**Mountain Division Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council**

**Date/Time:** 9/30/21–3:30 pm

**Attendees:** Paul Schumacher (Chair), Senator Rick Bennett, Nate Moulton, Nate Howard, Jack Sutton, Russ Barber, Dan Hester, David Kinsman, Paul Hunt, Katie Haley, Theresa Egan, Dwight Warren, and Zach Mosher.

**Introductions:** This is the initial meeting for the Council. The purposes of the meeting are:

* To allow members of the Council to introduce themselves
* To get input from the committee on how to proceed with the effort including schedule, how often the group should meet, topics to cover
* To determine what information is needed to make recommendations
* To provide an opportunity for input

Paul Schumacher from Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission has been asked to Chair the Council

**Background/Goals of the Council:**

Two bills were passed this session (LD 672, LD 1133) that directed the department to establish Rail Corridor Councils upon petition from municipalities along the rail corridor. The Mountain Division will be the 1st of the 4 corridors identified in LD1133. The other 3 are:

1. The Berlin Subdivision between Portland and Auburn
2. The Lower Road from Augusta to Brunswick. The section subject is also the subject of a passenger rail study.
3. Calais Branch from Calais to Ayers Junction in Charlotte

More than 200 individuals testified for the bill, mostly in favor. Testimony can be viewed at: <https://legislature.maine.gov/ctl/TRA/5-20-2021?panel=1&time=0&sortdir=0&sortby=2>.

Goal of the Council is to develop a recommendation for the Commissioner of MaineDOT regarding the future use of the rail corridor. Is there a viable interim use as a trail corridor?

The corridor will continue to be held for future rail use under the Rail Preservation Act. The Act can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/23/title23ch615sec0.html>.

The line must be preserved for future rail use as MaineDOT only holds a rail easement in certain areas like the Portland Water District.

The Council will consider the economic benefits and costs of the potential uses of the corridor.

The Corridor is defined as MP 15.7 to 46.82: The section between the existing trail segments from the Standish/Gorham Line to Fryeburg.

Potential uses include rail use (passenger or freight or both), trail with rail, and trail with removal of rail infrastructure.

Jack Sutton from MRG proposed a model for an operating railroad between Portland, ME and White River Junction, VT based on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad called “The Crown of New England”.

Q: Are there examples of a trail that has gone back to rail?

**Consultant work/information**

MaineDOT will contract with HNTB to develop high-level costs and evaluate trail/rail segments. The firm has done extensive work in this corridor.

Proposed consultant Tasks:

* Rechecking existing conditions and inventory and analysis
* Identify opportunities and constraints in corridor
* Develop cost estimates
* Investigate funding resources
* Examine economic benefits of rail and trail
* Propose implementation actions

The Council also needs to consider what type of trail uses should be accommodated including ATVs and snowmobiles.

Nate Moulton will distribute scope of work to the council.

The section of Windham into Westbrook will be subject of separate rail-with-trail study.

**Outline/Agenda for future meetings**

Nate suggested 2 presentations at the next Council Meeting. We will ask the owner/operator of the Conway Scenic Rail and a Rail Trail Group to talk about successes and challenges in other areas.

Next meeting will be October 28th at 3:30. After that, the desire was to meet biweekly (minus holidays) to keep the process moving.

The recommendations do not have to be unanimous. The Council can submit a minority report. The recommendations should also address capital and maintenance responsibility for any trail options and operational parameters for any rail options.

The report must be submitted to the Commissioner of MaineDOT within 9 months of the 1st meeting (today).

We will hold 1 or more public meetings, possibly virtual, towards the end of the process.

Can MaineDOT host a webpage for study materials? Virtual public meeting could also be recorded and shared on the webpage.

The Portland Water District advocates for the protection of the public resource. They would like the Council to consider alternate trail routing like what was done near Otter Ponds to minimize impacts to the water supply.

Can the assets around the corridor be inventoried?

This is the first step in a long process to advance any recommendations for the corridor.