



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: January 25, 2023

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Virtual Meeting

Date: 01/25/2023

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) • Meghan Russo, MaineDOT • 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. • Jeremy Cluchey, Chair of Merrymeeting Board of Supervisors (Bowdoinham) • Doug Ebert, Chair of Select Board, Town of Farmingdale • Tom Ferrell, Director of Parks and Rec., Town of Brunswick • Gay Grant, City of Gardiner and chair of Trail Committee • 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 • Richard Rudolph Ph.D, Chair, ME Rail Users Network and on board of MRTC • Larissa Loon, Richmond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

Agenda:

- > Introductions
- > Background and Purpose of the Council
 - o LD 1133



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- Rail Preservation Act
- Corridor Study Area
- Corridor Use Option for Consideration
- › Discussion related to adding Council members from Bangor and Waterville Round Robin Discussion
- › Summary of Hi-Rail tour/Brief Snapshot of Existing Conditions
- › Preliminary Results of Cost Estimates
- › Agenda for Future RUAC Meetings
 - Update on Spring Public meeting
 - Future Agenda Items including guest presentations
 - Other?
- › Public Comment

Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

Initial discussion about the maximum time allowed for Council members to speak. Per Nate H, there is no formal rule currently and will be up to the Chair. The previous RUAC established a 2 or 3 min time limits in subsequent meetings, but not initially.

For Agenda Item RE: Adding Council Members from Bangor and/or Waterville Discussion

- › Nate: quick review of the Bangor propensity study should perhaps be done at the meeting next month. The state statute calls only for communities along the corridor, so we can't really add more. We are also capped at 15 and we are at 14 right now.
- › Richard: I spoke to Commissioner Bruce van Note (at a meeting with other rail advocates as well) and he is opposed to expanding the Council. However, he may appoint people to the RUAC if he wishes but he doesn't want to.

After slide presentation from VHB staff, Council members had the following questions and comments:

- › Jeremy: would RWT require major changes at bridge locations?
 - Phil: Tim can get into more detail but generally a new trail bridge parallel to the existing bridge would be required; in some rare occasions, a trail/sidewalk can be cantilevered off of the existing structure if structurally feasible.
- › Gay: where does the state-owned corridor end?
 - Phil: east end of the bridge over the Kennebec River



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- › Matt E: what is the ROW width along the corridor?
 - Phil: 66'-99' with some stretches at 50', perhaps less
- › Matt E: where does the \$\$ come from for maintenance for any of these options?
 - Nate M: freight operators would be responsible for freight service. If there is to be passenger rail, the operators would do the day-to-day maintenance. For the Kennebec River RT and Mtn Division Trail (and others), we have agreements with non-profit groups for trail maintenance, such as plowing, cutting brush, etc. If a major issue like a wash out after a storm, the state would be involved.
- › Gary: will the presentation be posted?
 - Nate H: it will be on the Council web site (see below).
 - Jeremy (from chat): <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/ruac/lowerroad/meetings/>
- › Gay: re: cost of rail restoration, will we consider the cost of rolling stock and/or property acquisition? Any info on ridership or potential revenues that would occur?
 - Mike: estimate is the capital cost of improving the state asset only (tracks and crossings). Also, the econ analysis will bring some of that analysis into the mix.
- › Keith: regarding the final ½ mile in Augusta...the portion of the rail bed that is paved currently includes an agreement between the City and MaineDOT that the City would restore the rail bed for rail use, if needed. The area from Water St to Front St to the rail bridge does not need to be addressed until there is a plan.
- › Matt E: will there be an analysis of RWT that indicates a lower cost option that includes road connections to avoid need to wider underpasses and build new bridges?
 - Tim: we can call them out at a high level, but we are scoped to develop the worst case scenario to develop a RWT design option
- › Richard: what kind of Federal commitment might be made for a trail or upgrades for rail service? VHB's estimate was \$600m-900m for rail service from Brunswick to Bangor in the propensity study but these costs are too high and don't include potential Fed sources, leaving the community to think it would be local tax money. In VT, they spent \$161m for 27 (?) mile route.

Forthcoming Meetings

- › Nate H: for the next Council meeting, I think we should go over the Portland-to-Bangor Transit Propensity study as an agenda item (*all agreed to the idea*). I will provide the draft report in advance on the Council web site (in the spring). At previous RUAC's we have had guest speakers come in to provide a vision for trails and/or rail service as an option. We can do the same here.
 - Matt E: can the future rail speaker talk about the different types of passenger service?



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- Nate M: yes, but some costs may be different in Maine vs. Vermont so please keep that in mind. We should focus on heavy rail, however...it would be very unlikely for light rail to be viable on such a corridor. We are open to suggestions for speakers.
- Matt: we don't need to look very far for successful trails in the region...it would be nice to hear about a nearby trail in Augusta or elsewhere to help us understand what it would take to be successful along the Lower Road corridor.
- Keith: for the RWT in Hallowell and Augusta, it never had active rail so it isn't a good example. It would be nice to have a presentation from an actual RWT in Maine. We had to accommodate required setbacks from the trails however, though we don't have a fence. What is hard for me to imagine is a family for instance being on a trail and having a train go by at 30 mph...this doesn't seem practical to me. (Matt E: in Fryeburg, you can get a taste of that!)
- Gay: for future meetings, I'd like to see an update from MaineDOT about the State Rail Plan and the State AT Plan so we have a better sense of context. (Matt E: great idea)
- Jeremy: I'd like to see Phil Garwood do a presentation re: the Kennebec River Rail Trail.
- › Gay: I'd like to have an overall sense of what the timeline would be for the public meeting and opportunity for discussion of the draft deliverables?
 - Nate H: we'll need to check in w VHB to understand timing for the draft deliverables for the meetings in April or May. We'll figure that out soon.
- › Richard: one issue to discuss is social equity re: passenger rail service vs. a trail. Seniors and low-income folks need more transportation services in Central Maine. Current intercity buses drop people off on the outskirts of the cities, not downtown. The State Rail Plan and the propensity study don't touch this issue.
 - Nate H: we can talk about that, but it is beyond a "rail vs trail" issue. We could get a speaker from MaineDOT to address that issue.

Public comments and questions

- › Joseph Leonard (Bangor City Council): not having representation from both Waterville and Bangor would be a huge oversight, as the populations will play a major role in the corridor. There are many who need transportation via rail, and bike paths are for recreation use primarily.
- › Jim Deming (Bowdoinham): I worked at Rails to Trail Conservancy and we understand the complexities but there are lots of benefits of trails. This includes building communities through the process as much as anything else. I've ridden on many of the routes locally and I think visitors would come from all over New England.
- › Ryan Gordon: closing the Hallowell gap is critical. I didn't hear about enviro costs of air and noise pollution from diesel trains, esp if freight trains. This could disrupt children at schools too. That is a social equity element that needs to be focused on too. People without cars need local transportation and bike paths can



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provide this service. The Downeaster is mostly used by tourists and passenger trains here may not be well used. Would trains need to blow horns at the at-grade crossings?

- Nate H: unless it is a designated quiet zone, then 'yes'
- › Larry Belka: I want to have the Rail Explorers rail bike service considered for the corridor. We are based in RI and family friendly. We would maintain the infrastructure with low impact on the current rails. Please consider this for a section of the Lower Road, if not the full 31 miles. We would be open to doing a presentation at a future meeting.
- › Bruce Sleeper (president of Rail Riders Northeast): why is PTC being included as it isn't required until you are at 6 round trips per day? Have the tracks in Augusta been removed? (answer: no). The current trail crosses the tracks 5-6 times currently...what would be done to minimize this? Will there be a survey of potential shipping companies?
 - Mike: the assumption is that we will have PTC/ATC and seek a waiver, but we plan to be conservative in our estimates. We can have that broken out as a separate cost. CSX would likely require PTC if we are talking about service up to Bangor.
 - Keith: the City of Augusta has 60 days to remove the asphalt. When we did this, freight service had been out for many years so its condition—along with the bridge—is open to question.
 - Tim: looking at specific RWT crossing locations is beyond our Scope but a future designer would need to keep them to a minimum for safety purposes.
 - Nate M: for freight service, we've had shippers looking at the corridor and there is very little industry now. We get calls occasionally but to-date, there is very little interest in the corridor.
- › Ian McConnell (Bowdoinham): regarding equity, a lot of low-income people don't have access to recreational facilities and there are too few places for people to walk or bike in the area. The public health perspective is critical too, not just transportation.
- › Patty: do you have any light rail specialists at MaineDOT? If not, we need to look more carefully at LRT...without it, the Council can't make an informed decision.
 - Nate H: both Nate M and our consultants do have some expertise in light rail.
- › Russel (President of Maine Rail Group): we have seen a lot of studies that show how great trails can be but the Council is lacking potential supporters of rail service. It appears to me that you have already made up your minds. Look at the Massachusetts for a state that is extending rail service, for instance the South Coast Rail Project and along routes near Northampton. Keep in mind that there is half million people living to the north of the Lower Road corridor.
- › DJ Merrill (Topsham): I want to express support for snowmobile and ATV use, which can bring a lot of economic benefits. The state is a destination and there are a lot of places to walk and bike and only one place for ATV. Motorized use is a big benefit to Northern Maine.
 - Matt Nixon: the Topsham Select Board wants to include a multi-use path, including motorized.



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- › Ed Hanscom: If I want to go to Gardiner by bike, I can already do it from Topsham on Rt 24. I'd rather see active transportation improvements in the towns, not between communities along the rail corridor. Most walk and bike trips are short and occur in towns. Can a representative of Waterville or Bangor be a speaker in the future at the Council? (Nate H: yes, good idea)
- › Kristine Keeney (ECG): we developed the AT Arterials Plan and ID'd a fully connected network. I hope everyone on the Council will review this document. [Active Transportation Arterials — Maine Trails Coalition](#)
Also, keep in mind that we need All Ages and Abilities facilities and don't forget about maintenance issues, esp in the winter.

Questions from the Chat:

- › Do the estimates for trails include the Androscoggin River crossing to Brunswick? That section already has a bike/ped crossing? (Tim: yes)
- › Ruth Indrick: Is it possible for a presentation at one of the meetings to share information about bus or other existing public transit use/ridership in the region? Or will that already be part of the cost assessment? (Nate: already discuss earlier)
- › Joanne Joy: I am wearing the hat of Healthy Communities of the Capital Area - and I want to add a voice for the health of our youth - getting outside, cross generational activities, etc all reduce substance use among youth and families, and improve mental health.
- › Rep Dan Ankeles: Hi, I am a new member of the Legislature's Transportation Committee here. When would be the earliest something related to this would come before us? (Nate: likely August 2023 per the 9-month schedule).

Meeting adjourned at 12:40