

Mountain Division Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council

Meeting minutes 12/9/21

Attendees: Paul Schumacher (Chair), Nate Moulton, Nate Howard, Meghan Russo, Jack Sutton, Russ Barber, Dan Hester, David Kinsman, Paul Hunt, Theresa Egan, Dwight Warren, Colin Burch, Carolann Ouellette, and Zach Mosher.

Presentation #1: Recreational Vehicles on Rail Trails

Brian Bronson, Supervisor Off Road Recreational Vehicle Program, Bureau of Parks and Lands, gave a presentation on the Downeast Sunrise Trail (DEST) and the Recreational Vehicle program.

- The Recreational Vehicle Program manages 13 multiuse rail trails statewide.
- The Sunrise trail (former Calais Branch railroad) is owned by MaineDOT and managed under an agreement with MaineDOT.
- These former railroads are not “rail banked”. They are purchased under different Maine law.
- ATVs not allowed on these trails in winter. ATVs must be legally registered.
- Funding for the program comes from ATV and snow mobile registration and gas tax from recreational vehicles.
- It costs approximately \$50,000 per mile to convert the Calais Branch to a trail. The cost is nearly double that amount today.
- Washington Junction to Ellsworth cost \$600,00 per mile to construct a trail next to the active rail.
- Up to this point, no authorized use of ATVs is permitted on the Mountain Division line
- Conflicts can exist between trail user, including:
 - motorized vs non-motorized crown: speed issue
 - equestrian conflict between cyclists. Horses can’t hear bikes coming behind
 - Dust from ATVs.
- The width of the DEST is 12’ in most areas, some areas are narrower.
- There is no statewide speed limit for ATVs. Downtown areas are posted at 15 mph.
- Steel salvage (from rail) goes into an account and is reinvested in trail.
- \$120 per ton for tie disposal @\$25,000 per mile.
- Most of the work for the DEST was completed from steel value.
- Trail maintenance includes grading and compacting trails and applying calcium.

Presentation #2: Economic impact of Rail Trails on Communities

Craig Della Penna, Associate Broker, The Murphys Realtors, presented on a wide variety of topics including:

- Farmington Canal Heritage Trail
- Virginia Creeper Trail 33 miles long
- NY Erie Canal Trail. Empire State Trail 750 mile
- Bicyclists bring business and prevent “rural blight”
- 100 Rail-Trail projects underway in MA
- Lamoille Valley Rail Trail
- Ashokan Rail Trail
- Common concern with trail abutters
 - Waste
 - Property theft
 - Depressed property values
 - Scare wildlife

Outline/Agenda for future meetings

- Next meeting is January 6TH, 2022. Agenda items include:
- Sources of rail trail funding
- Additional rail uses along the Mountain Division

General Discussion

Nate Moulton – MaineDOT is currently updating the Statewide Rail Plan and the Active Transportation Plan. These efforts will address state owned rail lines. However, the Rail Preservation Act directs MaineDOT to manage state-owned rail line for future rail use. The mission for this council (from the Legislature) is to draft a recommendation for the MaineDOT Commissioner regarding the future use of this line.

Russ Barber – MRG is looking into viable uses for the line. Mountain Study was conducted in 2007.

Colin Burch – GPCOG has issued an RFP for Rapid Transit between Gorham, Westbrook to Portland.

Jack Sutton – Group should give serious consideration to NH and Vermont in terms of making final recommendation.

Dave Kinsman – Would like to set aside time at a future meeting to hear from other members of the Council.

General Public Comment

Kristine Kenney, East Coast Greenway Alliance – She wants to understand process. The Mountain Division is not envisioned as a part of East coast Greenway route but part of large NE trail vision. Effort in North Conway underway to connect trail to the Mountain Division Trail in Fryeburg. Visitors are looking for a connected network of trails.