

Minutes of Meeting
Commissioners' Status Update
April 26, 2021
11:00 a.m.

The Kootenai County Board of Commissioners: Chairman Chris Fillios, Commissioner Leslie Duncan and Commissioner Bill Brooks met to discuss the following agenda items. Also present were Resource Management Office (RMO) Director Jody Bieze, Deputy Finance Director Keith Taylor, BOCC Communications Manager Nancy Jones, BOCC Senior Business Analyst Nanci Plouffe, BOCC Administrative Secretary Chandra Newberry and Deputy Clerk Tina Ginorio. Also present were Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority Executive Committee Members Jerry McDonald, Dave Strohmaier, Bill Bery and J. Stuart, Kootenai County Residents Charity Myser, Erin Barnard, Richard Price, Caria Mattare, William Le, Sandy White, R Ottosen and Sandy Turner, and Coeur d'Alene Press Reporter Madison Hardy. Ms. Bieze and Ms. White were present via teleconference. Mr. McDonald, Mr. Strohmaier, Mr. Bery and Mr. Stuart were present via Zoom.

A. Call to Order: Chairman Chris Fillios called the meeting to order at 11:06 a.m.

B. Changes to the Agenda (Action):

Chairman Fillios indicated that item two on the agenda, "Optional Forms of Government Study Commission Members," would be covered at the end of the meeting.

C. Business:

Restoration of the North Coast Hiawatha Passenger Train Presentation with Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority Executive Committee Members (Discussion)

Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA) Executive Committee Chair and Missoula County Commissioners Chair Dave Strohmaier reviewed the history of passenger rail service in Southern Montana. He described the North Coast Hiawatha Route, which connected Chicago to the West Coast, via Southern Montana and was terminated in 1979. He added that a separate line, The Empire Builder, still operated, running through Idaho, Washington and Oregon.

Mr. Strohmaier said that there had been attempts made in the past 40 years to bring rail service back to Southern Montana, but they have not succeeded. He stated that his group had begun a new initiative this year and planned to take advantage of the Montana statute that allowed counties to jointly establish regional rail authorities.

Mr. Strohmaier provided a map which showed the Empire Builder line and the projected path of the North Coast Hiawatha Route. He noted that they were also considering smaller lines connecting to Denver and Salt Lake City. He reported that twelve counties had already signed on to the project and they had received commitments from two more that planned to join next month.

He explained that his group would serve to coordinate activities between the host railroad, the federal government, Amtrak and the local governments. He pointed out the potential social and economic development benefits to restoring the rail lines, supporting his stance with data that illustrated the benefits provided to communities by the Empire Builder in the past. He added that they were doing a study for the North Coast route to provide estimates of potential revenue.

He asked the Commissioners to consider providing a letter of support for BSPRA for the restoration of the North Coast Hiawatha route. He also asked them to consider sending a letter of support to Idaho's congressional delegation and governor to urge them to support BSPRA. He remarked that his group might later ask for support to restore the Pioneer Route, from Salt Lake City to Portland, Oregon.

Chairman Fillios asked Mr. Strohmaier to send the BOCC all the information on the proposed project and the Commissioners would be happy to review it.

Resource Management Office (RMO) Director Jody Bieze asked whether the group had discussed funding the project with the FTA (Federal Transit Administration) the Coeur d'Alene Tribe or other entities providing public transport in the area.

Mr. Strohmaier said they had spoken to the Departments of Transportation in other states, but not yet in Idaho. He indicated that most of the funding would be from Amtrak and the federal government, not from the individual states.

Pending Items Status Review – List Attached (Discussion)

County Form of Government Study Commission

Chairman Fillios noted that an item on the agenda was devoted to this in the next part of the meeting.

Facilities Expansion

Commissioner Duncan stated that they were waiting for the long range study to be completed and for the Legislature to complete its work for the session so the Board would know how the County's finances would be impacted.

PAC Airport Lease

Commissioner Duncan reported that Airport Director Steven Kjergaard and Wally Jacobsen were still discussing this project.

1A/B Audio Upgrade

BOCC Communications Manager Nancy Jones said that she should know this week what the timetable for the upgrade would be. She remarked that there might be a delay in the project due to components being backordered.

Financial Snapshot

Chairman Fillios reminded those present that this was provided on the first Commissioners' Status Update of each month.

Ballot Bond Language

Commissioner Duncan said this item was on hold until the Legislature had completed its work this session.

Building Financing

Commissioner Duncan said this item was also on hold pending the Legislature's decisions.

Optional Forms of Government Study Commission Members (Action)

Chairman Fillios reminded those present that the Board had agreed last week to have each Commissioner name three members and one alternate for the Optional Forms of Government Study Commission. He reminded those in the audience that the Public Comment portion of the meeting was intended for comments only; questions should be submitted to by email either to an individual Commissioner or to the BOCC as a whole.

Commissioner Bill Brooks listed his choices: Brian J. Cleary, Bob Fish and Kristen Wing, with Joan Genter as his alternate.

Chairman Fillios listed Dave Botting, David Levine and Phil Ward, with Dr. Cheri Zao as his alternate.

Commissioner Duncan listed Dr. Kurt Andersen, Tamara Bateson and Brant Bushling, with Bruce Mattare as her alternate.

- D. Public Comment:** This section is reserved for citizens wishing to address the Board regarding a County related issue. Idaho Law prohibits Board action on items brought under this section except in an emergency circumstance. Comments related to future public hearings should be held for that public hearing.

Kootenai County Resident William Le commented that President Biden had indicated he wanted to revitalize train service nationwide. He suggested that the Board see if the North Coast Hiawatha Passenger Train project would receive federal funding. He also remarked that the Board should consider why passenger rail service had died out before the County invested any of its funds in such a project.

Richard Price, Coeur d'Alene, said it occurred to him that we would have more people coming to the area, if the train service was implemented. He commented this would include in-state locations such as Bonner, SandPoint and Boise, but would also include places like Washington and Chicago. He stated he would like to know the cost involved before he made up his mind on the topic and pointed out that Amtrak had needed to be bailed out by the federal government previously.

Karla Mattare, President of Kootenai County Republican Women, said her first reaction was pleasure that the Trail would be easier to access, but as the presentation continued, she wondered if the added ease of transportation to our community would be beneficial after all. She remarked that she was not certain the community would welcome an additional large number of tourists, with the facilities that now exist. She expressed concern over having a transportation system that would link this area directly to the East Coast and Chicago.

Mr. Price exited the meeting at 11:52 a.m.

Kootenai County Resident Sandy White stated she knew nothing about Bob Fish. She expressed concern that a Study Commission member could have an unfair advantage when selections were made to fill County Offices which were no longer filled by an election. She added that she wished the Study Commission had not been proposed initially.

Sandy Turner, Coeur d'Alene, remarked that, once people arrived at the train station, they would need some form of transportation to get to their next destination. She speculated that the bus system would need to support them, or some other method would have to be found. She added that she had a wonderful experience herself on a rail journey.

Ms. Turner also objected to the implementation of the Study Commission. She pointed out that many residents had objected to the project in a number of different meetings. She pointed out that none of the nominees seemed to have studied Political Science.

Chairman Fillios replied that one or two of his choices had majored in Political Science.

Ms. Turner stated she and others wanted to protest the unnecessary waste of taxpayer money, pointing out the Commissioners' duty to direct public funds and not stand for any one party but for the people. She said they wanted the Board to drop the action immediately.

Kootenai County Resident Charity Myser exited the meeting at 11:55 a.m.

Kootenai County Resident Nancy Jones described her and her family's good experiences on rail journeys. She also pointed out that a rail connection from Chicago to Spokane already existed.

E. Adjournment (Action): Chairman Fillios adjourned the meeting at 11:57 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

JIM BRANNON, CLERK

CHRIS FILLIOS, CHAIRMAN

BY: _____
Tina Ginorio, Deputy Clerk
