

# Warren Board of Selectmen

Minutes of March 3, 2023

10:00 a.m.

Town Administrator's Office, Shepard Municipal Bldg; tour of Main/Southbridge/Maple Street CSX bridge

**Selectmen in Attendance:** David Dufresne, Derick Veliz, Richard Eichacker

**Others in attendance:** Maurice O'Connell (CSX), Robert Rohauer (CSX), Town Administrator James Ferrera, Highway Surveyor Jeremy Olson, Scott Petraitis, Water Treatment Plant Lead Operator Ralph Zebrowski, Kerry Schmidt

D Dufresne called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and thanked the CSX representatives for attending to discuss the condition of railroad bridges in town. He indicated that there has been a lot of public concern about the corrosion on the pillars and the concrete that falls from overhead, and questioned whether preventive maintenance should be done regularly. J Olson said the conditions have been a problem for at least eight years, and town officials are concerned about protecting residents who drive and walk beneath the bridge.

R Rohauer stressed that there is a difference between cosmetics and safety and structural integrity, and that there is no doubt that structurally, the bridge is sound. The bridge, which was built in 1911, was engineered to carry several tracks and it now only carries one. CSX does regular inspections – safety is their top priority – and there is no safety concern. The New England elements have been at work on the bridge surfaces for a long time and have taken their toll resulting in rust, falling concrete, etc.

M O'Connell pointed out that annual inspections are required by law, and CSX typically performs many more than one annual inspection on bridges, depending on their age and condition "grade" (i.e. older bridges are inspected more often). \$2.3 Billion has been allocated for maintaining the company's infrastructure this year. He also indicated that he's been in contact with the Engineering Department, and they are preparing to look at the outer piers (the central piers are okay) and the condition of the concrete on the underside of the bridge.

J Ferrera inquired about the exposed rebar underneath the bridge. R Rohauer answered that the rebar and concrete were modifications -- it had been built as an open deck bridge – and not structural, so the deterioration of the concrete (spalling) does not indicate a weakness in the bridge and is the result of the natural freeze/thaw cycle. S Petraitis, a current employee of the Highway Department and former employee of CSX, agreed that bridges can look as though they are in terrible shape but can be safe.

J Olson indicated that, although the railroad may consider the concrete spalling cosmetic, when pieces of concrete fall on pedestrians or vehicles, there is a public safety hazard.

D Dufresne pointed out that there is a lot of public concern; many, many people walk and drive under the bridge and see the conditions then complain to town officials. He wants to make sure that residents know that the selectmen are working with CSX to make sure everything with the bridge is all right. He also requested five years' worth of reports on the bridge from the annual inspections previously mentioned. R Rohauer indicated that the town would have to obtain those from the Federal Railroad Administration, which is the federal oversight agency for railroads.

M O'Connell assured selectmen that CSX will come in the spring (April is the beginning of their construction season) to address the spalling conditions, but painting the bridge is more difficult and is another issue.

R Rohauer provided a telephone number – 800-232-0144 – for anyone to call 24/7 to report any type of emergency as soon as possible.

M O'Connell said that CSX wants to be a good neighbor, but they also have a vested interest in their Northeast line, with the New England Automotive Gateway in Spencer and the Intermodal Port in Worcester, and CSX has a robust reinvestment plan for the line.

D Dufresne inquired about an incident two weeks prior when a train came through town blowing its horn the entire way – does that signal an emergency on the train? R Rohauer replied that the horn was likely just stuck. M O'Connell concurred, saying that although the engineer can sound the horn anytime they want for any reason – and they do when they see an obstruction on the tracks – that an extended use is more than likely an issue with the horn itself.

R Zebrowski asked about doing work to sewer lines along the tracks; specifically at this time, inspections and cleaning about six feet away from the rails. R Rohauer informed him that he can obtain online (at CSX.com) "Right of Entry" agreements, that look for very specific information about the work to be done and the location. Such agreements should be made with CSX whether or not the work to be done is on CSX property – for safety reasons, the railroad needs to know what type of construction activity will be done even parallel to its property. It can be difficult to determine how much property along the line belongs to CSX, as widths can vary; CSX even has property that's nowhere near railroad lines, so it's better to contact the company. Depending on how near the track the work is being done, flagmen may need to be hired or fences erected. Also, they have to make sure that debris from any project is well off the tracks.

D Veliz asked whether any cosmetic work like painting murals or improving lighting could be done. M O'Connell said that CSX doesn't paint bridges, but with a "Right of Entry" agreement in place and strict standards set, the community could do work along those lines (though murals under bridges don't typically wear well). Safety lighting under the bridge would also be responsibility of the town. CSX has a process in place, a "Public Projects Manual."

D Dufresne inquired whether information is available on the specific materials a particular train is carrying; in the event of an emergency, First Responders would need that information. R Rohauer indicated that there is an AskRail mobile app that can tell them what they need to know. Also, CSX offers various trainings for First Responders, just have Chief Lavoie get in contact and they can schedule something. There is a report of the Hazardous Materials Commodities that includes the 10 or 15 products are typically carried on their lines, but for specific materials on specific trains, there would have to be a formal request and it would be provided only with specific railroad approval (proprietary information). Additionally, every engineer has a Bill of Lading for his train, which would be available electronically,

M O'Connell pointed out that CSX has a 99.98% Safety Rating transporting hazardous materials. Also, not every tank car is carrying hazardous materials – it could be food product or anything else: "If it's in your life, we probably moved it." There are many safeguards built into the system, including sensors on tracks that provide information on specific cars. In the event of an emergency, CSX would be here "in great numbers" to rectify the situation. But it's unlikely to happen, as they do a lot of preventive maintenance and use modern safety equipment.

11:10 a.m. – Recess for Bridge Tour.



At Bridge

R Rohauer pointed out the construction standards of the bridge, including the use of hot rivets and hand cut stones in the abutment.

The trees on the deck are not a problem, as they're growing on an unused section of the overpass and are certainly not as heavy as the trains that the bridge was engineered to carry. The rusting outer piers are cosmetic, not structural.

J Olson inquired about culvert work that may be in the future and was told that it would be the same "Right of Entry" Agreement process. Anything up to the CSX property would be town's responsibility, on CSX property is the railroad's responsibility. R Rohauer asked that Olson keep them posted on culvert work to be done that connects with railroad culverts so that they don't become a "choke point" with updated drainage everywhere except on their property. Sidewalk work would also be the responsibility of the town.

**Motion to adjourn:** R. Eichacker

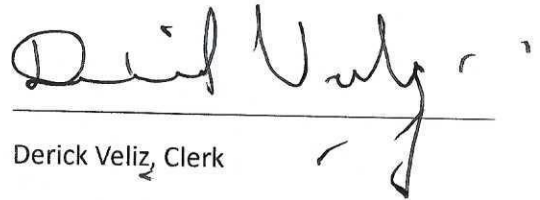
**2<sup>nd</sup>:** D Veliz

**Vote:** 3-0 in favor

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kerry Schmidt



Derick Veliz, Clerk