of the attendees to introduce themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MINUTES

Mayor Kent moved approval of the December 11, 2007 Minutes, and Mr. Hayes seconded. Unanimous vote.

PRESENTATION FROM MIDWEST HIGH SPEED RAIL ASSOCIATION

Mr. Lammey introduced Mr. Harnish from the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, who made a presentation including the following items:

- Membership – The MHSRA has 1,000 members, half from inside the State of Illinois, and some of the members of the Commuter Transit Task Force are members of the Association.
- Train Ridership in Illinois – The increases in train ridership in Illinois are in some degree because of additional service within the State of Illinois. The MHSRA was instrumental in lobbying for that increased service. Mr. Harnish stated that a current priority of the Association is lobbying for financing of additional train equipment, based upon that increased ridership.
- National Priority on Rail in Spain – Mr. Harnish showed slides of new stations and trackage in Spain, and stated that they have a 15 year financing plan for increased service that is ½ highway and ½ transit. He stated that France is also very active in this area.
- Reasons for Rail Resurgence – Mr. Harnish showed slides of worldwide oil production, and stated that it has reached the maximum, and in fact is declining. He stated that gas tax revenues in Illinois have declined in recent years. He stated that transit in general will play a key part in the solution to these problems.
- How Do We Expand Existing Transit Services – Mr. Harnish proposed some partial solutions to the problem, through the development of a group called the Transit Riders Alliance.

Mr. May asked about new trackage in Illinois, observing that service has decreased over the years, and stating that a public commitment needs to be made to passenger transit. He stated that the CN would love to get rid of Amtrak service over their system.

Mayor Kent asked why Spain is able to make a commitment to transit and not the United States. Mr. Harnish stated that the United States did not make commitments to city centers after World War II, and moved vast populations into suburbs. He stated that most European countries focused on rebuilding their city centers, and thus had far greater densities of population in those city centers, making transit far more successful. He also mentioned that the oil lobby is far stronger in the United States than it is in Europe. Mr. Harnish stated that incremental service is far easier to add in transit than it is to add incremental capacity for highway.

Mayor Kent stated that the report just approved by the Commuter Transit Task Force shows that increased train service cannot be added as far south as Kankakee, due to an overpass constructed that constricts movement.

Mr. Hayes asked about rail line expansions, and Mr. May stated that CN personnel have been clearing their right of way to allow for additional rails to be installed. He mentioned again the pending purchase by the CN of the EJ&E, which impacts service on the Star Line, and stated his belief the Metra is committed to expanding service to Peotone.

Mr. Harnish stated that a capital bill is being discussed currently among state legislators, and that the MHSRA is lobbying for \$100 million for rail improvements, including the route through Kankakee.

Mr. Grimsley stated his belief (as a member of the Transit Board for the River Valley METRO Mass Transit District) that transit must be improved, but that the form of that transit service, rail or bus, is still a concern.

PEOTONE SERVICE

Mr. Gray stated that a site has been selected by Metra for a yard and a station north of Peotone. He stated that the property owner has not yet been contacted about selling the property. Mayor Kent asked about access to Interstate 57.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Nicholos stated that the next meeting of the Task Force would be on June 17, 2008, and would be at the County Administration Building.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Kent moved adjournment, and Mr. Hayes seconded. Chairman Nicholos adjourned the meeting at 1:56 P.M.