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**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING**  
**NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

April 29, 2009  
Draft Meeting Minutes

13 The meeting of the Board of Commissioners was held at F-GI Training Center in Swanton.

14 Commissioners: See attached.

15 Staff: Catherine Dimitruk and Bethany Remmers

16 Guests: Charles Hunter, David Crawford, Charlie Moore and Helen Simon

17 Quorum was present to conduct business.

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**WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, OPENING REMARKS**

Chair R. Larose welcomed everyone at 7:00 PM followed by roll call attendance and introductions.

R. Larose welcomed Dennis DeBevec the new regional commissioner from Bakersfield.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment was received.

**RAIL IMPROVEMENTS, NEW ENGLAND CENTRAL RAIL**

Charles Hunter, the Director of State Government Relations-East, RailAmerica Inc. and Dave Crawford, the Essex Junction Village Manager, presented a proposal to upgrade the NECR line from East Alburgh to Burlington. The project would improve bridges along this section so they could accommodate railcars that are 286,000 pounds. This is the standard load rating for cars that are being manufactured today. This upgrade would allow fully loaded rail cars to be shipped along this section of NECR and would increase efficiency and competitiveness. The project would also improve the rail rating to accommodate passenger rail from Essex Junction to Burlington. The total cost of the project is \$5.2 million and NECR is prepared to provide the necessary 20% match. C. Hunter and D. Crawford noted that the project could be funded through an appropriation from Senator Jefford's office dedicated to improving rail in the Western Corridor of Vermont. The board discussed the potential of computer rail from St. Albans to Burlington in the future. H. Garrett asked if crossings would be upgraded. C. Hunter noted that they would when necessary. R. Gutierrez asked if Canadian National Railroad has been notified of the proposed upgrades and noted the important role trucks play in freight movement. S. Jensen asked about rail subsidies and the state. C. Hunter explained that NECR owns the line and does not receive funding from the state. The State of Vermont owns about ½ of the rail lines in the state and then contracts with other companies such as Vermont Rail System to maintain the lines. It is those railroads that receive state funding.

*D. Peirce moved that the NRPC Board of Commissioners support the proposal to upgrade the NECR line from East Alburg to Burlington noting that it will impact every community in the region. A. Beaderstadt seconded. The motion carried.*

**2010 CENSUS**

Helen Simon from the US Census Bureau updated the board on the upcoming 2010 Census. She explained that the census is required by the US constitution. In the 2000, the average response rate was 67% nationwide, 60% in Vermont, 64% in Franklin County and 44% in Grand Isle County. She noted the importance of getting everyone to mail back their survey and that federal funding for many programs are based on the census. All survey answers are confidential and the

1 survey is available in many languages. Census workers are currently verifying residential  
2 addresses and surveys will be mailed next year.

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5 **MINUTES OF THE MARCH 2009 MEETING**

6 *L. Touchette moved to approve the minutes. H. Garrett seconded. The motion carried.*

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8 **COMMISSION REPORTS**

9 Executive Committee: No activity to report.

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11 Finance/Operations: D. Peirce noted that there was nothing to report except that the committee will  
12 need to meet soon to review the FY10 budget.

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14 Personnel: L. Scangas reported that the Personnel Committee will meet over the next six weeks to  
15 discuss annual staff evaluations.

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17 Policy/Project Review: M. Guernsey noted that the committee did not meet in April but will meet again  
18 on May 13. He noted that they are anticipating an application from Lowe's.

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20 Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC): R. Larose reported that The TAC met on April 9<sup>th</sup>.  
21 Charles Hunter from New England Central Railroad and Dave Crawford the Essex Junction Village  
22 Manager, updated the committee on a proposed rail improvement project that would upgrade the line  
23 from East Alburgh to Burlington. The TAC was very supportive of the project and approved a  
24 motion for NRPC staff to write a letter of support. Because the TAC is advisory, they are requesting  
25 that the full board also supports this project. At the April meeting, the TAC also nominated 13 roads  
26 for consideration in the High Risk Rural Roads Program. This program allocates federal funds to  
27 mitigate safety issues on rural roads (mainly class 2 and 3 town highways). The program focuses on  
28 low-cost solutions to these safety issues such as signs and pavement markings. NRPC identified  
29 these 13 roads based on accident data from the last 6 years. Just last week, the Vermont Agency of  
30 Transportation selected Kellogg Road in St. Albans Town for a sign review along the entire route.  
31 Two intersections were also selected for a road safety audit review. They were the intersection of  
32 Richford Road and Berkshire Center Road in Berkshire and the intersection of Boston Post Road and  
33 the Tyler Branch Road in Enosburgh. NRPC staff will contact each municipality to confirm their  
34 interest in participating in the program and will coordinate the site visits and other grant  
35 requirements.

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37 VT Assoc. of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA): B. Kittell reported that the next  
38 meeting will be in June.

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40 Vermont Economic Progress Council (VEPC): C. Dimitruk reported tax credits have been  
41 approved for the BEMAG Transformers.

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43 Downtown Development Board (DDB): C. Dimitruk reported that Saint Albans City has submitted a  
44 preliminary Designated Growth Center application.

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46 Office: C. Dimitruk reported that she has been working on the budget and work program for  
47 next year. She also sent a letter to the Governor about the Highgate Welcome Center closure and  
48 received a reply from the Director of Buildings and General Services noting that there are no

1 plans to reopen and that public/private partnerships will be explored for the Georgia, Fairfax and  
2 Alburgh welcome centers. Dimitruk reported that there has not been much information released  
3 about the energy efficiency and conservation block grant program. She noted that the Vermont  
4 has been ineligible to receive the funding at the county level but other funds will be available to  
5 municipalities on a competitive basis. Details for the program will be developed by the  
6 Department of Public Service.

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8 B. Remmers reported that she has been giving a lot of support to towns relating to the stimulus  
9 package and the two transportation grant opportunities related to the stimulus. They include a  
10 special round of enhancement grants which fund projects such as sidewalks and stormwater  
11 treatment and a paving grant for class 2 and 3 town highways on the federal aid system.

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13 **OTHER BUSINESS**

14 M. Guernsey noted that on January 1, 2009, the Green Mountain Transit Agency took over  
15 operations of the Network and seems to be providing good service. S. Jensen announced that  
16 Isle la Motte received an enhancement grant to restore and convert the historic Dyer Hill House  
17 into a visitor center. She asked the board for advice on raising funds for long-term operational  
18 costs of the facility. Discussed centered around commissioners' suggestions including leasing  
19 for events, additional grants, potential tenants.

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21 **ADJOURN**

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23 *J. Baitz motioned to adjourn; M. Guernsey seconded. The motion carried.*

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25 The meeting adjourned at 8:54 PM.