



CANADA – UNITED STATES

CROSS-BORDER RAIL PEER EXCHANGE

May 25, 2011

BURLINGTON, VERMONT

Session V: A Vision for the Future of Cross-Border Rail

Summary

Tim Hoeffner, Michigan DOT (MDOT) facilitated a discussion of issues impacting rail freight and passenger services between the United States and Canada. Key focus areas included data needs, rail freight border processes, and rail passenger border processes.

Chris Dingman presented cross border freight trend data derived from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics-North American TransBorder Freight Data Base and other sources. This data base focused on dollar value of cross border freight movements. Bob Leore, Transport Canada, stated that when looking at cross border rail freight movements, we also needed to consider other factors besides dollar value, such as weight and numbers of cars crossing the border. This information would better represent grain and other bulk commodities.

Transport Canada has that information and will share it with Chris Dingman, FHWA, who will continue to refine the data set that was presented at the peer exchange. Mike Tamilia, CN, also indicated that the rail freight industry had cross border freight data available, which would provide a more comprehensive view of the importance of cross border freight flows.

Cross Border Rail Freight Issues

Mike Tamilia (CN) identified a number of core issues impacting the cross border movement of rail freight:

- Need common set of US and Canadian customs rules, risk criteria, and inspection protocol.

- Expand on existing CBP and CBSA Cargo Security Initiatives (CSI) and Joint Targeting Initiatives (JTI).
- Establish reciprocal processes for trans border US/Canada shipments for interdiction at point of origin, with focus on inherent intermodal controls.
- When required, inland container inspections should be performed at destination.

Resolving these issues will reduce border delays, reduce transportation costs, and improve the competitiveness of U.S./Canada goods. The industry is currently working closely with U.S. and Canadian border inspection agencies to address these issues with the expectation that solutions will be found in the near future.

Cross Border Rail Passenger Services

Ed Courtemanch identified a number of key issues affecting the ability of AMTRAK to expand passenger services between U.S. and Canadian cities. These included:

- On train inspections are no longer satisfactory from the perspective of border agencies because:
 - On train inspection lacks the privacy to properly interview travelers especially about sensitive issues.
 - Border agencies often cannot clearly match every item of baggage to its owner.
 - There is poor connectivity with agency information technologies.
- There are safety and security risks with potentially unruly passengers and officer firearms.
- Requirements to de-board passenger trains at the border have safety issues.
 - Unsafe low platforms especially in bad weather.
 - Elderly and ADA passengers must get off a train to be inspected adding to safety issues.
 - Passengers carrying infants and small children are also at risk when de-boarding.
- Serious inconvenience to passengers.
- Long border dwell times cause longer trip times.
- All passengers must wait until the last passenger has cleared.
- Frequent delays would exacerbate poor on-time performance at down-line stations.

Possible solutions include:

- Pre-clearance process (similar to airports) at point of origin.
- End point customs and immigration processing in Canada with non-stop closed-door operation north of the border.
- Developing new methods for on-board processing that mitigate concerns of border authorities.

After extensive discussions, the participants recommended that a working committee be established to recommend strategies that would facilitate the cross-border movement of passenger rail service in an efficient, safe and secure manner. This committee should include key stakeholders, including border agencies, AMTRAK, federal, state, provincial and local transportation agencies, and other key stakeholders.

It was recommended that the committee be formed under the auspices of the Transportation Border Working Group. The conference sponsors will take this proposal to the TBWG for consideration.