

WRRTC DECEMBER 6, 2024 MEETING MINUTES – APPROVED 1/10/2025

**Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission
Commission Meeting – Friday, December 6, 2024 at 10:00 am**

1. 10:00 AM **Call to Order – Marty Krueger, Chair**

2. Roll Call. **Establishment of Quorum – Misty Molzof, Admin**

Crawford	Carl Orr, <i>1st Vice Chair</i>	X	Jefferson	Mary Roberts	X
	Mark Gilberts	X		John Kannard, <i>Vice Secretary</i>	X
	Tom Cornford	Excused		Jeff Smith	X
				Dan Herbst, <i>Alternate</i>	
Dane	Kevin Potter	X	Rock	Dave Homan, <i>2nd Vice Treasurer</i>	X
	Jeff Huttenburg, <i>Treasurer</i>	X		Tom Brien	X
	Jim Bolitho	X		Kevin Stone	X
Grant	David Wiederholt	Excused	Sauk	Brian Peper	X
	Mike Lieurance	X		Gaile Burchill	X
	Robert Scallon, <i>2nd Vice Chair</i>	X		Marty Krueger, <i>Chair</i>	X
				Tim McCumber, <i>Alternate</i>	
Green	Harvey Kubly, <i>1st Vice Treasurer</i>	X	Walworth	Al Stanek	Excused
	Larry Kranig			Richard Kuhnke, <i>2nd Vice Secretary</i>	X
	Mark Gundlach	X		Allan Polyock	X
Iowa	Charles Anderson, <i>Secretary</i>	X	Waukesha	Rick Beutler, <i>3rd Vice Treasurer</i>	X
	Kate Reimann	X		Richard Morris	X
	Craig Hardy	X		Karl Nilson	Excused

Commission met quorum.

Others present for all or some of the meeting:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misty Molzof, SWWRPC • Ben Mohlke and Lisa Stern, WisDOT • Ken Lucht, WSOR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don Vruwink, OCR • Larry Bierke, Iowa County Administrator • Peter Schierloh, SW Bridge
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3. Action Item. **Certification of Meeting’s Public Notice – Noticed by Molzof.**

4. Action Item. **Approval of Agenda – Prepared by Molzof.**

- *Motion to approve the agenda as posted. Burchill/Reimann. – Passed Unanimously.*

5. Action Item. **Approval of draft November 8, 2024 Meeting Minutes – Prepared by Molzof.**

- *Motion to approve the November 8, 2024 meeting minutes with change to #12 as read by Molzof and change Dan Herbst to not being present at the meeting. Morris/Anderson. Passed Unanimously with Hardy abstaining.*

6. Updates. **Public Comment – Time for public comment may be limited by the Chair.**

7. Updates. **Announcements by Commissioners**

Reiman thanked WSOR and Lucht for a wonderful new crossing in the Village of Arena.

Homan reported that WSOR fixed the crossing on Hwy 11 in Rock County, and outstanding job was done, and it is appreciated.

REPORTS & COMMISSION BUSINESS

8. **Merrimac Bridge Presentation – Pete Schierloh, SW (Steel Wheels) Bridge.**

Schierloh, primary engineer of design work for Merrimac Bridge, presented timeline and status update of the Merrimac Bridge.

9. **Iowa County Request for Profitability Plan – Larry Bierke, Iowa County Administrator.**

Krueger reported that he and Molzof received information that Iowa County may be leaving the Commission in the next year or two, and it was suggested that might be the case of other member counties as well.

Bierke, Iowa County Administrator, familiar with what WRRTC does, and there is lot that railroads offer economic development and county. Levy Limit Law is hindering Iowa County because you cannot raise your levy to cover operating without a referendum, and Iowa County has had to reduce three full time and six one-half time positions within the county, \$0.5 million was cut out of economic development budget, UW Extension lost 30% of their funding. Iowa County is getting smaller and needs to cut services. There is a likelihood that Iowa County will be pulling out of the Commission membership; therefore, Bierke, wanted to start the conversation to see when this organization can start becoming profitable on their own, especially if other counties are facing the same issues and will likely consider pulling out. Polyock stated that Walworth County has no debt

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and a good financial position, it comes down to administration and county board. Bierke, Walworth County is the role model for budget practices in WI. McCumber, Walworth County has greater opportunity than Iowa County; and questioned how can we put a profitability statement together for rail and the services provided for each county. McCumber, could look at other ways to assess, i.e., equalized value, rail customers served, etc. Lucht stated that there were materials sent out in the packet regarding rail benefits in Iowa County, and tracking metrics through economic development, there is a 50-year operating agreement with Commission that started in 1980, and profitability can be determined by tracking goals through job growth and economic development. Reimann brought up economic development, jobs, and the importance of rail in the county. Bierke stated that it is not a Return on Investment question, when comparing the amount of money, we spend on the railroad versus the amount of money we spend on senior meals or services, it becomes a political question and where does the County Board cut from. Craig Hardy, Iowa County Highway Commissioner stated that there was a \$1.5 million deficit to county budget in 2008, which required short-term borrowing for capital projects, the Iowa County tax Levy today for highway department is the same as it was in 1999, and they are looking at a 10% cut in operating expenditures this year to cover wage and benefit increases. Census data shows that Iowa County had 23,500 people in 1850, and in 2023, population was 23,435. Today is an opportunity to discuss, and try to find a solution. Polyock stated that cutting services is not an easy thing to do, the county board and town board are the ones that need to make the tough decisions, and not all of them are making good decisions.

10. WRRTC Financial Report – Huttenburg, Treasurer

- o *Motion to approve the October, 2024 Treasurer's Report as presented and pay bills: Freight Rail Conference – Jim Bolitho \$50 and Gaile Burchill \$50; legal fees to Boardman & Clark through 11/8/2024 in the amount of \$8,464, and 4th quarter to SSWRPC in the amount of \$8,166.25. Anderson/Orr. Passed Unanimously.*

Huttenburg presented the October 2024 financial statements, operating budget is covered by WSOR, and County Contributions go to Capital Projects. Large payment made to Merrimac Bridge and at the end of the month we had \$27,248, LGIP balances total \$1.035 million, bills to approve total \$16,730.25. Revenue and Expense statement shows where we are at for this year. \$270,735 sitting in LGIP for Merrimac Bridge, and monies are set aside for Janesville Bridges.

11. Wisconsin & Southern Railroad's Report on Operations – Lucht, WSOR

Lucht reported: state capital rehabilitation project is 28,000 ties on the Reedsburg sub to go from Class 1 to Class 2, and should be completed 1st quarter 2024; WSOR is working with WisDOT to secure funding to improve the North side of rail to Reedsburg and hoping to be done within a couple of years; WSOR is in winter mode; equipment is in shop getting ready for next season, recap of 2024: 43,000 ties system wide, 28,000 on Reedsburg sub; rebuilt 15 at-grade public crossings including Arena crossing; numerous bridge repairs in addition to Merrimac (largest project in 2024 and 2025); finished new locomotive shop, and 10 miles of rail has been installed from Prairie du Chien almost to Wauzeka.

12. WisDOT Report – Mohlke - WisDOT.

Mohlke reported: Crawford, Wauzeka, and Devil's Lake Improvements are projects eligible for WisDot funding, new policy allows inclusion of segregated funds to be used for these improvements, as well as private owned rail, this is crucial for funding rail in the state, and the state is confident that it will continue to help; the state is looking for applications to be coming in, due by February 1st. The Freight Rail Conference had record high attendance (150 attendees), presentations are all on line can find easy with a google search. Janesville bridge project is moving forward with preliminary design and engineering, but based on 2021 federal grant, it is being pushed back a couple of years; however, UP is being cooperative and responsive now. Roberts asked if there were grants available to counties that could help with economic development? Mohlke stated that there could be funding to help with a rail spur or industry access.

13. Adjournment.

- o *Motion to Adjourn at 11:20 am. Polyock/Kannard. Passed Unanimously.*