



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: August 23, 2023

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Virtual Meeting

Date: 08/23/2023

Project No.: WIN: 24759.00 / VHB: 55647.00

Project Name: MaineDOT RUAC Supporting Study – Lower Road Rail Corridor

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) • Dakota Hewlett, MaineDOT Active Transportation Program Manager • Phil Goff (VHB) • Tim Bryant (VHB) • Mike McDonough (VHB) • Eric Halvorsen (RKG) • Larry Cranor (RKG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair Mathew Eddy (Executive Director, Midcoast Council of Governments) • Doug Beck, ME Bureau of Parks and Lands • Nicole Briand, Town Manager, Bowdoinham • Tony Cameron, CEO, Maine Tourism Assoc. • Alison Sucey, Maine Tourism Assoc. Rep. • Jeremy Cluchey, Chair of Merrymeeting Board of Supervisors (Bowdoinham) • Doug Ebert, Chair of Select Board, Town of Farmingdale • Tom Farrell, Director of Parks and Rec., Town of Brunswick • Gay Grant, Gardiner City Councilor • Gary Lamb, Hallowell City Manager • Keith Luke, EcDev Director, City of Augusta • Matt Nixon, Select Board, Town of Topsham • Carolann Ouellette, Director, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation • Bruce Sleeper, ME Rail Users Network and on board of MRTC • Larissa Loon, Richmond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • na

Agenda:

- > Discussion of Majority Recommendation from the RUAC
- > Discussion of Minority Recommendation from the RUAC
- > Other business
- > Public Comment Period (15 min.)



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Discussion Re: Minority Council Recommendation

- › Bruce: All of my arguments are in the minority report so I won't go through it again.
- › Keith: we know that you speak for many and we appreciate the well written minority report

Discussion Re: Majority Council Recommendation

- › Gay: we are looking to use an unused state asset for a trail until rail becomes more feasibility due to high expense and the projected ridership which is relatively low and could be accommodated with bus service. We had lots of public input and it was overwhelming in support of the interim trail. Also notable is the lack of businesses who have expressed interest in using the Lower Road for freight.
- › Jeremy: I requested inclusion of one word in the Majority Report...I want to add "primarily" for non-motorized use with additional analysis of allowing motorized use in some segments.

- › Matt E: is anyone prepared to make a Motion?

- › Gay: YES...Motion – *Be it moved that, the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council recommends the conversion of 33.5 miles of existing state-owned railroad track to an Interim Trail.*

This trail may be surfaced with stone dust or paved and be primarily for non-motorized use. During DOT's trail planning process, the RUAC further recommends that the Commissioner work with the Merrymeeting Trail Board of Supervisors and individual towns to identify potential trail segments where limited motorized use may be permitted, such as where there is space for dual trails.

It is further recommended that any trail developed should not interfere with the current lease with the City of Augusta Parking District.

- Gary seconded the Motion
- Bruce: my amendment is to revise Gay's Motion to include "rail with trail" rather than "interim trail" (seconded by Matt Nixon). To me, vote for interim use is the permanent removal of the tracks
- › Gary: if rail would come back, wouldn't it be brand-new rail?
- › Bruce: yes, and that is one of the reasons that the cost is so high (unnecessarily). Restoring rail would be much more expensive to rehab for passenger rail. I'm not asking for the Council to vote to restore the rail in the future, but only to keep the rails as-is.
- › Nate: for the question regarding feasibility of removing the trail in the future and the feasibility of restoring the base for rail infrastructure: we did not quantify the cost of restoring the sub-base of the rail corridor in the estimates. However, it may be similar in cost for the higher costs that VHB did for passenger service.
 - Matt E: yes, that is how I remember it.
- › Bruce: I can't imagine the cost of restoring the rail now vs. adding it completely new would be anything similar.



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- › Jeremy: I feel we've had a version of this conversation a few times now...Per Maine Statute, it is a rail corridor and it doesn't seem viable in the shorter term for rail service. In the long term, the rails could in fact come back. In the next 15-20 years, interim trail is the most logical investment and IF demand for rail increases a lot, it would be the state's responsibility legally to put rails back.
- › Matt N: Sears Island is in a Statute to be preserved and neighbors have had to fight tooth and nail to protect it. There are other examples of elements that exist in Statute but are not enforced so that's not a strong argument. We haven't really included much discussion of other passenger rail service options such as light rail powered by batteries and other lower-cost power sources.
- › Gay: it was clear from the experts we heard from that any passenger service would require new rail infrastructure. What moved me was the results of the Bangor Propensity Study...it is clear that Federal \$\$ for passenger rail will not rain down on Maine. To me, a vote for Rail-with-Trail is a vote to do nothing. The communities along the corridor are best served by a trail.
- › Matt E: Let's vote on Bruce's RWT amendment
 - in favor: 3 members, including Doug Ebert, Matt Nixon, and Bruce Sleeper
 - opposed: 11 members
- › Matt E: Let's vote for the motion to accept the Majority Report:
 - in favor: 11 members
 - opposed: 3 members, including Doug Ebert, Matt Nixon, and Bruce Sleeper

Next Steps:

- › Nate H: Matt, please FW the majority report and vote to the Commissioner. He made a decision on the Mtn Division line but has not made a decision on Berlin Sub yet.
- › Bruce: who do I submit the Minority report to?
 - Matt E: I'd be happy as Chair to submit both reports to the Commissioner
- › Nate H: I will ask VHB to revise the final report to accommodate the public comments received in August.
- › Jeremy: it has been 9 months and I feel that the process has been thoughtful and respectful and I think this would be a good model for other RUACs in the future.

Public Comments:

- › None

Meeting adjourned at 11:04 am