

Summary Minutes MARC Riders Advisory Council Meeting
Thursday August 18, 2011, 4:30 p.m.
Hall of the States, Room 283
444 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001-1512
866-247-6034, 1674171863#

Attendees:

MARC Advisory Council:

Alan Weisman – Present
Amy Bernstein – Present
Andrea Richardson, Brunswick – Absent
Chikwe Njoku, Penn & Camden – Absent
Christopher Field, Penn – Present
David Frederick, Brunswick - Present
David Plazak - Present
Ellen Mayer – Brunswick – Absent
Ernest Weiss – Penn – Absent
Jeff Crooks – Present
John Scarpone – Present
John Stamatakos – Present
Laurence Gross, Brunswick – Present
Makeda Scott – Penn – Absent
Mark Dysart, Brunswick – Absent
Mara D’Angelo - Present
Marla Smith, Penn – Present
Matthew Quarrick - Present
Miriam Schoenbaum, Brunswick – Present
Paula Sind-Prunier - Absent
Rafael Guroian, Penn & Camden – Present
Russell Lawrence – Absent
Scott McClure - Present
Scott Minos, Brunswick – Absent
Shailaja Rabindran – Present via Teleconference
Stephen O’Connor - Present
Steve Chan, Penn – Present
Theresa Leftwicht – Present
Vince Hodge - Present
Vince Zagorski, Camden – Present

Staff:

Simon Taylor - MTA Chief of Staff*
Patrick Fleming - MTA Director of External Affairs
John Hovatter – MTA Director of MARC Train and Commuter Bus Service
Rich Solli – MTA Trainmaster of Union Station
Rex Springston – MTA Chief Mechanical Officer – MARC Train Service

Guests:

Craig Wietscher – CSX Trainmaster - Operations, Baltimore Division
Rob Surgeoner – CSX Director Passenger & Commuter Operations

Doug Adams – Amtrak Superintendent of Commuter Services
Debbie Benham – Amtrak District Manager

Mike Tierney – Amtrak Assistant Manager Station & Customer Service
Shawn Gordon – Amtrak Superintendent of Road Operations

John Morris – Montgomery County Transit, Retired
Beverly Rollins – Brunswick Line

Call to Order:

- The meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM Thursday August 18, 2011 by Chairman Rafi Guroian

Welcome and Introductions:

On-Time Performance

- Penn Line 94%
- Brunswick Line <80% for 2011
- Camden Line 83%-84%, rising to 93% for July

Camden Line Report

- Rob Surgeoner – CSX Director Passenger & Commuter Operations
- Rob Surgeoner reported that many of the recent delays have been caused by the large turnover of the maintainers for the signaling system.
- Rob reported that there has been an effort to add more maintainers to the staff, as well as have them respond more quickly when needed.
- An inquiry was raised regarding why an express Camden train was switch to a sidetrack at Greenbelt, and still went through the station and then out of the station.
- Craig Wietscher – CSX Trainmaster - Operations, Baltimore Division reported during this incident, the switches would not reverse after the previous train went through the side track. CSX dispatched a maintainer to correct the problem, so subsequent trains did not have to divert through the sidetrack.
- Signal/Switch work at Dorsey has been completed, and it ready to go as soon as it can be turned on.
- Signal/Switch work at Jessup will be ready to go as of October 2011.
- The necessary repair/maintenance work on the switches for the Camden Line should be completed with these two projects.
- Jeff Crooks – MRAC Council member – inquired about delays out of Camden due to freight train congestion. Today's delay was 30+ minutes.
- Jeff commented that the short delays – 5 or 10 minutes – are generally not much of a problem. When delays start to approach 30 minutes or more, it gets to be a significant issue.
- Jeff asked that CSX be more proactive in training and preventing problems that could cause poor on-time performance.
- Vince Zagorski – MRAC Council member – cited a delay where Camden Train #811, 15 minutes out of Baltimore on its way to St. Denis had three main lines blocked with freight trains.
- Vince asked if CSX could better plan its freight train dispatching so that for three hours in the morning and three hours in the evening just on weekdays, a commitment could be made to provide better commuter train service between Camden Yards and Union Station ?
- Vince Zagorski asked - As rush hour is approaching, could CSX limit or reduce the number of freight trains between Baltimore and Washington?
- Rob Surgeoner reported that CSX does try to keep a window for passenger trains.
- Jeff Crooks asked how many trains run through Baltimore and DC?
- Jeff Crooks brought up that Chicago runs 16, 900 trains a month, and reports a 94.2% on-time performance across all lines.
- John Hovatter – MTA Director of MARC Train and Commuter Bus Service:
 - Reported that the Chicago railroad system was built for passenger trains.

- They have been running many more passenger trains for a much longer time period.
- Chicago has three main high-speed lines with modern signal systems.
- Chicago is a completely different railroad system
- Rafi Guroian – Chairman of the MARC Riders Advisory Council
 - Suggested that we compare MARC to commuter rail services where the tracks are not owned by the state or transit agency.
- Simon Taylor – Chief of Staff to the MTA
 - Reported that the New York commuter lines are owned and operated by the state, and are passenger oriented. A proper comparison would be commuter systems that also must allow freight traffic.
 - Reported that the MDOT does pay CSX \$5 to \$7 Million/year in capital funding for mutually agreed-upon projects.
 - One such project is the new interlocking on the Brunswick line.
 - Emphasized that in the discussions between the MDOT Secretary and CSX Chief Operating Officer last week, the Secretary stressed the importance of on-time performance.
 - The CSX Chief Operating Officer explained that freight traffic is way up, and that coal train traffic has dramatically increased.
 - It was noted that when you start to exceed 15 minutes late, it start to impact people’s lives and gets frustrating.
- Jeff Crooks – MRAC Council Member
 - Asked if problem switches and signals affect freight trains as much as passenger trains?
 - Suggested that the repair and improved maintenance of both switches and signals should be a priority for CSX.
- Miriam Shoenbaum – MRAC Council Member
 - Stated that the problems seem to be less related to switches, and more related to dispatch.
 - Reported that any statement that CSX give priority to passenger trains over freight trains is a guaranteed laugh line to the passengers.
 - Asked how to best persuade these train riders that CSX does in-fact give priority in dispatch to passenger trains, given the passengers’ experience riding the trains.
- Vince Zagorski:
 - Mentioned that when you are standing on the platform at 7 AM and three freight trains come by with no passenger train, it’s hard to buy the line that the passenger train has priority. It’s the reality versus the goals.
- Rafi Guroian – Chairman of the MARC Riders Advisory Council
 - Suggested to CSX that they host a few of the council members into the dispatching center in Baltimore so that when we talk to the other passengers, we can tell them what it’s like in the dispatching center. It would be beneficial to CSX to have the council members act as ambassadors for CSX.
- Rob Surgeoner – CSX Director Passenger & Commuter Operations
 - Stated he would make the request.
- John Hovatter – MTA Director of MARC Train and Commuter Bus Service:
 - Stated that overall, more good decisions are made than bad decision.
 - Dispatchers have a small territory, and are being handed off trains from another dispatcher’s territory.
 - The local dispatcher must do something with each train.
 - There is just no place to hold trains anymore. They don’t have the room.
 - Noted that the MARC Tracker system gives much more timely and accurate positions of each train, but cannot show the speed of each train.
- Jeff Crooks and Miriam Shoenbaum both commented that the announcements on the CSX lines are much improved over a few years ago in regards to communicating the what/why/when during delays.

Penn Line Report

- Water Delays on Monday August 15th
 - There was over 18 inches of water over the rail at the mouth of the tunnel at Charles Street.

- The storm drains, which flow into the Jones Falls, were clear. But the Jones Falls was flooded to higher than the storm drains.
- As soon as the water level in the Jones Falls fell, the water in the tunnel was able to drain.
- The railroad was shut down for about 1.5 hours.
- Shuttle buses were run to help handle the emergency.
- Simon Taylor reported that there is \$60 Million allocated federal funds to look into the design of a new tunnel.
- Simon Taylor believes Amtrak has budgeted about \$1 Billion over a number of years to replace the tunnel, as part of the high speed initiative.

Station Maintenance

- Rex Springston - MTA Chief Mechanical Officer – MARC Train Service
 - Reported that emergency bottled water storage cabinets are being designed and will be built/installed at the rate of 20-30 cabinets per month.
- John Hovatter – MTA Director of MARC Train and Commuter Bus Service
 - Reported that station maintenance depends on who owns which station.
 - In some cases, the lighting and platform may be owned by the MTA, but the parking lots may be owned by multiple entities.

Old Business

- Rafi Guroian – Chairman of the MARC Riders Advisory Council
 - Brought up the need for Council members to ride other lines of the MARC Train system.

New Business

- Baltimore Grand Prix Labor Day Weekend
 - Simon Taylor briefed the Council on the impact to downtown Baltimore traffic for this event, and the effect on the Camden Line.

Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be on Thursday September 15, 2011.

Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 5:49 PM Thursday August 18, 2011.