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Our Vision: The NGEC provides national leadership in standardization, acquisition, and management of passenger rail equipment.

Section 305 Next Generation Corridor Equipment Pool Committee (NGEC)

Monthly Activities Report: April 30, 2024

Submitted By: Steven J Hewitt, Program Manager, S305 NGEC

Public law 110-432 required Amtrak to:

...establish a Next Generation Corridor Equipment Pool Committee, comprised of representatives of Amtrak, the Federal Railroad Administration, host freight railroad companies, passenger railroad equipment manufacturers, interested States, and as appropriate, other passenger railroad operators.

"The purpose of the Committee shall be to design, develop specifications for, and procure standardized next-generation corridor equipment.

(b) Functions – the Committee may –

- 1) Determine the number of different types of equipment required, considering variations in operational needs and corridor infrastructure.*
- 2) Establish a pool of equipment to be used on corridor routes funded by participating states; and*
- 3) Subject agreements between Amtrak and States, utilize services provided by Amtrak to design, maintain and remanufacture equipment."*

Executive Board

Chair: Ray Hessinger, NYSDOT

Vice Chair: Dan Ruppert, Amtrak

Secretary: Amanda Martin, Iowa DOT

Treasurer: Tim Ziethen, Amtrak

The Executive Board will hold web- conference calls every 4 weeks on – Tuesdays at 11:30am Eastern.

During the month of April 2024, the Executive Board met once – on 4-16-24.

Highlights, decisions, updates from the NGEC during the month of April 2024:

Forecast/Accrual Amount to Reflect Billing Lag 60 days - \$30,000.
 Invoiced + Accrual Expenses to date (through February – 103,831.34
 Amtrak AOP Funding - \$260,000
 Remaining funds (total available less Invoiced + Accrual) - \$156,168.66.
 Estimated full year (YTD Incl. Carry Over + FC + Remaining Months @ Avg Spend TD) - \$170,132.02.
 Current Average Monthly Spend - \$13,260.14

Status – Contract Extensions:

All sub-contractor contract extensions have been executed.

Status – Completing Prior Grant Close Out documents:

Tim is working with Steve Hewitt on these documents. Tim has also had a discussion with FRA. Due by the end of the month with QPR (Quarterly Progress Report) as per usual.

Steve noted he had sent Tim a lot of information in response to the questions to be answered on the close out documents. He asked Tim to let him know if there was anything further that he needed from him or any questions he may have.

New CRISI Grant Application – steps/timeline:

The CRISI Grant NOFO has been released. Tim is working with Amtrak Grants on filing a new application. He will update the NGEC Exec Board on the application and timeline on the next call.

Other potential funding opportunities:

Tim commented that there was some discussion with the FRA, (while meeting about the close out of the prior grant), on possible other ways to align a federal grant with the current budget process.

Funding Discussion:

Dan Ruppert asked Tim Ziethen what the ramifications would be if they are unsuccessful in securing a CRISI Grant.

Tim responded that he is having discussions on other options with FRA - possibly pointing funding in a different direction. He noted that there is no obvious answer and that he will pull Dan into the ongoing conversation with FRA. Tim added that it was not the quality of the last CRISI grant application that caused it to not be awarded. It seems that there was simply too little funding for too many projects as well as prioritization. This will likely still be the challenge.

Dan added that there is some question and concern (internally) about Amtrak's appetite to continue this (funding) going forward.

Tim agreed and noted that the Amtrak funding through its AOP this fiscal year was not meant to be incremental – it was considered bridge funding until more long-term funding could be secured. It basically bought time but was not seen as a long-term solution. If the next CRISI Grant is not successful or another funding option is not found the NGEC would cease to exist once these funds are exhausted.

Steve Hewitt added, and Tim agreed, that this would result in the specification's created by the NGEC becoming obsolete.

Ray Hessinger added that another potential option – longer shot than CRISI - is through the FY25 appropriations process. He added that States for Passenger Rail and AASHTO both have funding the NGEC in their policy principles. "We" need to press that route as well. This group as a whole cannot lobby, but individually states and industry members can.

First Quarterly Report under current funding source – due (internally) 4-30-24:

Likely to be the same or similar to the previous reports provided during prior grant. Tim will look at the milestone information that Steve Hewitt provided in the March Monthly Activities Report and let him know if he needs anything more.

By-Laws Annual Review – FASC Recommendation

The 2023 review resulted in no changes being recommended. The By-Laws will next be reviewed in the Fall of 2024.

NGEC two-pager updates for 2024:

The NGEC 2024 Backgrounder and Educational document has been released and remains available by request from Steve Hewitt @ shewitt109@aol.com.

As of 4-30-24, 460 copies have been distributed (hard copies and electronic). The document is also available on the NGEC website.

- Metro-North Dual Mode Locomotive Procurement:

As reported on 4-25-24:

Locomotive 301 completed factory testing and completed FAIs on March 20th.

The procurement is moving along well and they should have the Dual Mode Locomotive out of Siemens for testing in the near future.

- Multi-State Venture Rail Car Procurement as reported by Caltrans on 4-25-24:

The Cab Car FDR is approved, and all FDR stages are complete. The Cab Car and Café Car MCAT simulation reports have been approved by the states and the FRA.

The Cab Car Complete FAI and FRA sample car inspections are complete. The Cab Car 238.111(b) test plan has been submitted to FRA and the first two cab cars have been shipped to Stockton in preparation for testing.

All 137 cars are in production or have been produced at Siemens Sacramento Facility. IDOT coaches and Caltrans trainsets are currently in revenue service and additional cars are being added as they are commissioned and accepted.

- Amtrak Equipment Procurement Update as of 4-25-24:

On the Acela: Amtrak is working with FRA on QP2 testing – trying to move to the final steps. They are having multiple daily calls/updates with the OEM and FRA. This procurement is heading in the right direction. Trainsets are being delivered to various locations as reported previously with #12 moving to Penn Coach yard. The remaining units will be stored at Alstom until they are placed into service. Work force training is taking place with Alstom at two of three sites – with training at the third site -Sunnyside yard - starting soon.

On the Airo trainset: This procurement is moving full speed ahead. They are closing out design efforts. Working on FAIs and wrapping up work on various systems. 40 vehicles are in production – 4 Locomotives and the rest (36) are coaches.

The first will go on the Pacific Northwest for testing – and 12 months later into service.

They are building out a commissioning facility for Airo and others.

Overall, this procurement is progressing “pretty well”.

On the ALC 42: Work on this equipment is progressing steadily with 50+ units in service. The total to be purchased is 125. Performance has steadily improved -working Amtrak with the OEM has been successful.

On the Long-Distance Fleet: This is an active procurement. Amtrak continues to respond to questions from the carbuilders within the RFP process.

On the Long-Distance Fleet:

It is in the middle of procurement. Bidders are working with the acquisition team on preliminary bids within the RFP process. They are looking at the end of this year or early next year for the award.

- Connecticut DOT Rail Car Procurement as of 4-25-24:

PDRs are continuing. The project team and Transportation representatives from CTDOT's service providers, Amtrak and TASI, are in Montreal this week at Alstom's Prototype center to review the Low Fidelity Cab Mock Up and provide comments as to layout and design assumptions.

- VIA Rail Equipment Procurements:

A detailed update presentation was provided to the NGEN during the Annual Meeting on 2-2-24.

The presentation is posted in the Meetings section of the website at www.ngec.org

- Document Control Update -4-16-24:

The Materials Working Group continues to meet regularly, their last meeting was 4-1-24.

The Communications Working Group held a meeting on 4-15-24.

Tammy Krause is working with the Technical Writer to create the DCRs for the single level document and we will then be submitting them to the Working Groups.

On 4-25-25 Dave Warner, Weight WG Team Leader, reported that he hoped to have a revised draft by the end of April and will schedule the next meeting thereafter. He recently sent out a reminder to working group members.

- Filling Vacancies:

Vacancies exist on the Specification Review Panels

Current status as of 4-30-24:

ON 4-16-24, the following discussion took place:

Ray Hessinger noted that Caltrans is the "elephant in the room" as the vacancies are primarily seats that have always been held by Caltrans and it is important that they remain on those panels. There is no urgency at the moment as none of the panels are expected to be convened in the near term, but they should be fully staffed to be ready when a product comes out of the Technical Subcommittee.

Steve Hewitt noted that IDOT has one seat that was vacated when John Oimoen retired and that John had intended to have IDOT keep. He was going to try to fill that vacancy before he retired but was unable to do so. Melina Lopez, IDOT, appreciated the information and will come back to the Board next month with an answer regarding IDOT representation on the panel (Locomotive).

Consultants/ Technical Support to the Review Panels:

Review Panel Consultant – Larry Salci

NGEC Support – Steve Hewitt

Technical Support – Tammy Krause

Amtrak Technical Support – Mike Kraft

Bi-Level Car Review Panel:

Ray Hessinger, NYSDOT – Chair

Vacant Caltrans

Amanda Martin, Iowa DOT

Melissa Shurland, FRA

Locomotive Review Panel:

Ray Hessinger, NYSDOT – Chair

Vacant Caltrans

Vacant - IDOT

Jason Biggs, Washington State DOT

Melissa Shurland, FRA

Trainset Review Panel:

Ray Hessinger, NYSDOT – Chair

Ed Engle, Iowa DOT

Jason Biggs, Washington State DOT

Vacant Caltrans

Melissa Shurland, FRA

Single Level Rail Car Review Panel:

Ray Hessinger, NYSDOT -- Chair

Ed Engle, Iowa DOT

Jason Biggs, WSDOT

Vacant Caltrans

Melissa Shurland, FRA

DMU Review Panel Members:

Ray Hessinger, NYSDOT -- Chair

Melissa Shurland, FRA

Brian Beeler, for Maine DOT

Vacant - Caltrans

Technical subcommittee

Chair: Don Ruppert, Amtrak

Vice Chair: Joe Paul, Amtrak

During the month of March 2024, the subcommittee met once – on the 28th:

Key decisions and action item updates from the month of March 2024, included:

- Backgrounder educational document:

The 2024 NGENC two-page educational was released on 2-2-24 at the NGENC Annual Meeting. As of 4-30-24, 460 copies have been distributed. The document is available in electronic or hard copy versions. Requests should be sent to Steve Hewitt at shewitt109@aol.com

- Document Control Update as of 4-16-24:

See the update in the Executive Board section of this report.

- Multi-State Car Procurement - Caltrans (Lead State) update as of 4-25-24

See Executive Board section of this report for the status of the Venture car multi- state procurement.

- Metro North Dual Mode Locomotive Procurement as of 4-25-24:

See the Executive Board section of this report for the status of this procurement.

- Amtrak Equipment Procurement Updates as of 4-25-24:

See the Executive Board section of this report for the status of this procurement.

- Connecticut DOT Rail Car Procurement as of 4-25-24:

See the Executive Board section of this report for the status of this procurement.

- University of Nebraska/FRA study on High Speed wireless technology as of 2-29-24:

Hamid Sharif, University of Nebraska, provided a summary presentation on the High-Speed Wireless Study during the NGEAC Annual Meeting.

The presentation is available on the NGEAC website at www.ngec.org.

This study, as of 2-2-24 had not been granted funding from FRA for its next phase. The item will be tabled until further information is received.

*Hamid Sharif
Advanced Telecommunications Engineering Lab
University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

*Phone: 402-917-6363
Email: HSHARIF@UNL.EDU*

Discussion: Potential future presentations – Dan/Steve:

- a. Technological advances/emerging technologies/technology transfer:

Steve Hewitt reported that Melissa Shurland had reached out to the FRA's lead on the topic of Technology Transfer, but he has not heard from her yet.

Melissa said she would follow up. She noted that they are interested in a standardized specification for technology transfer.

Dan suggested that he, Steve, Melissa and the Technology Transfer person discuss "our baseline thinking" and then invite the individual to participate on the next call (5-9-24) or whatever works best.

Melissa agreed and will check back with dates and times for a brief call with Dan and Steve Hewitt.

(Following the meeting, Melissa connected with Michel Geary, FRA and offered 4-30-24 at 2:00pm or 5-2-24 at 10:00am for a call with Dan, Steve, Melissa and Michele. Steve has reached out to Dan about his availability.)

- b. Lessons learned during Equipment Acquisitions/Procurements

Steve Hewitt reminded industry and state members that we are looking for suggestions on additional topics on either emerging technologies or even lessons learned from vehicle acquisitions. This information could lead to an update of the Best Practices Document the NGEAC created a few years ago. Ideas on topics of interest should be sent to Steve Hewitt and Dan Ruppert.

- NGEAC future funding – CRISI Grant Application:

The NOFO for the next round of CRISI Grants came out at the end of March 2024. Amtrak intends to, once again, apply for a CRISI Grant for long-term funding for the NGEAC. Work has begun on developing the application. All CRISI applications are due to FRA by 5-28-24.

In the last round, Amtrak applied for a CRISI grant for funding the NGEAC. In the end, with many great applications and too little money to go around, the grant for funding the NGEAC was not awarded. In the debrief with FRA, Amtrak learned that the application was very well done and compelling and there was no major flaws or any real flaws at all, simply not enough money to fund all of the many requests received. Amtrak was encouraged to apply again on behalf of funding the NGEAC and is doing so.

In the last round, one of the critical factors that carried weight was the tremendous support the NGEAC received from the industry through letters of support. It is hoped that we are able to get that kind of support and more this time around. It will be critical for sure.

As was done in the previous round, Amtrak will send out a letter to industry members from Tim Ziethen requesting letters of support and providing information as to where to send the letters and other guidance.

Please watch for Tim's request letter and, if so inclined, please support the CRISI application for funding the NGEC. The NGEC is currently being funded by Amtrak out of its AOP, but this was simply a 12-month interim funding to bridge the gap until long-term funding could be secured. It is critical that the NGEC be funded long-term and this should come by way of an FRA grant. The best vehicle at this time seems to be through CRISI. The NGEC Executive Board and Amtrak, as well, continue to look for other possible funding options.

The Finance and Administrative Subcommittee

Chair: Tim Ziethen, Amtrak

Vice Chair: Brian Beeler II, NNEPRA for Maine DOT

Second Vice Chair: Amanda Martin, Iowa DOT

The Finance and Administrative subcommittee (FASC) will hold a conference call every four weeks on Wednesdays at 3:00pm Eastern.

During the Month of April 2024, the Finance and Administrative Subcommittee met once on the 24th.

Key decisions and action item updates from the month of April 2024 included:

Balance/Spend Rate Through February 2024

Forecast/Accrual Amount to Reflect Billing Lag 60 days - \$30,000.
 Invoiced + Accrual Expenses to date (through February – 103,831.34
 Amtrak AOP Funding - \$260,000
 Remaining funds (total available less Invoiced + Accrual) - \$156,168.66.
 Estimated full year (YTD Incl. Carry Over + FC + Remaining Months @ Avg Spend TD) - \$170,132.02.
 Current Average Monthly Spend - \$13,260.14.

Strat Cavros, AASHTO, reported that invoiced expenses for March – reported in April were \$5,695.

Status: Preparing Prior Grant Closeout Documents:

Tim Ziethen is working with Steve Hewitt on the closing documents. Tim had a discussion with FRA regarding what is needed for closing out the prior grant. Tim intends to submit all closing documents by the end of the month (4-30-24) with the QPR (Quarterly Progress Report) for the second period of FY 2024 also to be completed by then - as per usual.

On 4-25-24, Tim noted there are three items required for FRA:

1. Financial report which Amtrak Grants Office is working on.
2. A final Quarterly Report to FRA as of 3-30-24 – the end of the no-cost grant agreement extension for the purpose of closing out the prior grant. The information for this report was previously provided on October 31, 2023, as a part of the final quarterly report for FY 2023.

Steve Hewitt and Tim Ziethen will work on exactly what needs to be provided for this newly requested prior grant close out Quarterly Report.

3. FRA Form F33 – Summary form – which Steve Hewitt has taken a first pass at. This form highlights activities and goes with the final QPR.

These items are due to FRA by April 30, 2024.

Steve Hewitt and Tim Ziethen will meet on 4-24-24 to discuss these items. Tim will send Steve a calendar appointment.

- Seeking Long-Term Funding:

Preparing CRISI Grant Application – steps/timeline:

The CRISI Grant NOFO has been released. Tim is working with Amtrak Grants on filing a new application. The application is due to FRA by 5-28-24.

Steve Hewitt noted that he has some ideas for inclusion in the application and will discuss them on the call with Tim on Thursday (4-25-24).

Tim noted that a request for letters of support from the industry is being developed – similar to the last round and will go out from him. He encouraged states and others to “talk it up”.

Steve Hewitt added that he has NGEC funding – including CRISI - on the agenda for tomorrow’s (4-25-24) Technical subcommittee meeting and will give the industry the heads up and ask for continued support.

Other potential funding opportunities:

Tim commented that there was some discussion with the FRA, (while meeting about the close out of the prior grant), on possible other ways to align a federal grant with the current budget process. There are no new ideas but some that can be revisited – while also pursuing the CRISI grant. Ideas are welcome and encouraged. Send them to Tim Ziethen and Steve Hewitt.

- Conveying the message as of 3-31-24:

The NGEC 2024 backgrounder/educational document was released during the 2024 Annual Meeting. To date 460 copies have been distributed (hard and soft). Contact Steve Hewitt at shewitt109@aol.com to request a copy.

- Quarterly Grant Agreement Progress Report to FRA

On 4-25-24, Tim Ziethen reported that the plan is to continue preparing a quarterly report to be submitted internally to Amtrak and the NGEC Executive Board. The funding FY24 is coming from Amtrak – so submitting a QPR to FRA is no longer required, but continuing the QPR in its current format for internal Amtrak and for the NGEC Executive Board is a good business practice.

Steve Hewitt included milestone information as a part of the March NGEC Monthly Activities report and, as usual, this will be the information that is used in preparing much of the QPR.

- Annual NGEC By-Laws Review:

The 2023 review resulted in no changes being recommended.

The By-Laws will next be reviewed in the Fall of 2024.

NGEC Specification Review Panel(s):

For each PRIIA NGEC specification a Review Panel has been established to compare the specification (as developed by the technical subcommittee) against a Requirements document previously adopted by the Executive Board. As the Review Panel completes its work, it prepares a report with recommendations. This report is submitted to the Executive Board for its consideration. Once accepted by the Board, the specification is subsequently formally adopted by the Executive Board. As part of the Document Control process, any proposed revisions to a PRIIA NGEC specification must go through the Review Panel process as well. At such times, the Review Panel, previously established for a specification, is re-convened by the Executive Board chair.

The NGEC Review Panels did not meet in April 2024. Several vacancies are yet to be filled as noted previously in this report.