

WRTC May 9, 2025 MEETING MINUTES – Approved

Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission Commission Meeting – Friday May 9, 2025 at 10:00 am

1. 10:00 AM **Call to Order – Marty Krueger, Chair 10:01**

2. Roll Call. **Establishment of Quorum – Schaeffer, Admin**

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

Commission met quorum.

Others present for all or some of the meeting:

- Benjamin Mohlke, WisDOT - Ken Lucht, WSOR - Don Vruwink, OCR	- Alan Anderson, Pink Lady RTC - Alyssa Schaeffer, SWWRPC - Steve Chmielewski, UW Extension
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3. Action Item. **Certification of Meeting's Public Notice – Noticed by Admin.**
Motion to approve meeting's public notice – Lieurance/Scallon. Passed Unanimously.

4. Action Item. **Approval of Agenda – Prepared by Admin.**
Motion to approve the agenda moving item 14 (discussion and possible action on update to 2014 Rail Economic Impact Study) to directly after item 7. – Reimann/Kannard. Passed Unanimously.

5. Action Item. **Approval of draft April 4, 2025 Meeting Minutes – Prepared by Admin.**
Motion to approve the April 4, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Brien/Gundlach. Passed Unanimously.

6. Updates. **Public Comment – Time for public comment may be limited by the Chair.**
No public comments

7. Updates. **Announcements by Commissioners**

Krueger: There was a ribbon cutting event for the Wisconsin River Recreation Bridge on May 8. Alan Sweeney was in attendance as well as Ken Lucht. Much of the work to construct the bridge was done when Sweeney was the chair of the commission.

On Monday night, Krueger and Lucht attended the Iowa County public works committee. John Meyer suggested that \$30,000 be moved to capital projects fund, but that was not the motion that was presented. Three supported leaving the commission, one abstained, and one did not support leaving the commission. Krueger heard several times that Iowa County paying the same amount as larger counties was unfair. Different funding factors were discussed previously, but the commission didn't have the interest to change the formula at this time. Krueger was still open to exploring different formulas. The Iowa County committee was not open to discussions about a different formula.

Reimann: Iowa County board meets on May 20 and she encourages commissioners to attend.

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REPORTS & COMMISSION BUSINESS

8. Discussion and Possible Action on a Proposal to Update the 2014 Rail Economic Impact Study: Steven C. Chmielewski, UW-Extension Community Development Educator/Waukesha and Jefferson Counties. – Chair

Chmielewski reported on the scope of the update to the 2014 Rail Economic Impact Study. They will use the 2014 study as a template and explore how freight rail impacts industries and the economic impact of the rail. A literature review would occur from July-August, data collection from August-September, analysis from October-November, writing from November-December, and submission in January 2026. WATCO will provide customer info. The project cost estimate is \$26,697 with two payments.

Huttenburg reported that the commission has about \$220,000 in its rainy-day fund, which is sufficient to cover the cost of the proposed study, an extraordinary expense. Krueger expressed interest in moving the study forward promptly, noting that the other Regional Transit Commission (RTC) won't meet until July to decide whether they can contribute. Homan emphasized the study's value in helping the state evaluate its current rail service and explore possible expansion and target markets. Chmielewski said he would consult with his team and follow up on whether future customer data could be included in the study.

Lucht outlined the study's focus on tracking the economic impact of the rail system by gathering data from 203 customers, including employment figures, total income, tax revenues, and customer expansion plans. He emphasized that this information would help demonstrate the value of rail partnerships to counties. Chmielewski referenced similar data gathered in the 2014 study, such as employee demographics, wages, and the potential effects of shifting freight from rail to trucking. In response to Bolitho's question about customer trends, Lucht noted that national freight rail demand is expected to double in the next 20 years, with Wisconsin projected to handle an additional 200 million tons by 2050. He highlighted challenges facing the trucking industry—such as driver shortages and rising fuel costs—and the efficiencies offered by rail. He also pointed to growing interest in shuttle loading systems, sustained ethanol production in Wisconsin, and WSOR's efforts to market vacant sites along the rail line.

Motion to ask UW Extension in Jefferson and Waukesha Counties to present a formal proposal at the June WRRTC commission meeting. Reimann/Brien. Passed Unanimously

9. WRRTC Financial Report – Treasurer

- *Motion to approve the March 2025 Treasurer's Report as presented. Orr/Anderson. Passed unanimously.*

\$216,492.65 is in the rainy-day fund that was built up over time and could be used for the rail study. \$173,049.00 was not drawn down until April 4, therefore the 2022 project fund still shows a balance in the March Treasurer's Report. That fund will go to zero for the April financial report.

- *Review draft budget*

Iowa County will still owe \$30,000 in 2026, so there is still \$270,000 from the counties. WSOR lease will remain the same and has been the same for the last two years. Permits can be high one year and low the next, so Huttenberg made an estimate. Interest is a conservative estimate due to Federal Reserve changing rates. Legal can fluctuate depending on projects. Anticipate more legal fees due to Baraboo Bridge lawsuit.

Motion to publish the budget and host a public hearing during the June meeting with the public hearing time changed to 10am. Anderson/Kannard. Passed unanimously.

10. 2026 Staff Services Agreement with Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWWRPC) – Admin

Motion to approve the 2026 Staff Services Agreement with SWWRPC. Huttenberg/Reimann. Passed unanimously.

Orr left at 10:47am after this agenda item

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

WSOR was awarded two bridge contracts in Lodi from state grant funding. The tie and crossing project between Waunakee and Devils Lake is finishing up with 10 at grade crossings to construct still. Those crossings will start construction in the next 3-4 weeks. Lucht and Scott at DOT will be resuming calls on property management issues soon. There are 19 unresolved issues with little progress in the last 2-3 years. Some applicants are not compliant with distance restrictions outlined in agreements. Lucht would like to get them in compliance or terminate agreements.

WSOR is following the state budget as it works its way through the legislature. RR property trespassing, funding for FRPP, and a couple of other matters affecting transportation are included in the budget as of now.

WSOR will be hosting Novak and Tranel in Boscobel for a ride along on Monday, May 12 at 10am at United Cooperative. The ride along will explain what WSOR does and why. The ride will go to Muscoda for a tour of Riverdale Ag.

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Traffic is down on the railroad. Grain is not moving as they would like. Lots of uncertainty in the market right now. Down 10% from year-to-date last year.

12. WisDOT Report – Mohlke – WisDOT

Merrimac bridge: The latest inspection report on Tuesday had some work finishing up. Track panel work was taking place and grass was being installed on some staging areas.

Janesville: Environmental and preliminary engineering work is underway. WisDOT is expecting categorical exclusion for the environmental review, but are waiting for FRA consultant determination on that. WisDOT has been waiting for Union Pacific to send the bridge plans. A meeting will be scheduled to get those plans. Lucht has been involved and WSOR's engineers contribute as needed

No update on FRPP funding. Still processing applications right now. The proposed budget is \$5M in bond funding. This would be a continued trend downward. These things are cyclical – some years may not have many project requests and others there are more requests than funding. The program is essential to getting railroad to Class 2 standard.

Summary of grant applications received: \$25M asked and \$23M available. WSOR, Fox, Tomahawk requesting \$800,000 for main line improvement for most of their system. There is a ranking process to determine which projects bring most benefit to the state. This includes cost saving of rail versus truck, environmental benefits, density of the line, etc.

Mohlke will not be at the next meeting but will try to get Lisa or another WisDOT member to attend.

13. Permits / Licenses

None

14. Review status of Walking Iron Trail, Dane County – Huttenburg / Bolitho

Bolitho and Huttenburg walked the grade Wednesday. All ties and rails are off. They were happy with the look and drivability of the trail. It is nearly ready for next steps. Only thing remaining: 10 sections of 100 lb rail in the DNR parking lot. Mover got paid to move 10 sections but not the remaining 15. Huttenburg suggested calling a scrapper or someone who reuses rail to get the final 15 sections moved. Jim estimated 6.5 tons for approximately \$1,500-\$1,800. Would split the money between the mover and the commission.

Huttenburg will connect with the Badger Steam and Gas Club president about the potential to reuse the 15 sections of rail.

The signals were left at County Hwy Y because it better signifies to drivers that the crossing is still there. Dane County will remove signals and box once rails are completely removed. WSOR could reuse lamps, but Lucht is not sure about the process to do that. Commission owns the lamps but WSOR likely wouldn't pay for them. Lucht will report on whether this could be used next month.

15. Adjournment.

Motion to Adjourn at 11:08 am. Scallon/Kubly. Passed Unanimously.

Posted by County Clerk's Office on 6/13/2025, Barbara Weinbrenner