

From: [Moulton, Nathan](#)
To: [Jonathan P LaBonte](#); [Howard, Nathan](#)
Cc: [wshane](#)
Subject: RE: RUAC Questions
Date: Monday, November 14, 2022 10:01:36 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
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[image004.png](#)
[SLARUACSCOPE.pdf](#)

Good Morning Jonathan,

I wanted to give you some general responses to your questions and recognize your comments below for the written record and webpage. Please keep in mind that the RUAC purpose is defined in the LD 1133 and reports are designed to gather and provide general information about the corridor for the RUAC to facilitate discussion as part of its work. The work by VHB and RKG are one piece of information for the RUAC they are not exhaustive studies that are designed to make the decisions for the RUAC members on their recommendations or the people/region/municipality/organization they represent. If at the end of the RUAC process members feel they do not have proper information to make a recommendation then that should be part of any vote/communication/report to the Commissioner.

See my responses/comments below in **Red**, as with previous questions from members this will be sent to the RUAC members and posted to the website so everyone has a complete record.

Thanks for you continued participation in the RUAC.

Regards,

Nate

From: Jonathan P LaBonte <j.labonte@auburnmaine.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, November 9, 2022 9:43 AM
To: Howard, Nathan <Nathan.Howard@maine.gov>; Moulton, Nathan <Nathan.Moulton@maine.gov>
Cc: wshane <wshane@cumberlandmaine.com>
Subject: RUAC Questions

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Good morning,

Below please find a series of questions I have regarding the analyses provided to the RUAC to date, including specific questions to MaineDOT regarding long range planning. As you can see, keeping all questions/answers to the within the meetings of the RUAC makes it highly unlikely we could complete our meetings in the allotted 90 minutes while also having time for discussion/deliberation and public comment (which was over 30 minutes at the last meeting, and likely at least that much at

the next).

As a city of close to 25,000 people, along with our partner city Lewiston (36,000 people), we have over a quarter century of consistent advancement of public rail infrastructure planning and investment, in close coordination with MaineDOT and the Androscoggin Transportation Resource Center (our Metropolitan Planning Organization). It will be important for the City of Auburn to have a solid understanding of these factors in weighing any vote on a recommendation.

VHB/RKG Analysis Questions

- **Scope of Work** - Please provide a copy of the scope of work behind this analysis. It would be helpful to understand what elements of VHB's economic analysis for the passenger rail, directed by the Maine Legislature, was included or where that scope was enhanced.

See Attached

- **Data sources** – Given the significant changes in workforce and mobility patterns pre-pandemic to post-pandemic, further details should be provided on the data sources used for this analysis and justification for continued use of modeling factors before 2020. We cannot fully factor economic impacts of public transit facilities or recreation facilities under pre-pandemic data modeling.

Comment/opinion noted, due to the massive drop in transit usage and significant bump in outdoor recreation during the pandemic we consider pre 2020 data to be the best available at this time for this type of work. Over the next few years we will begin to get better data on any long term changes coming out of the pandemic.

- **Demographics** – The analysis leans exclusively on benefits that accrue to wealthy, well-educated, older Mainers. Are there measures the consultants have access to that would support us in considering equity and inclusion with respect to this process? Less educated, more diverse, and economically disadvantaged populations live outside the limited corridor buffer used by the consultants and deserve to have their needs and impacts assessed.

Comment/opinion noted, project scope and limits are defined in the study

- **Trail use** - With the Casco Bay Trail vision being a full link inland between Auburn and Portland, how would the methodology change to understand those economic impacts? It appears that RKG has reduced the larger trail proposal to a point to point on just a section of the Berlin Subdivision and assumed its benefits are focused on abutters. That approach excludes most of the residents that live in impacted communities. We do not believe it is rational to exclude nearly all of Portland and Auburn's population in these

analyses. Auburn has already had preliminary discussions with MaineDOT about an existing ROW available to extend the Casco Bay Trail vision to the Auburn Riverwalk system and collective economic impact should be included (given that the passenger rail analysis included non-Berlin Subdivision investments). The East Coast Greenway re-alignment to this route would also be a factor.

Comment/opinion noted, Project study is focused on this RUAC corridor not a larger regional or statewide trail system

- **Passenger rail** - Total capital costs for passenger rail includes the connections to Lewiston, from our recollection of the 2018 study. Can this be broken down to show the costs associated with the Berlin Subdivision specifically? There are two substantial bridges in downtown Auburn and Lewiston that skew that capital number. With respect to economic impact, Auburn submitted extensive comments to VHB regarding flaws in its economic analysis, both relating to parameters for housing development distances and the current market reality and zoning reforms underway that would incentivize significantly more housing be constructed around Exit 75. Auburn also has concerns with the analysis of jobs in the catchment area. The significant proportion of shift-based manufacturing jobs in walking distance to any transit stop makes this an attractive corridor for fixed route connections from residential areas to this hub of employment openings. The RKG analysis focused on spin-off retail or service jobs, and not access to manufacturing jobs and its impact.

Comment/opinion noted, passenger rail figures as noted are based on the 2018 study

- **Freight rail** – Can we confirm that, other than the economic spin off from rail corridor improvements, the economics and market potential for freight service offerings was not reviewed by either consultant? Have the costs contemplated by RKG been verified as reasonable by the representative on our RUAC that works for a freight rail company? RKG dedicated a section to the potential of a Foreign Trade Zone if it were to exist in this area. The Auburn freight intermodal area has been part of a designated FTZ, and it does raise questions about the thoroughness of the review by RKG that they were unaware of this. There is also a lack of reference to the Berlin Subdivision offering double stack freight rail capacity, a unique asset for freight movement over long distances that at one point was a celebrated fact by Maine freight planners at the state and regional level. What market implications does access to double stack have?

Scope of work did not include this type of detailed analysis for any of the options. SLA did provide a presentation as part of this RUAC process and are members of the Council. While many acknowledge freight assets in the corridor, it is important to note since 2015 there has been no freight rail activity in the RUAC corridor or freight intermodal service at the Auburn facility in spite of these assets.

MaineDOT Planning Questions

- In the current Auburn-Lewiston Airport Master Plan, a passenger intermodal facility is proposed and MaineDOT had previously secured federal permits to construct it. This facility was for passenger rail service using the Berlin subdivision from Yarmouth to just off Kittyhawk Avenue in Auburn. Has MaineDOT officially walked away from that plan? If so, MaineDOT has not discussed this with Auburn or Lewiston, or their airport, given how it impacts long range planning. What is the timeline and process to do that?

The most current planning around passenger rail in Lewiston/Auburn is based on the most recent work in 2018/2019 which focuses on service to downtown areas of Lewiston/Auburn.

- If the RUAC is to assume that the CSX line is the default for extending passenger service to the Auburn area, what is the status of NNEPRA/MaineDOT engagement with CSX? The PanAm acquisition process included significant negotiated accommodation for the existing Boston to Brunswick service but no negotiated accommodation for extension of the planned service inland. What steps would need to occur to demonstrate to the RUAC that the CSX is indeed available for passenger service before making a recommendation? If the RUAC does not have that information, does this process allow for conditional recommendations to the Commissioner?

LD 1133 does not specifically define what is in recommendations to the Commissioner.

- Given what MaineDOT knows about CSX freight service levels, and the state of the CSX corridor from Yarmouth to Danville, is there an analysis in place that demonstrates schedule/siding needs to accommodate either the proposed level of service from the ongoing passenger rail service, or something along the lines of the Downeaster intercity service levels?

No, not beyond any information in previous reports on the corridor

- Previous MaineDOT/PACTS Interstate 295 studies contemplated the role the Berlin Subdivision could play in providing a dedicated bus rapid transit corridor or commuter rail from Yarmouth and Falmouth to Bayside/B&M facility area (now Roux Institute). Those reports recognized that it was highly unlikely that MaineDOT would ever widen I-295 (both because of the politics of highway expansion and costs) and that bus transit like the Breeze would not be attractive to drivers since they would be caught in the same congestion. Has MaineDOT and PACTS (and its Portland North communities) concluded that commuter rail options in the future (or a BRT corridor) are not of interest? It would be valuable to have statements on the record regarding this so it is clear.

The Department looks at all transportation options available in a region or corridor to see what options and modes make the most sense from a transportation policy and financial perspective at any given time.

- MaineDOT has numerous consultant-led studies currently underway, including the long-range plan, the state rail plan, and the state transit plan. When can the RUAC expect to see MaineDOT's analysis for transit or rail needs/opportunities in this region of Maine to include that in our analysis? It is clearly premature to think that the RUAC could make a decision about a state-owned rail corridor without the context of MaineDOT's planning for the next 20-30 years.

Comment/opinion noted, the various draft plans will be out for public comment in late November and early December 2022.

- Unlike other state-owned corridors that were advancing towards abandonment, the Berlin Subdivision was purchased proactively by the Baldacci Administration with support of the Maine Legislature and voter-approved bonds. The RUAC would benefit from the analysis and context that led to this investment, and that should be secured in writing either from the St. Lawrence and Atlantic, MaineDOT documents, regional planning documents, or legislators involved in the negotiation.

Comment/opinion noted, you are welcome to contact the various parties involved in 2007 and 2010 for information or context. MaineDOT provided the bond language previously regarding the purchase.

Thank you in advance, happy to talk by phone to clarify any of this.
Jonathan

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Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council Supporting Study
for
St. Lawrence & Atlantic Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor

Scope of Work

Project Background

In the spring of 2021, LD 1133 was passed by the State Legislature which established guidelines for Rail Corridor Use Advisory Councils. In part, the Bill includes the following in regard to each Advisory Council and its scope of work:

- The Advisory Council shall review and make recommendations on the likelihood, economic benefits and costs of potential uses of the rail corridor, including, but not limited to, rail use, trail use or bikeways. Any non-rail use of a rail corridor must be considered by a council to be interim in nature, and all such rail corridors must be preserved for future rail use.

The feasibility study scope of work will include the creation of a high-level planning document to examine the possible development of a rail trail.

The following tasks are included in the scope:

1. Existing conditions inventory and analysis
2. Identify opportunities and constraints
3. Development of cost estimates
4. Analysis of Economic Benefits

Project area

The feasibility study will assess the approximately 24-mile section of the St. Lawrence and Atlantic rail corridor known as the Berlin Subdivision from railroad mile post 1.74 in Portland to railroad mile post 25.96 in Auburn.

Task 1 – Project Management and Coordination

VHB will manage and administer the project, including coordination with MaineDOT and preparation of monthly progress reports/invoices. VHB will prepare for and lead a project kick-off meeting and eight monthly project progress meetings with MaineDOT over the estimated 9-month project duration. All of these meetings will be virtual via Teams.

Meetings:

- 1 kick off meeting
- 8 monthly one-hour progress meetings

Deliverables:

- Meeting summary notes for 9 meetings
- Monthly project invoices

Task 2 – Existing Conditions Inventory and Analysis

VHB will work with MaineDOT staff and stakeholders to review and provide a general assessment of existing conditions including the following:

- Develop a general overview map of the study area and identify the boundaries/limitations of the study.
- Review and provide a summary of past planning efforts and studies.
- Assess corridor limitations for rail service, rail with trail following MaineDOT Rail-with-Trail requirements and for removal of rail infrastructure and exclusive trail use. Utilize available GIS mapping and aerial imagery. No site visits are anticipated as part of this study.
- Perform a high-level review of potential environmental requirements for areas where the rail line/trail passes through wetland areas, ponds and over rivers and streams

Following collection of the above information, provide a general review and analysis of potential constraints to trail development and options for addressing these locations.

Task 3 – Conceptual Cost Estimates

- Provide concept-level cost estimates for passenger rail consistent with the Lewiston-Auburn Passenger Rail Service Plan.
- Provide concept-level cost estimates for rail-with-trail in the corridor for a 10 ft. wide trail with gravel surface and paved surface. Assume the trail will be constructed on an offset of the existing track.
- Provide concept-level cost estimates for developing a 10 ft. wide trail on existing rail bed, with a gravel surface and paved surface, including removal and salvage of rail and ties. The cost estimates shall be based on the latest known unit pricing.
- Assess financial feasibility by providing planning level opinions of probable cost including construction and maintenance cost estimates for the alternatives above.

Task 4 – Analysis of Economic Benefits

VHB's subconsultant RKG Associates will provide a high-level assessment of potential economic benefits of a multi-use trail and rail for the communities and the region. It is assumed no demographic interviews will be conducted at this stage. The analysis will be derived from database research.

4A - Provide the general demographics of potential trail users.

- Describe the community character and general land use along the corridor

- Compile population information and project demographic patterns (current and projected).
- Develop a profile of potential trail users (cyclists, pedestrians, equestrians, cross country skiers, ATV's, snowmobile use etc.)

4B- In conjunction with MaineDOT and the Advisory Council, the VHB team will develop a strategy to determine the range of economic benefits. This strategy will consider a variety of factors including, but not limited to:

- Analyze potential demand and use of a trail. Estimate initial usage levels and project future usage levels.
- Real estate trends (Residential and Commercial)
- Potential increase in year-round tourism and visits to the trail
- Estimates of income and jobs created by construction of a trail

4C - In addition to the economic impact of a trail, the VHB team will also estimate the economic impacts of a rail option. This analysis will include the following specific impact assessments:

- Utilize the IMPLAN econometric model to estimate the impact of the construction of the rail line and improvements including direct, indirect, and induced effects across employment, labor income, value added, and total output.
- Summarize where possible other economic impacts that could serve as a benefit to the region and state from an active rail line including the movement of freight/goods, benefits of rail compared to other freight modes, and opportunities for designations like a foreign trade zone.

The final deliverable for this task will be a summary document that describes the potential economic impacts of the trail for the region as well as potential impact of rail to the region should operations be viable.

Task 5 – Project Stakeholder Meetings

Meetings of the Advisory Council will be held via Zoom. A VHB Information Technologies virtual meetings specialist will set up and moderate the Zoom meetings. In addition, VHB will assist with the following:

- Prepare for, host, and attend up to four regular bi-monthly meetings of the Advisory Council (two-hour meetings assumed)
- Prepare Advisory Council meeting minutes
- Prepare for, host, and attend one virtual public meeting (two-hour meeting assumed)
- Prepare meeting minutes for public meeting

Deliverables:

- Advisory Council meeting minutes (4)
- Public meeting presentation and materials, meeting minutes

Task 6 –Summary Report

VHB will prepare a draft and final report summarizing all analysis performed. The summary report will include reference appendices. VHB will address review comments from the Advisory Council and MaineDOT and develop the final version.

Deliverables:

- Draft summary report for review by the Advisory Council and MaineDOT in PDF format.
- Final summary report in PDF format.

Schedule

In accordance with the legislation, the Advisory Council has 9 months from initial Advisory Council meeting to submit a final report and committee recommendation to the MaineDOT Commissioner. VHB will assist MaineDOT and the Advisory Council in meeting this schedule.