



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: October 27, 2022

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Cumberland Town Hall

Date: 10/28/2022

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
<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. Analyst, 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) • Natalie Thomsen (Town Planner, New Gloucester)

Agenda:

- › Introductions
- › Summary of Lewiston-Auburn Passenger Rail Study (Mike McDonough, VHB)
- › Summary of Economic Analysis Report (Larry Cranor and Eric Halvorson, RKG)
- › Q&A for both presentations
- › Next Steps (2:00 pm)
 - November meeting agenda



Meeting Notes

- Draft Feasibility Study report (est. mid-November)
 - Public meeting logistics (mid-December, Cumberland Town Hall)
 - Council recommendation
- › Public Comment
- › Link to Virtually Attend:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v8LSRGoKBE&list=PLgHBSjataBvjwSptuMVnTFcUiKCO8as22&index=6>

Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

After the Lewiston-Auburn Passenger Rail Study presentation from Mike McDonough (VHB), Council members were given the opportunity to ask questions:

- › Tony: (addressed Mike) did you know that the State developed a Purpose and Need statement in 2011? Also, station sites need to be better defined before a real understanding can be made of the econ impact.
- › Dick: why is passenger rail within the segment from the Yarmouth Junction to Ocean Gateway not included in this study?
- Mike: in 2019, the Study committee voted to move forward to connect to the PTC, not to Ocean Gateway, so use of the state-owned corridor south of the Junction was not needed
 - Tony: no, we are not looking at Amtrak service, so Dick's comment was wrong, light rail is the focus
- › Jonathan: is the econ analysis based on rider frequency, etc.? Also, a question for DOT: in 2018, what were the implications of freight service to continue on the Pan Am line? Can 1A and 1B accommodate that, or is that for future study?
- Nate M: this is the next step in getting federal funding. The next phase is integration with freight, final selection of a corridor and potential passenger station sites with the Feds. So, for now, the analysis relates to circle around a general station area...selecting a site prior to the NEPRA process could disqualify us from getting federal funding.
- › Jeremiah: I didn't see any discussion on the net benefits to Portland for any of these options.
- Nate M: some of the econ benefits are already "baked in" to what the benefits would be for Portland since the city already has some passenger rail service.
 - Jeremiah: I'm not sure we yet know what the benefit would be for the residents of Lewiston-Auburn either (discloser: I am chair of CS committee there). It would be good to know what other benefits might come to the PTC.
 - Mike: I will take that back to the project team...
 - Jonathan: the 2018-19 study assumed a move from PTC to the St John St area...would that be part of the follow up econ study?



Meeting Notes

- Scott; how does discussion of commuter rail to Lewiston-Auburn impact service up to Bangor?
 - Nate M: study is ongoing...the 2018-19 study was a propensity study which doesn't really ID a 'winner' by mode....it is about how often passengers might ride, how many would use which modal option, etc.
- Scott: I want to make sure we are consistent with our efforts in other parts of the state.

After the Summary of Economic Analysis Report by Larry Cranor from RKG, discussion continued.

- › Dick: of the 2 rail corridors between the two cities...should we expect a similar econ impact on the west corridor (CSX) as the east corridor (SL&A)?
 - Larry: with respect to restoration of train services, then "yes" – the econ impact would be **roughly** the same with a few differences.
- › Dick: the finished portion of the Eastern Trail (ET) concluded with \$44m of econ impact, but your numbers are a bit smaller. The Eastern Trail should be a good proxy, shouldn't it, given the trail lengths?
 - Larry: the ET looked at larger ZIP code areas to get their econ impact, where we did a study within a ½ mile only. Half mile is a more comfortable walking distance to connect to the trail so we kept it tight (which was in the Scope as well).
- › Tony: I see that the 11 reports referenced in the Appendix were done for trail impact only. I also noted many lacking citations in the RKG report, which is a major flaw. I want to ask a lot of questions of dozens of questions and I have many pages of notes. In terms of terminology "Interim" (trail) means, in essence, taking the rail corridor. If we don't ID the station sites, then the econ impact can't be studied IMO. Redfin is not a good source for property values. The IMPLAN model Google search only resulted in IMPLAN info only, so I don't think it is a credible source and used by trail advocates typically. I discovered 25 ways that IMPLAN was used which implies lots of benefits for trails, etc. This is a \$200k (?) report with tons of flaws. The state's rail corridor runs through the center of the towns, whereas the CSX lines runs thru other post-industrial areas, so I disagree that the econ impact would be roughly the same as RKG just said.
 - Larry: again, these aren't specific station sites and form the basis for 1, 2 and 3 mile radii from the center. Irrespective of whichever line is studied, there is a lot of overlap especially when you get to 2 or 3 mile radius.
- › Jonathan: I don't recall seeing the Scope of Work for RKG so I don't want to ask Q's that are outside of scope. I would like to hear from other Council members about what they would like to hear from each other. I will submit my specific questions about the econ analysis in writing.
 - Larry: availability of land available for development, zoning opportunities, and any willing developers in the area are impact factors too



Meeting Notes

- › Jeremiah: if there is any net benefit for City of Portland for passenger rail service, I would like to have that to take it back to City leaders. Can we have any ROI information? How would maintenance be paid for? I think some of the areas could support the maintenance costs through new development and tax revenue. It would be good to know if this is within the Scope. Outside of the density that could support rail service at the ends, I'm not sure about the middle sections.
- › Nate Wildes: our job is to make a recommendation to the Commissioner, but we don't have legal weight behind it, correct? (Bill: correct.) Our recommendation will be a public document to the Commissioner...does he 'need' to do anything with it? (Bill: yes, I think he will act on it, but we don't know for sure.) Will there be another process afterwards, if he goes on with the recommendation? (Bill: yes).
 - Nate H: if the recommendation is interim trail use, then the Transpo Committee of the Legislature will need to give the approval.
 - Nate W: will this be a unanimous recommendation? We hope so. Bill: Regardless, we intend to add the Council's rec to the report developed by VHB.
 - Nate M: like Mtn Division RUAC, a majority and minority report is allowed.
- › Angela: will public input be included in the report?
 - Nate M: yes, esp with input from the early Dec public meeting, which comes just before the 9-month Legislative deadline.
- › Scott: when exactly is the 9-month deadline? (Nate H: Jan. 25 2023)
- › Nate H: the draft report from VHB will be late November 2022. The Council's recommendation will likely be a short report (Mtn Division was only 5 or so pages), with a minority report attached.
- › Bill: order of the process moving forward will be 1) draft report issued, 2) public mtg in early Dec, and 3) the recommendation from the RUAC.
- › Scott: what will the report look like?
 - Nate M: it will include a summary of the public process and summary of all of the analysis for the Commission and the Legislature to consider.
 - Nate H: it is the Council's job to interpret the data presented by VHB to inform their opinion
- › Tony: will the final report be from VHB only or from MaineDOT? (Nate H: DOT will only draft the Council's recommendation, not the meat of the report.) Also, regarding the DOT/VHB responses to the questions submitted by Dick W...especially the one related to the question about light rail: MaineDOT's response included errors related to a conclusion in the 2019 about rail along the corridor. IMO, light rail IS appropriate. The idea that FRA waivers would be required for light rail is totally flawed.
- › Bill: the point and counter-point issue has been absent in our work, so your questions are appreciated.
- › Tony: at one point, the Chair said that we as a Council may not be able to form a recommendation...is that true. (Bill: yes, I said that but we will be making a recommendation.)



Meeting Notes

Time and Place for the Public Meeting Discussion

- › Bill: this will be a public meeting, not a formal Public Hearing with likely a few hundred people attending.
- › Nate W: I recommend that we allow public comments remotely at the next meeting, if possible. (Bill: it is tricky to do a hybrid and gets clunky.)
- › Tony: the week of Nov 16 isn't good, I am at the light rail conference in Boston.
- › Nate W: what is the purpose of another Council meeting in November?
- › Jonathan: if the draft report is or isn't done, let's have a RUAC meeting in November to discuss where each one of us is "at" on behalf of their constituents.
- › Bill: yes, good idea. One big question to me is whether the Freeport station has had much impact on the Town economically? (Scott: I can see what I can dig up and report back.) Ditto for Thompson's Point in Portland?
 - Jeremiah: if there is a shift to the St John St area of Portland, that could change the equation
 - Tony: Thompson's Point originally was \$4-10m in value whereas now it is more like \$30m.
- › Tony: Larry described the new Portland rail stop at Ocean Gateway as a platform, can you describe what a platform station means?
 - Larry: a simple platform with a parking area. (Tony: in our opinion, it would be a station.)
- › Bill: Nate should send out a Doodle poll for the next Council meeting in late November, and I will look for a time and place for the early December meeting...likely Monday-Thursday, Dec. 12-15.
- › Tony: please add the word "Draft" in the RKG economic analysis report. (Bill: will do.)

Public comments

- › Shirley Storey-King, Cumberland Town Councilor – I haven't seen the econ impact delineated to Cumberland. Right now, we have no public access to any trails. Another concern about the econ report is that there are 338 households within a ½ mile and there are only 28 abutters along the route. I have concerns there is a lack of input from abutters. There have been indigents bringing their tents along the corridor lately. Why build a trail when someone can ride their bike along Rt 88, etc. and connect elsewhere by bike? My concern is that residents and other people who don't want a trail may feel intimidated into expressing their opinion.
- › Art Bell: I rep Yarmouth in the State Legislature. People in Yarmouth are excited about this opportunity and DOT is getting lots of comments. Since there are two rail corridors that connect A to B, it seems that we could have both rail and trail, and we know that the state can bring rail back in the future if we need to. The discussion doesn't need to be as adversarial as it has been



Meeting Notes

- › Paul Weiss – (former president of Portland Velo Club). I've used rail lines in 46 areas to ride my bike recreationally, including throughout New England. I find the study flawed in many ways and I know that people who just bike don't spend much money. Rails bring far more economic benefit. It is poor policy and poor use of public funds to pay for a trail rather than a precious rail line. The rail line can be used by a wider range of people for work, etc. The notion that trails can be returned to rails is something that will never happen. Our elderly population wants to use the train, not a trail. This could be our biggest project ever. The routes do matter and the state-owned corridor should be rail.
- › Ken Capron – retired CPA from Portland. I agree with the previous speaker and think it is important to explore all populations. Right now, the US DOT requires a benefit cost analysis. Revenue simply gets shifted from one trail to the other as it doesn't seem to get any net benefit. We should look at the BCA analysis that the feds require
- › Carl Wilcox, New Gloucester – I have more history than anyone and will be impacted more than anyone. My property has been cut in half so livestock may get out whether my property becomes a trail or a rail line. If it is a rail line, I could make millions by subdividing my property. If the rail line becomes a trail, I would like compensation for loss of value thru eminent domain.
- › Jon Kachmar – director of Eastern Trail and our econ study was supported by the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission and is very credible. The burden of our trail does not just fall onto adjacent communities, as was implied earlier. On the Eastern Trail, we have a diverse group of commuters, and recreational folks on our route. We have 250,000 trail users representing \$44 million in impact, esp when it extends to Burwick. Any homeless along the trail are not the fault of the trail, it is the lack of affordable housing in Southern Maine. We have worked with the engineering firm disparaged earlier for two PPI studies. VHB was selected because they do excellent work and don't forget they were selected in a competitive process and it is inappropriate to keep pointing out flaws in their work.
- › Mike Woisin, former resident of Cumberland, now lives in Portland. Worked for Trust for Public Land. The Bayside community in Portland has really transformed recently and the trail has been part of the solution. State rep Collins helped us with it a number of years ago.
- › Ed Suslovic – I believe in the KISS model: "keep it simple for Suslovic"! We want to avoid analysis paralysis and the discussion at the end was good re: what can we as a Council do? I am a member of Casco Bay Trail Alliance, and member of Metro and NNEPRA committee. I am "modally agnostic" and believe we should do what makes the most sense. We need to acknowledge that use of transit has dropped dramatically during COVID and work from home is here to stay. Yet, outdoor recreation modes have exploded and is likely here to stay. The greatest need is more trails...take a look at the Belfast Rail Trail: abutters were accommodated and none of the concerns came to fruition. Similar issue nationally with lots of national examples. The reason no "interim" trails have returned to rails is perhaps because people have voted with their feet and they want trails.
- › Adjourned at 3:15 pm