

Summary Minutes MARC Advisory Council Meeting
Thursday July 17, 2008, 4:30 p.m.
Hall of the States, Room 283
444 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001-1512

Attendees:

MARC Advisory Council:

Carol Oberdorfer, Brunswick – Present
Chikwe Njoku, Penn & Camden – Absent
Christopher Field, Penn - Present
David Frederick, Brunswick - Present
Evelyn Anderson, Brunswick – Present
Hameed Ahmed, Camden – Absent
Josh Friedman, Camden - Present
Juan Calvo, Penn – Absent
Laurence Gross, Brunswick – Present
Lynda Clarke, Penn – Present
Makeda Scott – Penn - Present
Mark Dysart, Brunswick Present
Rafael Guroian, Penn & Camden – Present
Scott Minos, Brunswick – Absent
Steve Chan, Penn – Present

Staff:

John Hovatter – MTA Director of MARC Train & Commuter Bus Services
Jim Knighton - MTA Director of External Affairs

Guests:

Emery Hines, Baltimore County
Chip Dobson – CSX Manager of Commuter Operations - chip_dobson@csx.com 904-359-7451=office

The meeting was called to order at 4:34 PM by Chairman Lynda Clarke.

Lynda Clarke announced that the council by-laws required us to hold elections. Candidates should announce their candidacy and distribute their paperwork during the November council meeting, with the elections to be held at the January 2009 meeting. New Officers will start beginning in February 2009.

Jim Knighton will look into procedures for improving the distribution of emails that are sent to marccouncil@mtamaryland.com. As of May 2008, roughly one or two emails were received each day. Sometimes Jim Knighton would respond directly to the sender. In general, Lynda Clarke, Larry Gross, and John Hovatter were sent copies of the email for evaluation and response.

Chip Dobson – CSX Manager of Commuter Operations, was introduced to the council. Chip joined CSX in February 2008, and was in the US Navy before his current position. Chip also rode on the VRE for a number of years, so he is familiar with commuter rail systems from a passenger point-of-view. Chip noted that June 2008 was a bad month for CSX performance metrics. An increase in freight traffic in the local area has caused some of the poor performance. Also, planned/scheduled maintenance work could have gone more smoothly with less impact on MARC schedules. Chip noted that the rainy weather didn't help. As of the July meeting, on-time performance is back in the mid 80% region. On-time is defined as being within 5 minutes of the scheduled time from the start point to the end point. In past years, this figure has been 90%. June 2008 was only 64%.

Chip Dobson also reported that the Jacksonville Florida CSX headquarters has distributed the dispatchers from Jacksonville to nine local offices. The local dispatch office for our area is Baltimore, in the former Carling Brewery plant on the southwest side of the Baltimore Beltway. CSX headquarters realized that if the dispatchers were more local, there would be a more stable population of employees with better knowledge of the local conditions and personnel. This knowledge helps to make dispatching more efficient.

John Hovatter mentioned that Maryland contributed about \$1.5 million of the approximately \$4 million it cost to move and build a new dispatch center, which officially started on July 1, 2008.

Chip Dobson also reported that CSX is aware of and is trying to address the problems with breakdowns in communications.

Larry Gross asked why, on the Brunswick line, MARC trains just sit on the tracks, rather than at a MARC train station? The answer is that the conductors are limited by federal law as to how many hours per day they may work. If the crew of a train runs out of time, the train has to stop. Generally, if a crew is within 2 hours of their limit, they will look for a MARC train station to stop at. To help minimize delays due to maintenance, CSX is working to make sure maintenance teams understand the operations in our local area, and they try to tailor the work plan to accommodate the local traffic.

Larry Gross and the other Brunswick council members noted that the switch at Derwood constantly causes delays on the Brunswick line, and should be replaced. It was noted that MARC gives \$28.5 million/year to CSX. Amtrak receives about \$26 million/year from MARC.

To help improve communications with the ridership, John Hovatter is working to get some MARC Trainmasters down to Union Station each afternoon/evening to get better information back to MARC. Other ideas being considered include using bigger screens to display more information, and better loudspeakers. It was noted that email may not be the solution to more timely notification.

John Hovatter noted that the current diesels are 40 years old, and were rebuilt 10-12 years ago. MARC will be receiving 26 brand new diesels locomotives, at the rate of 2 per month, starting in January 2009. Three electric locomotives have been rebuilt in Wilmington, Delaware, and will be returned to service over the next month or two. This will help improve reliability and on-time performance.

Also being planned is the replacement of the Landover interlocking. Hopefully, the engineering work will be done in 2009, with the replacement hopefully occurring in mid 2010.

Chip Dobson was asked how CSX views commuter rail. The response was that CSX has major freight operations east of the Mississippi river, and believes it is important to work well with commuter rail.

Rafi Guroian asked about the possibility of mid-day trains on the Camden line. The response was that talks are in progress.

Josh Friedman asked about the possibility of closing the Jessup station on the Camden line. It was explained that many of the stations that have low passenger counts stay open due to political reasons.

Due to the number of events that have occurred recently, it was decided that there will be a special meeting of the MARC Riders Advisory Council on August 21, 2008.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:43 PM Thursday July 17, 2008.