

# SECTION 305 FINANCE and ADMINISTRATIVE SUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES

APRIL 27, 2022

3:00PM EASTERN

WEBEX MEETING

<b>FACILITATOR</b>	<i>Brian Beeler II, First Vice Chair of the S305 Finance and Administrative Subcommittee (FASC)</i>
<b>ATTENDEES</b>	<i>Brian Beeler II, Brian also as proxy for John Oimoen, Jeff Gordon, Amanda Martin , Amanda Martin also as proxy for Arun Rao and Troy Hughes, Ray Hessinger, Shayne Gill, Rebecca Anger, Steve Hewitt</i>
<b>ABSENTEES</b>	<i>Tim Ziethen, John Oimoen, Troy Hughes, Arun Rao, Jason biggs, Larry Salci, Mike Murray</i>

## DECISIONS MADE

### 1. Welcome and Open Meeting – Brian Beeler II for Maine DOT:

FASC Chair Tim Ziethen was unavailable for today's call, thus, Subcommittee Vice Chair, Brian Beeler II, for Maine DOT, was asked to chair the meeting. Brian opened the meeting and asked Steve Hewitt to call the roll.

### 2. Roll Call – Steve Hewitt:

After calling the roll, Steve Hewitt reported that, due to the absence of Tim Ziethen, Amtrak is not represented on the call and a quorum cannot be confirmed. It was agreed that the meeting proceeded with business being discussed but no votes or decisions made.

### 3.

#### Approval of Minutes from the 2-2-22 conference call– Brian Beeler II Maine DOT:

This item was tabled due to the absence of a quorum.

### 4.

#### Treasurer's Update – Steve Hewitt:

Steve Hewitt reported that he had not been provided an updated report, but provided the most recent report as submitted to the Executive Board on 4-5-22:

Balance/ Spend Rate:

Total Initial Grant Amount: \$1,250,000.

Amount Spent through January: \$912,469.91

Balance remaining: \$ 337,530

Current Spend Rate per month (as info and used in calculating): \$14,257

Estimated Balance at the end of the Extension Period (Contingency): \$52,000

### 5.

#### NGEC Funding Discussion:

##### Preparing an Application for a CRISI grant for the NGEC – Ray Hessinger and Steve Hewitt:

Ray Hessinger reported that the Executive Board has tasked the FASC to begin the process of developing an application for a CRISI grant. The process is moving forward. Ray noted that the grant applicant would be Amtrak.

Ray reported that he had a recent one on one call with Paul Nissenbaum, FRA. The direction suggested by Paul was for the NGEC to seek funding through a CRISI grant and he was pleased to know that the NGEC was already beginning that process. He was equally pleased that Amtrak will be the applicant. He is happy to have the NHEC looking ahead and continuing its work. He noted that it is important for the NGEC to apply for a CRISI fund even if it is not ultimately successful in receiving the grant. The fact that the NGEC submitted an application could

open doors for the FRA to find other opportunities for funding it.

Paul provided some suggested some things to include in the app to make it more compelling. Some of the items to include are; energy efficiency, climate, and workforce development. On workforce development he suggested an expansion into the academic word at the university level and named a few that would be good places to start such as Illinois and Penn State. He added that other minority institutions and historically Black colleges as potential opportunities.

Paul also noted that he did not expect that there will be many changes to the CRISI program for this round, so if the NGEC were prepared in advance by going off the last round process it would put itself in a good position.

Pau also mentioned that the amount of funding the NGEC would be requesting would be very small in terms of CRISI and as Ray commented it would be basically "a rounding error" if looking at the total amount of dollars available and this would also be an advantage for the NGEC's application.

Again, Paul added that even if unsuccessful, the NGEC having documented the need for funding could open the door for another funding source.

Overall, Ray felt the discussion was a productive one.

Steve Hewitt added some information on where Tim Ziethen had left things before being out of the office. He has discussed the process with Amtrak Grants Office at least twice, and gave the following report to the Executive Board on 4-5-22:

*Tim Ziethen reported that he has had two calls with the Amtrak Grants Officer. The FRA has not yet released the details for this round, and likely will not for a couple of months. In the meantime, Amtrak Grants and Tim are looking at last year's process, and Tim is waiting for internal confirmation as to whether he can distribute a copy or parts of a copy of an Amtrak submittal from last year to use as an example.*

*Tim noted that they (Tim and Amtrak Grants Officer) believe it is an appropriate application and process for those funds (CRISI) based on successful Grant applications from last year's program.*

*Tim noted that since it is a couple of months away before we will see the details, timing is a concern. The program will be highly competitive, and the NGEC has a short window with its existing funds. Therefore, he has asked the Amtrak Grants Office to consider other potential funding opportunities and he asks that FRA also consider other avenues or vehicles – even if only short-term pending the timing of a CRISI Grant.*

As Tim was unavailable for today's call (4-27-22) no update was provided, Steve Hewitt will follow-up with Tim to see what the status is.

**Requesting funding through the 2023 Appropriations** – Steve Hewitt for Arun Rao, WISDOT and Chair, States for Passenger Rail Coalition (SPRC):

In the absence of Arun Rao, Steve Hewitt reported that Arun had submitted written testimony on behalf of SPRC to the Senate Appropriations THUD subcommittee in advance of its hearing to be held on 4-28-22. (the testimony was submitted on 4-26-22.

Also, on 4-26-22, Arun Rao sent a letter to the House Appropriations THUD subcommittee with the same language as was submitted in the Senate testimony only in letter format as instructed by the House subcommittee staff. (They are not accepting written testimony but will accept letters).

Arun believes that, while applying for a CRISI Grant makes sense, it is a difficult process, therefore, the SPRC Executive Committee decided to also make a request for an appropriation to fund the NGEC.

Steve noted that he would include the language used in the letter and testimony as well as what is included in the updated DRAFT of the SPRC's Policy Principles, in today's minutes.

The language used in both the Senate and House submittals was that SPRC supports:

- *Providing new funding to continue the activities of the PRIIA Section 305 Next Generation Equipment Pool Committee (NGEC), to advance the development and maintenance of standardized next generation passenger rail equipment specifications. These specifications support lower operating and maintenance costs, extending vehicle life expectancy, and reinvigorating the US Rail manufacturing and supply industry.*

*The NGEC has judiciously used its previously appropriated funds (expending less than \$4 million over 12 years) to produce vehicle specifications that are being used as a basis for all new passenger rail vehicle procurements in the U.S. and beyond; including states, Amtrak, VIA Rail, Metro-North; Brightline, and other entities. It is critical to continue to fund the NGEC so that it can maintain the existing specifications, while exploring emerging technologies (such as zero emission/climate friendly propulsion alternatives) and developing additional next generation specifications that cover the full spectrum of passenger rail services in the US.*

The SPRC also is finalizing an update to its policy principles and has included the following language regarding the NGEC as drafted is:

**Funding for the PRIIA 305 Next Generation Corridor Equipment Committee (NGEC):** *Providing new funding to continue the activities of the NGEC, to advance the development and maintenance of standardized next generation passenger rail vehicle specifications. These specifications support lower operating and maintenance costs, extending vehicle life expectancy, workforce development, and reinvigorating the US Rail manufacturing and supply industry. It is critical to continue to fund the NGEC so that it can maintain the existing specifications, while exploring emerging technologies (such as zero emission/climate friendly propulsion alternatives) and developing additional next generation specifications that cover the full spectrum of passenger rail services in the U.S. For more information on the NGEC please see [www.ngec305.org](http://www.ngec305.org)*

So, ultimately, SPRC, which represents 24 State DOTs and/or Regional Transportation Officials and Passenger Rail Authorities across the United States, is weighing in with Congress to support funding for the continuation of the NGEC.

## **6.**

### **Review/Discuss DRAFT SOW for an RFI for refreshing the NGEC website – Steve Hewitt:**

Steve Hewitt had drafted a first cut at a SOW for an RFI for updating/refreshing the NGEC website which AASHTO will put out.

Tim Ziethen planned to comment and revise the DRAFT, but was unable to make those edits/revisions, prior to being out, so he asked Steve to circulate it as is.

Steve received several edits and comments from Jeff Gordon, FRA and from Ray Hessinger, NYSDOT. In the draft sent out with the FASC meeting materials, Steve Hewitt tried to incorporate/address the comments/edits received.

Steve stressed that this is not his area of expertise, so he was a bit at a loss with what to include in the SOW, but gave it a shot to at least get the conversation going.

There are two drafts circulating. The first rough draft and the one that Steve sent out with the meeting materials for today's call. (This includes Steve's attempt to capture input provided by Jeff and Ray.)

Included in the second draft was borrowed from the successful SOW put together by SPRC when it was looking for a web consultant to do a refresh on their site. It was successful and the site is now up and running and is greatly improved. It is largely based on the RFP used by SPRC, but is tailored to NGEC needs. This was a suggestion that Ray had provided in his comments on the initial draft.

The intent, today, is to discuss the DRAFT and determine if it is on track or should be revised further.

There remains several questions including whether the NGEC would look to continue to tag onto the AASHTO Rail .org site or have its own URL.

Much of what the extent of the NGEC website refresh is will depend on funding availability. The NGEC is currently planning to use its contingency funds for this expense. This will reduce the length of time the NGEC can continue to operate beyond 9-30-23 unless more funding is made available.

Discussion:

Ray Hessinger weighed in noting that Steve touched on some of the differences in in what the NGEC is looking for and what the SPRC needed, but "we did steal key pieces of it".

Ray added that he thinks "we need to get some input from AASHTO for this. SPRC mentions word-press – can AASHTO host us while we also have our own domain?"

AASHTO should be asked about the need to buy our own domain name – how long would we have it, and in what type of format would we need?

Rebecca Anger agreed to work with Steve Hewitt to arrange a call with the appropriate AASHTO staff. She would need a list of questions and what the NGEN is looking for.

Jeff Gordon commented that he still is not sure what it is the NGEN is trying to do with the website. Is it trying to make it pretty, or give it more tiles – more or less blue hyperlinks? He is not sure what it is we want or are trying to do with this refresh. It calls for training – training who? Who will maintain the website?

Ray Hessinger added that he sees the following as what needs to be addressed in a refresh:

Establish our own domain – ngen.org – as a suggestion – it is available.

Better organization

More Tiles and less blue hyperlinks

The ability to still maintain our documents, but in a better way.

Brian Beeler II agreed that it is important to identify how we want the site refreshed. It is stale and new must improve its look – its freshness. It is evident that we need to have a targeted conversation with AASHTO to get our questions answered and how it will work going forward.

Next steps – FASC members should review the DRAFT and send comments to Steve and Tim Ziethen and Rebecca Anger will work with Steve Hewitt and get us in contact with AASHTO's web group.

#### **8.**

#### **Quarterly Report – 2nd Quarter FFY2022 – due to FRA 4-29-22 – Steve Hewitt:**

As requested by Tim Ziethen during his absence, Steve Hewitt reported that he worked with Amtrak staff Nabina Mganga to prepare the narrative for the report and update the percentage of completion of NGEN activities tracked in the grant agreement report. On 4-22-22, Nabina confirmed having received the info provided by Steve Hewitt and its inclusion in the report. Nabina will enter the financial information.

The report is due on 4-29-22, and as Steve Hewitt understands, it will be submitted on time.

Steve Hewitt will distribute the submitted version to FASC and Executive Board Members.

The next report for the 3rd quarter FFY2022 will be due to FRA on 7-31-22.

#### **Adjourn:**

With no other business forthcoming, Vice Chair Brian Beeler II adjourned the call at around 3:35pm Eastern.

By Computer: <https://stephenhewitthewittconsulting.my.webex.com/meet/shewitt109>

by phone: 1-415-655-0001

Access code: 126-073-1531

**Next call – 5-25-22 NGEN Annual Meeting**

### **Decisions - Action Items**

#### **Treasurer's Report – 4-5-22:**

Balance/ Spend Rate:

Total Initial Grant Amount: \$1,250,000.

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Balance remaining: \$ 337,530

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**Exploring/confirming funding options beyond 9-30-2023**

The FASC is working with Amtrak Grants to begin the process of applying for a CRISI grant.

Other organizations such as SPRC are advancing requests for an appropriation for the NGEN in the FFY 2023 appropriations process.

**Developing a plan to increase NGEN awareness as of 2-222:**

**Decisions/Actions – as of 4-27-22**

Steve Hewitt and Tim Ziethen will discuss possible language to add to the By-Laws sometime in the near future, and run it the regular NGEN procedures for revising the By-Laws.

**NGEN 2022 Two-Page Educational Document:**

Distribution of the 2022 educational two-pager continues as the primary source of raising awareness. The new website would also serve to help in raising awareness.

**Quarterly Grant Progress Report to FRA:**

The FFY 2022 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter report is complete and will be submitted by 4-29-22. When Steve receives the copy of what was submitted, he will distribute to the Executive Board.

Next report due 7-31-22.

Developing an SOW for a website refresh:

Steve Hewitt has circulated the DRAFT SOW – and requests feedback.

Rebecca Anger, AASHTO, will work with Steve Hewitt to arrange a call with AASHTO’s web group to assist in clarifying what should be in the SOW.

By Computer: <https://stephenhewittconsulting.my.webex.com/meet/shewitt109>

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Next Call 5-25-22

**ATTACHMENTS**



*Our Vision: The NGEN will provide national leadership in standardization, acquisition, and management of passenger rail equipment.*

**SECTION 305 NGEN Finance and Administrative Subcommittee (FASC)**

**Web Ex video/audio information:**

By Computer: <https://stephenhewitthewittconsulting.my.webex.com/meet/shewitt109>

by phone: 1-415-655-0001

Access code: 126-073-1531

**AGENDA**

**4-27-22**

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|--|-----------------|
| 1. Welcome/Open  | Brian Beeler II |
| 2. Roll Call   | Steve Hewitt    |
| 3. Approval of the Minutes from 2-2-22   | Brian           |
| 4. Treasurer's Update  | Steve Hewitt    |
| 5. NGEC Funding Discussion:  |                 |
| Preparing an application for a CRISI Grant for the NGEC -                            | Ray Hessinger   |
| Requesting funding through 2023 appropriations -                                     | Arun Rao        |
| 6. Review/Discuss DRAFT Statement of Work for an RFI for refreshing the NGEC website | Steve Hewitt    |
| 7. Increasing Public Awareness – follow-ups  | Steve           |
| a. Distribution of Educational Document 2022   | Steve           |
| b. By-Laws Update to include permissible activities such as press releases           | Steve           |
| 8. Status: Quarterly Report to FRA – due 4-29-22                                     | Steve           |
| 9. Other Issues/questions  | All             |

**Next Call 5-25-22 NGEC Annual Meeting**