

**Minutes of the
East Wisconsin Counties Railroad Consortium
Meeting of November 8, 2023**

East Wisconsin Counties Railroad Consortium Meeting was called to order by Chairman Thomas E. Winker on November 8, 2023, at approximately 10:00 a.m., at the Dodge County Administration Building Auditorium, 127 E. Oak Street, Juneau, Wisconsin.

Certification of Public Notice: Kimberly A. Nass certified that the notice of this meeting complies with all applicable requirements of Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law.

Present: Char Holtan, Columbia County; Dave Frohling and Jeffrey Caine, Dodge County; John Zorn and Karen Madigan, Fond du Lac County; Dennis Mulder and Charlie Wielgosh, Green Lake County; Tom Winker, Ozaukee County; Jeff Schleif and Robert Hartwig, Washington County; and Donald Nussbaum and Howard Miller, Winnebago County.

Excused: Milwaukee County; Marty Wolf, Ozaukee County; and, Roger TeStroete and Al Bosman, Sheboygan County.

Others Present: Ken Lucht, WSOR; Ben Mohlke, WisDOT; Don Vruwink, Office of the Commissioner of Railroads; Kimberly A. Nass, Dodge County Corporation Counsel; and Kelly Lepple, Dodge County Corporation Counsel Office.

The Consortium rose to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment: Don Vruwink, Commissioner of Railroads introduced himself and spoke about the WisDOT Annual Freight Railroad Conference. Don Vruwink also stated that he goes somewhere every week to talk to somebody about the importance of freight rail and help people around the State to understand what the Commissioner of Railroads Office does and how it helps promote safety.

Approval of Draft Minutes of September 13, 2023: Motion by Caine/Mulder to approve the draft minutes of September 13, 2023, as corrected. Motion carried. Zorn and Winker abstained.

Financial Report: Jeff Caine reported for the period ending October 31, 2023. The balance in the checkbook as of August 31, 2023, was \$1,001.57. Deposits – \$5,201.43, Expenditures – None, and Transfers – \$5,201.21. Total EWCRC money on deposit in the Local Government Investment Pool as of September 30, 2023, is \$1,030,996.01. Kim Nass reported that Milwaukee County has not paid its 2023-member county contribution. Kim Nass further stated that she will draft and send out a letter requesting payment. There was discussion about why Winnebago County only contributed \$25,000. Don Nussbaum will follow up with its Finance Department to submit the \$5,000 to make its 2023 contribution whole. There was discussion about what kind of interest rate the EWCRC is getting through the EWCRC Local Investment Pool. Kim Nass stated that the interest rate will be added to all of the Financial Reports going forward and the current interest rate is over 5%. Motion by Caine/Schleif to approve the Financial Report. Motion carried.

Consider, discuss, and take possible action to amend the Bylaws of the EWCRC: Tom Winker stated that he will not be running for reelection for county board but would like to remain on the East Wisconsin Counties Railroad Consortium. Currently, only active county board members may be appointed to the Consortium. Tom Winker asked the members of the Consortium to consider changing the Bylaws to be able to make citizen appointees. Ken Lucht reported that WSOR has three other rail transit commissions, and they have a set of bylaws, and their membership is comprised of citizen appointees that live in the county that they are appointed

by or can be a member of the County Board or can be an employee of the County Board. It was the consensus of the Consortium to direct Kim Nass to amend the EWCRC Bylaws to state that one member shall be a county board member and the other member may be a citizen appointee.

Report of WisDOT Railroads and Harbors: Ben Mohlke, WisDOT's new Freight Rail Manager, introduced himself. Mr. Mohlke provided an update on the Janesville Bridge project. A Memorandum of Understanding between WisDOT, WSOR and the UP has been drafted and is being reviewed by the legal department. Mr. Mohlke will contact Mike Halstead to see if he would be able to give a presentation on the Delong harbor project at the next EWCRC meeting.

Report of WSOR: Ken Lucht provided the following report: In 2023, WSOR invested \$12 million of capital expenditures into its tracks and bridges. WSOR installed 9,000 ties systemwide to help improve and preserve the rail infrastructure. WSOR has installed about 5 miles of continuous welded rail on the Prairie Subdivision. Approximately 78% of WSOR's track is at Class II standards or above. Class II railroads run at about 25 mph and is able to handle 286,000 gross pounds of weight on rail. The Prairie Subdivision is approximately 100 miles long between Madison and Prairie du Chein. Over the next 5 to 10 years, WSOR will install continuous welded rail on the entire Prairie Subdivision. In 2023, WSOR reconstructed 14 at grade crossings and also completed some bridge repairs and upgrades to structures to 286-pound capacity. WSOR has finished its system wide weed control process and completed two brush control applications. On October 2, 2023, Ken Lucht met with the Ozaukee County Executive Committee to talk about the \$30,000 member county contribution. Ozaukee County is very supportive of the partnership.

Merrimac Bridge: WSOR received a federal grant of approximately \$7 million to rehabilitate the Merrimac Bridge. This is approximately a \$27 million project, and the rest of the project will be funded by the State of Wisconsin, WSOR, and several counties that are served by the Merrimac Bridge. Michels is the contractor for the project and are in Phase 3 of the rehabilitation project, which is to change out 14 spans on the bridge, and 10 of the 14 spans have been changed out. In 2024 Michels will change out the rest of the spans. Once that is complete, WSOR will be able to upgrade the rating on the bridge to 286,000-pound railcars. There will be some touch up work and quality control work going into 2025 but should be running 286,000-pound railcars by next summer. This project will be completely done by 2025.

Janesville Bridges: The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) granted \$6.7 million to rehabilitate the Janesville bridges. WisDOT drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and presented it to WSOR and the Union Pacific for its review. WSOR has reviewed the MOU and has provided its comments to WisDOT. WSOR is hopeful that in the next four to five months an MOU will be in place and WSOR will be able to secure the funds from the FRA to rehabilitate the Janesville bridges. This project must be completed by the end of 2026.

United Cooperative: United Cooperative is building a brand-new facility in Waupun on the west side of STH 151 and will be shipping grain and soybeans. This facility will be a grain elevator at first and then going to be expanded to a soybean processing facility. United Cooperative in Waupun is looking at the third quarter of 2024 to start shipping by rail. This is approximately a \$300 million project and will create approximately 100 new jobs. United Cooperative in Oshkosh has built its track expansion and are now shipping 110-pound units of grain to the port in Chicago. United Cooperative in Horicon is also looking into expanding its track as well.

Amtrak: On August 29, 2023, WSOR had a meeting with Amtrak regarding passenger rail. Amtrak is targeting a couple of corridors that the WSOR operates. One corridor is by Madison and one by Fox Valley. If the FRA admits a couple of corridors on the WSOR into their corridor ID program, then the WisDOT can start expending funds on engineering and design on those corridors. Ken will keep the Consortium updated on what the FRA decides.

WSOR is building a new locomotive shop in Janesville. The structure is up and they are currently working on insulating and the interior work. Hopefully before the ground freezes they can get the two tracks installed. Ken Lucht stated that he will have pictures of the new shop at the next meeting of the EWCR. Ken Lucht stated that he is working on setting up a rail inspection tour and a tour of Charter Steel for the spring of 2024.

Date, time, and place of next meeting (January 10, 2024): The next regular EWCR meeting will be held on January 10, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. Dodge County will host the meeting, to be held at the Dodge County Administration Building, located in Juneau, Wisconsin.

Don Nussbaum stated that Winnebago County will host the March 13, 2024, EWCR meeting, to be held at the Winnebago Sheriff's Office, located in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Motion by Schleif/Mulder to adjourn. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

THOMAS E. WINKER CHAIR

John Zorn, Secretary

Disclaimer: These are draft minutes. These draft minutes may be approved, amended, or corrected at the next meeting of the East Wisconsin Counties Railroad Consortium.