



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: August 25, 2022

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Virtual Meeting

Date: 8/26/2022

Project No.: WIN: 25979.00 / VHB: 55607.00

Project Name: MaineDOT RUAC Supporting Study – SLA Berlin Subdivision

RUAC Meeting Attendees (bold indicates attendance):

MaineDOT Team	RUAC	Guests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nate Howard, (MaineDOT, PM) • Nate Moulton, (MaineDOT Dir. of Freight and Passenger Services) • Meghan Russo (Maine DOT Dir., Legislative Affairs) • Tony Grande (VHB) • Phil Goff (VHB) • Tim Bryant (VHB) • Mike McDonough (VHB) • Eric Halvorsen (RKG) • Larry Cranor (RKG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair Bill Shane (Cumberland Town Manager) • Doug Beck (ME Bureau of P&L, RTC Manager) • Brian Harris (ME Yacht) • Charles Hunter (Assis. VP for Genesee & Wyoming) • Chris Chop (GPCOG Transpo Director) • Christine Landes (New Gloucester Town Manager) • Diane Barnes (North Yarmouth Town Manager) • Dick Woodbury (CBTA) • Hope Cahan (Falmouth Town Councilor) • Jeremiah Bartlett (Portland Transpo. Engineer) • Jonathan LaBonte (Transpo. Advisor, Auburn Town Manager) • Scott LaFlamme (Yarmouth EcDev Director) • Tony Donovan (Maine Rail Transit Coalition/MRTC) • Angela King (BCM Advocacy Director) • Nate Wildes (ED, Live and Work in Maine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keith Gray (Assist. Portland Transportation Eng.) • Jon Kachmar (Eastern Trail Alliance) • Al Fazio (BRT Services consultant) • Nate Asplund (Railroad Development Corp.) • Bridget Hodgson (BRT Services consultant) • Grayson Lookner (Maine State Representative) • Henry Posner (CMU, Pittsburgh)



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Agenda:

- › Introductions
- › Trail Opportunities presentation (Eastern Trail Alliance: Jon Kachmar)
- › Passenger Rail Opportunities presentation (MRTC and consultants: Tony Donovan, Al Fazio, and Nate Asplund)
- › Q&A for both presentations
- › Next Steps
 - September meeting agenda
 - Draft Feasibility Study report (est. early October)
 - Public meeting
 - Council recommendation
- › Public Comment

Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

After the Trail Opportunities and Passenger Rail Opportunities presentations were made by Jon Kachmar and the Maine Rail Transit Coalition respectively, Council member were given the opportunity to ask questions:

- › Bill: How did activities like snowmobiles and ATV's get excluded from use of the Eastern Trail? Is it maintained by the towns year round? Who enforces maintenance?
 - Jon: Granite State Gas/Unitil's high pressure gas line (installed in the 1960s) does not allow motorized vehicles along their property, so it wasn't even a debatable issue when planning the trail. Maintenance is a non-profit called Eastern Trail Maintenance District made up of muni reps, typically the Town's public works depts. We get major support from the gas company too.
- › Ken Capron: has usage of other trails declined as the Eastern Trail has increased
 - Jon: we don't ID trail users in our surveys and we don't monitor other trails so we don't have specific data. Anecdotally, from what I hear trail use has increased significantly over the past few years on many trails.
- › Jonathan: is there a split between rec and transportation usage on the Eastern Trail and if transportation, how does that compare to other modes of transportation?
 - Jon: we don't have the data to determine that...it would require detailed surveys which we haven't done. We have heard from many people about the desire to use the Eastern Trail for commuting, especially in the gap section between Saco and the Casco Bay Bridge.



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- › Dick: we have a great opportunity here for a trail, esp since we have a 2nd rail line that parallels the state-owned corridor. Very similar to the Eastern Trail corridor, one can be rail and the other can be trail. I object to any reference to the trail as being a recreational resource. This corridor can be another transportation use as well
 - Henry: re: the parallel corridors, it is more about the intermediate points, not the end points. Most cities have more than one transit rail line.
 - Henry: another strategic benefit to keeping the rail corridor intact is to meet demand for BOTH passenger and freight transportation (which is a tool of economic development).
 - Al: having multiple rail lines...it depends what kind of service you are connecting...trains that run 1X/day vs every 15-30 min that are useful for people, esp low income people, to get to work. When I go out to Chicago, there used to be a direct line from Philadelphia. Now, one has to go to Pittsburgh and connect to a once/day Amtrak from Washington DC to Chicago. We need frequent trains to get people to work, esp if they can't afford an automobile.
 - Tony: the notion that the CSX freight line can be used to connect cities/towns is a false notion. Even allowing PanAm freight traffic is an unknown. Using the SLA line provides far more opportunities for passenger service to multiple communities.
- › Bill: I'm intrigued by the technology and is it possible to bring one up to Maine so we can see it in action (Tony D: yes, we can do that. Henry: yes, we want to arrange for a demonstration in Portland so the community can decide what it wants.)
- › Chris Chop: Does this corridor have the density to support Interurban light rail?
 - Al: it is a chicken and egg issue. The fact that the train is there will induce new development, much more than a bus (especially with frequent service)
- › Andrew: Walton: Who would operate the light rail? State of Maine? Amtrak? A new company? Wouldn't freight traffic still be needed to make the line viable?
 - Al: it wouldn't be Amtrak...it could be the state, a contractor, or a Joint Powers Board (a Calif term) which is a mix of counties and other agencies.
- › Jonathan LaBonte: who owned the rail portions of the Eastern Trail corridor before it was converted to trail use? Also, are there underlying reversion rights?
 - Jon: the rail line was owned previously by Boston & Maine, it was then sold and bought up by various entities. There are no other rights to the corridors...the rights are complex, with utilities needing to weigh in if it were to revert back.

Questions from the General Public:

- › General liability question for the trail:



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- Jon: The Eastern Trail Alliance has liability insurance...the right to use the trail becomes the municipalities responsibility protected by the Torts Act, which is statewide coverage.
- Tony: in Rockland, they hope to be under the umbrella of Amtrak. Insurance are similar to what a bus company would use when moving people on public transit. We wouldn't go under the Federal Amtrak umbrella insurance.
- › Sue Ellen from Yarmouth: what are the populations of the cities mentioned: Camden NJ and La Jolla CA.
 - Answered in online chat: 74,000 for Camden and 47,000 for La Jolla
- › Carl Wilcox: how are livestock and livestock fencing dealt with along the Eastern Trail?
 - Jon: we have a co-location agreement with Unitil so those kinds of responsibilities are handled by the property owner
- › Would the State of Maine be open to selling its title back to a private entity?
 - Nate H: it is a decision by the Legislature since it was purchased under the Rail Preservation Act

NEXT STEPS:

- › Phil: for the Sept 22 meeting, one key agenda item will be sub consultant RKG's presentation related to a summary of the economic impact.
- › Bill: Can we see a draft of the economic impact analysis before the Sept meeting? Looking at the schedule in front of me, I'm at a bit of a loss as where we go next. This has been a bit difficult and overall this hasn't been especially productive and I would like to see some in person meetings before we finish up so we can get to consensus?
- › Nate H: this is not a consensus driven process. Also, we need to have a presentation related to existing, ongoing Portland to Auburn transportation study that perhaps could be made by DOT. Re: in-person, I'll defer to the Council.
- › Phil: yes, I think we can complete the econ analysis in the next couple of weeks.
 - Larry (RKG): yes, we can get the draft material in next two weeks
- › Nate H: how about one more meeting via Zoom in September with RKG's report and the ongoing Portland to Lewiston-Auburn study? From that point, we can decide whether to take the rest on the road and to meet in person.
- › Tony: who is choosing the guest speakers? The SLA study by VHB is an economic impact report and doesn't get into the potential uses...the flaw is that the report is not ID'ing stations along the route because it is a freight line primarily. The proposed use of a passenger train would include a potential for 6-8 town center stations and that should be incorporated in RKG's analysis (not park and rides).
 - Nate: guest speakers is just a semantic term.
 - Phil: the term was put into the agenda to cover other potential speakers for the meeting



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- › Diane: I think one more Zoom meeting is the way to go.
- › Dick: I want to note that we have reps from all 8 communities on the Council and we need to hear more about what they want to see in their communities? We need to know if they are excited about having LRT or freight along the line...if so, then we need to hear that. My instinct is that many of them want access to open space, trails and recreational amenities.
- › Phil: do any of the municipal reps want to weight in?
- › Chris Chop: yes, I agree that we should hear from the community reps though I'm not sure we need a specific agenda item for that.
- › Nate: I will leave it up to other Council members so tell us how they want us to get feedback from their communities using public meeting or other means.
- › Bill: input from abutters won't come using this format. We still haven't asked anyone along the route what they think. How do we pull people together to help us make a recommendation to the Commissioner. I don't think we are there yet to even ask the right questions to members of our communities since the plan is still up in the air. We need to know what the Vision is here and it will be difficult to keep everything at 10,000....people will want to get into some of the details.
- › Diane: I echo what Bill said. Also, is there a questionnaire that we could include on our web site to get comments? We need to reach people who live along the corridor.
- › Nate: in the months of June and May, we have 125 pages of comments for people to review from the website. We could develop a survey too on the site, if you had a method.
- › Nate Moulton: this is your opportunity for people to speak up. We are trying to follow the Legislation. I want to fall back to Nate's comments...we don't need to get to consensus for this recommendation. Let's get to an endpoint in 9 months if we can and if we don't, we don't. If Council members want to meet with abutters, let's meet w/ abutters. The Department does not intend to go town-by-town for permits (though we will coordinate with them of course). One advantage of Zoom is to avoid people taking 3 hours of their day...if not, we are open to meeting in person.
- › Nate: for the next meeting, we will find a presenter for the SLA/Portland-to-Lewiston analysis work for the next meeting.
- › Bill: a few communities along the corridor have offered up spaces to use for in-person meetings. Would DOT object to some of the Town Managers putting together a local survey for community?
 - Nate: no, sounds great. DOT can help if we can.

Public comments

- › Joseph Leonard (Bangor): I am in full support of trails that help economic impact. It is elitist to ask people to buy a bike to go 26 miles to their job. Something as valuable as a rail corridor should not become a bicycle trail. A rail corridor will connect Northern Maine too.



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- › Emma Bond: in East Deering and on Board of CBTA. I live very close to the corridor. It is such a waste that it is not being used for anything. There is no lack of data...we had a 2019 study. The Yarmouth to Portland route isn't even being considered for rail. If rail is the recommendation, that means nothing will happen for our neighborhood.
- › Richard Rudolph: I am director of the MRTC. I missed the presentation earlier but want to say that it appears that the public meetings will be held after the draft report is issued?
 - Nate: it is just a draft report in October that will be a summary of the findings, it will not include a recommendation...that is for the Council to decide.
- › Carl Wilcox: resident of New Gloucester and abutter to the corridor. I'd like some decision being made and I don't think a RWT option is credible. Adjacent property owners will be too impacted.
- › Ken Capron: federal funding sources have requirements, and is this an issue that could change the outcome of this analysis? The Benefit-Cost analysis will be needed and I hope it will be considered. The Federal Reconnecting Communities grant could be a perfect opportunity.
- › Jack Madden: I live in NH but have taken the Downeaster service many times. I used to work in the Freight and Passenger Rail Bureau in NYSDOT before 2015. Recently, I am a rail consultant. I'd like to see passenger rail along the SLR corridor. Avoiding conflicts between freight and passenger would be ideal, so use of both the Pan Am line and the state-owned line would be ideal. There are two routes between Portland and Auburn...passenger service on the SLR route removes conflicts w/ passenger and vice versa.