



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: February 22, 2023

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Virtual Meeting

Date: 02/22/2023

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. • 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"> • Maggie Maddox, VHB

Agenda:

- > Introductions
- > Follow-up Results of Cost Estimates (VHB, 10 min.)
 - Freight Rail



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- Passenger Rail
- › Portland-to-Bangor Transit Propensity Study overview presentation and discussion (Maggie Maddox, VHB, 15 min.)
- › Summary of the Maine State Active Transportation Plan (Dakota Hewlett, MaineDOT Active Transportation Planner, 15 min.)
- › Summary of the Maine State Rail Plan (Nate Howard, 15 min.)
- › Agenda for Next RUAC Meetings (Nate, 10 min.)
 - Update on Spring Public Meeting
 - Presentations on the benefits of passenger rail service and development of an interim trail or rail-with-trail configuration
 - Other?
- › Public Comment

Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

After the slide presentation from VHB's Mike McDonough related to the passenger rail cost estimates, Council members had the following questions and comments:

- › Gay: can you compare the costs of the Lower Road costs vs the Transit Propensity study. For instance do your costs do include double track etc?
 - Mike: we were being conservative and there are 2 different numbers with each study due to the different but overlapping corridors. We are not including any additional ROW.
- › Nicole: what about the two bridges over the rivers?
 - Mike: we have basic capital costs for redecking the 2 bridges without having done any specific inspection for structural issues
- › Matt N: is passenger rail assumed to be Amtrak style? (Mike: yes)
- › Richard: what is the weight of the rail we are installing? (Mike: 115 lb. or 132 lb.) I question \$10m/mile for the rail.
 - Mike: that is fair...we could value engineer some elements but we are being conservative and wanted to be consistent with the Berlin Sub approach. In an advanced phase, cost **could** be less.
 - Nate H: to me, the cost estimate may actually be low...I wouldn't call these conservative. They align with recent bids. There likely won't be many cost savings. For Class I speed for Freight, is 20 mph allowed? (Nate Moulton: correction on an earlier comment...Class I freight rail is 10 mph)



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- Nate M: costs are based on the Knowledge Corridor and S. Coast Rail projects in Mass. (done by VHB) and are also consistent with what we are looking at in Maine. HNTB's estimates for other projects are similar as well.
- › Gay: for a 10 mph speed for freight, is there any market for such service?
 - Mike: theoretically, it could be a small customer with occasional need for shorter freight trains (not big ones you see elsewhere). We haven't studied demand.
 - Keith: freight-service demand isn't part of the Scope
 - Matt E: have the Nates looked into possible customers, perhaps based on land use plans in each community?
 - Nate M: since the early 1980's, there has been no interest from customers. MaineDOT doesn't subsidize service, so they would need to cover all costs.
- › Richard: the Mass. studies that Nate M referred to assumes 79 mph, but we would likely have 60 mph trains and could use the 115 lb rail as a cost savings.
 - Nate M: the cost difference is not that significant between 115 and 136 lb rails. The 115 lb can cover 79 mph service if needed.

After slide presentation from VHB's Maggie Maddox related to the Portland-to-Bangor Transit Propensity Study, Council members had the following questions and comments:

- › Jeremy: it is great that you went after the previous presentation as it puts everything into a proper context. To me the "back road" connection (currently freight main line) from Lewiston to Bangor is far less expensive and perhaps better to use for passenger rail. For ridership estimate, 172-240 people/day is the result which equates to 4-5 buses per day. Is there a way to get to a "per trip" estimate for rail vs. bus?
 - Maggie: if rail is restored, it may remove the demand for buses, which are private service. Some of the stations are in different locations as well. Therefore, it might be hard to parse out those 'per trip' numbers.
- › Gay: we should compare rail vs buses related to costs. The Downeaster is supposed to break even by 2030. Is it possible to know how many buses would need to be added to match the service of rail? (Maggie's presentation covered it to some degree by assuming a \$1.2-\$2m cost for 4 buses to accommodate potential demand.) Any idea of the cost per ticket of bus vs. train?
 - Maggie: we don't know what train ticket costs would be but we know the buses charge \$15-30/trip from Bangor to Portland, up to \$50 to Boston
- › Richard: for the catchment area, you aren't including potential ridership from Mass. Also, from an Equity point of view, seniors receive ½ price on Amtrak, so that needs to be taken into account. Why didn't you use the larger catchment area that runs all the way to Boston? That would increase the number of riders.



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- Maggie: we actually did include ridership in Mass. but it wasn't shown in the initial, brief presentation. We (showing a new slide) determined that 4.5X – 6.5X of the trips within Maine would potentially leave the area and go to/from other states
- › Keith: the majority of people using buses from Maine are going to Logan Airport. That is a major part of the demand from Maine. Passenger rail won't provide that service which needs to be taken into account. Logan Airport riders won't want to take the train.
- › Matt N: we should not say that bus service is not subsidized...that is not correct. Carbon footprint needs to be taken into account when looking at the costs. The \$363m cost for passenger rail is small relative to what is available from the Federal Government. The \$3m for operations per year is something that can be easily Bonded by MaineDOT. Yes, we need to talk dollars and sense, but we need to take into account the ecosystem costs associated with carbon-based transportation other than trains.
- › Gay: do we have any data related to the climate impacts of each transportation mode?
 - Matt E: can VHB find those numbers? (Phil: sure, we can dig up those numbers.)

Agenda-related Discussion

It was decided that slide presentations from Dakota Hewlett and Nate Howard from MaineDOT will be moved to the next Council meeting on March 29.

- › Nate: for next meeting, we wanted speakers to offer insight into the general benefits of trails and rail within the area, similar to the other RUACs.
- › Gay: the Merrymeeting Trail study in 2011 should be made available to the Council. Perhaps VHB's cost estimates could be used to update the \$\$ numbers?
- › Jeremy: I can find a speaker to discuss trails
- › Richard: we mentioned last month having a rep from Bangor and Waterville speak to the Council in the future...can we still do that?
 - Matt E: if we have speakers from those cities, what about Lewiston too?
 - Nate H: yes, we will think of who to include
- › Gay: are there designs for a trail connection to the Brunswick train station? Let's consider that too
- › Nate: for the public meeting, we are looking at June timeframe
- › Gay: for future agenda, it would be nice to know exactly what an Interim Trail vs a RWT looks like
 - Nate H: yes, we can include that

Public comments and questions

- › F. Bruce Sleeper, President of Train Riders Union: the cost of RWT assumes that rail needs to be improved but it doesn't need to. The trail can just be but in. How much of the cost of passenger rail is for PTC?



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- Phil: cost of RWT does NOT include any improvements to the tracks
- Mike: PTC estimate is roughly \$130m of the \$363m total
- › Jack Madden: the consultant was in error related to the speed of freight trains. From Royal Junction the current freight main line route is 22 miles shorter than Lower Road. Going through Auburn makes less sense however...the freight line use creates problems for passenger rail. Use of Lower Road is much better.
- › Patty: Interim Trail means all of the infrastructure is removed (she then followed with a discussion of a hypothetical scenario related to the costs of replacing the tracks after a trail was built.) Let's go with RWT from the start.
- › Ryan Gordon: to reduce the risk of rail derailments, what kind of info about hazardous materials would need to be posted to abutters in the future?
 - Nate M: safety related issues are Federal requirements and if there are hazardous materials it can be a trade off...if you tell the public, it could attract terrorism, for instance
- › Ed Hanskem: the state rail plan forecasts a tripling of rail traffic, so it doesn't make any sense to tear up tracks in that context?

Questions from the Chat:

- › Bruce: why does the Propensity Study show so many more passengers on buses vs. train?
 - Maggie: the Propensity Study couldn't dissect ridership from bus stops where train service already exist.
- › Unknown: did the data include data beyond Maine? I.e. the Maritimes in Canada
 - Maggie: catchment area is based on best practices and the roadway network since people don't like to backtrack. The NNEPRA catchment rate is similar to our peers.
- › John Koons: Why are we making comparisons with 50 year old diesel, rather than looking at costs of self contained battery or hydrogen propelled units?
 - Nate H: the study does not address what type of rolling stock could potentially be used
- › Jack Madden: Operationally, use of the Freight Main Line as the route to Bangor for passenger services is problematic. This would cause the intercity passenger service to now have two termini, one route to Brunswick and one Route to Bangor.

Meeting adjourned at 12:07