



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: March 29, 2023

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Virtual Meeting

Date: 03/30/2023

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 Farrell, 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 	

Agenda:

- > Introductions
- > Summary of the Maine State Active Transportation Plan (Dakota Hewlett, MaineDOT)
 - o Q&A and Discussion



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- › Summary of the Maine State Rail Plan (Nate Howard, MaineDOT)
 - Q&A and Discussion
- › Discussion about additional information and data (Matt Eddy)
- › Agenda for April RUAC Meeting (Nate H)
 - RKG Draft Economic Impact Analysis Report
 - Other?
- › Public Comment Period

SUMMARY OF VHB COST ESTIMATES

Lower Road Corridor Option		Capital Costs	Annual Maintenance Costs
Interim Trail	Stonedust/Gravel	\$34,200,000	\$93,800 - \$147,400
	Paved	\$42,900,000	\$80,400 - \$134,000
Rail with Trail	Stonedust/Gravel	\$146,300,000	\$93,800 - \$147,400
	Paved	\$151,800,000	\$80,400 - \$134,000
Restoration of Rail Service	Freight	\$55,000,000	\$2,747,000
	Passenger	\$363,000,000	\$3,015,000

Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

After the slide presentation from MaineDOT's Dakota Hewitt summarizing the State Active Transportation Plan, the following discussion ensued:

- › Richard: Where does the AT funding in the work plan come from?
 - Dakota: it comes from many pots including Transportation Alternatives Program and the State's multi-modal transportation funds
- › Matt E: how many communities have embraced Complete Streets?



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- Dakota: some more than others but important to note that CS strategies apply to all projects. The Village Partnership Initiative is especially focused on helping communities with these types of AT projects
- › Tom: I want to thank MaineDOT for developing the AT Plan.
- › Richard: Waterville and Bangor should be invited to these RUAC meetings.
 - Nate H: MaineDOT's understanding of the RUAC statute is that it does not permit representation from communities not on the corridor.
 - Richard: my read of the statute is that the Commissioner "may" appoint up to 15 members from a diverse range of areas.

MaineDOT's Nate Howard then summarized the State Rail Plan, which included some key takeaways:

- › Report includes 5 chapters (90 pages) and based on FRA guidelines
- › Key short-medium term recommendations include:
 - Double track at Wells Station
 - Positive Train Control for all areas with passenger rail
 - Relocation of the Portland Transportation Center
 - Rockland Branch Coastal Connection Pilot (from Brunswick to Rockland, overseen by NNEPRA)
 - Commuter bus connection pilot from Portland to Lewiston/Auburn to help DOT better understand ridership
 - Passenger rail evaluation and financial analysis

The following discussion ensued:

- › Matt E: is freight rail service increasing in ME right now? It looks like there are investments to improve freight capacity, is that warranted?
 - Nate M: we don't have great data, but there is demand that is picking up again after a drop during COVID. Some historic shippers have recently shut down but connections at ports are likely to grow. As you go through the project list in the Plan, improvements to the corridors will benefit both freight and passenger (where relevant). We see significant growth in next 5 years but that is not reflected in the Plan.
 - Nate H: the Rail Plan reflects 2019 data. Not sure about CSX but CP is busy with increased container traffic. Hopefully more from CSX too in the near future.
- › Matt: in the next meeting, do people want to have a presentation related to rail issues and trail issues?
 - Consensus is yes



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- › Matt: how about hearing from the Bangor reps?
 - Gary: I think it is premature
 - Matt Nixon: I would like to hear from them
 - Matt E: either the April mtg or May mtg we should hear from Bangor
- › Jeremy: I'd like to hear more about viability of bus service along the corridor
 - Matt E: Nate covered some of that but that would be good background information
- › Nate H: we could also hear from freight operators along the corridor
- › Richard: the Council should hear about the handful of rail-based Bills currently in the Legislature currently. One Bill includes the re-establishment of rail service to Bangor.
- › Nate H: we will summarize the public comments received so far in the report (with VHB's help)
- › Jeremy: if there is an opportunity for a Hi-rail ride in the near future?
 - Nate: yes, we can make the Hi-Rail ride happen, perhaps in May

Public Comment:

- › Tony Donovan: for the AT Plan, it is great that Dakota was hired. The best AT can be realized at train stations and the next ME DOT AT-related hire should understand rail issues too. The last mile walk/bike is critical. The Scope of Services that VHB has does not actively look enough at passenger trail demand, especially train station locations. By not identifying train stations, we won't get correct ridership or economic demand. The Council is not getting adequate info about making an informed decision. None of the RUAC's have. We would like to see more accurate info from MaineDOT. Nate Moulton said we wouldn't qualify for Federal funds if we ID stations, which is not correct. At the last RUAC, we did a presentation about LRT that wasn't in the final report when the trail presentation was.
- › Duane Scott: I am Board member of Friends of Kennebec Rail Trail and glad to see there is interest for us to do a presentation. Phil Garwood can do that.
- › Dave: I represent the Bowdoinham Farmer's Market. The current Rail corridor forms the edge of the 30-acre park. Some vendors carry their products over the tracks. The corridor can help to connect to other parks and our Town's sidewalk network. Bicyclists coming to our market are especially excited to have a trail to make a connection to the market as well as other destinations in the Town.
- › Patty Barber: now is not the time to rip up rail infrastructure. The current Legislature is showing lots of enthusiasm to include more freight and passenger rail service. Lots of technologies for rail are now on-line and this will impact the cost estimates. I encourage rail and trail for the corridor...do we need to pull up the tracks to get the trail implemented? No. There should be funds for RWT in the state's budget.



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- › Ryan Gordon: resident of Hallowell. The interim trail estimate is \$43m while the RWT is \$152m, which is not insignificant. At the last meeting, we talked about comparing carbon emissions of different modes of transportation.
 - Nate H: yes, we put some figures together and will share with the group soon.
 - Matt N: we need to include light rail, not just diesel Amtrak-style service
 - Nate M: we need to make sure we have good data. For instance, if electric rail we need to understand the energy source, and also the carbon impact of electrifying the corridor. It always needs to come down to how many people are riding the rails, the buses, etc. We need to understand the carbon footprint of capital investments.
 - Matt E: perhaps electric bus service is another option to look at? It requires no new infrastructure
- › Bruce Sleeper: when will the economic analysis be posted to the web site? Can we get more detail on the cost estimates? Are we still doing public comments on the web site and/or Facebook? What about Deisel emissions, it can't be based on current use...it may be reduced later.
 - Nate H: a week prior to the Council meeting, the econ analysis will be posted. Also, for the costs, we will have more detailed information. For public comments, the web site is the formal way to provide comments. The FB site is not the formal location. We can't accommodate the public for the rail ride.
- › Ian McConnell: for the cost estimates, it wouldn't make much sense to spend the extra \$100m for a RWT option. That should be added to the passenger rail costs. The Interim Trail cost should also add the cost of expanding bus service so it is apples to apples.
- › Phil Garwood: I can speak on behalf of the Merrymeeting Trail group at the April meeting. I agree that the train station locations are important, because that has impact on the overall cost estimate. I would like to see cost of using Lower Road rail route to Bangor via Brunswick vs. the cost of rail service to Bangor thru L/A.

Questions from the Chat:

- › Tony Donovan: ...and MaineDOT did not reference the potential for small to mid-size manufacturing business on the state corridors such as the Lower Road corridor using the rail for freight and for economic development
 - Nate: it is a planning effort that crosses both AT and Rail plan. A lot of our shippers that we receive assistance are smaller
- › Ryan Gordon: Is there Maine DOT funding for establishing no-horn "quiet zones" at State owned crossings?
 - Nate H: No. Fed safety funds can't be used for quiet zones.



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- › Sue Ellen: During the Transportation Committee hearing yesterday a representative of the MDOT commissioner said the family of plans will be out in the next couple of months. Both Nate and Dakota have said in the next two weeks. Which is the closest to correct?
 - Nate H: If the Commissioner said, then I guess that is correct
- › Ryan Gordon: How would the federal "Bipartisan Railway Safety" bill introduced in response the recent multiple rail disasters increase costs of restoring rail service on the Lower Road?
 - Nate H: I don't think it will raise the bar for improvements
 - Nate M: only potentially on existing segments...this is related to 'hot spot' detectors.
- › Ryan Gordon: So, there is currently an active, Class I railroad that connects Portland, Lewiston, Waterville, and Bangor. It seems sensible to introduce passenger rail on this active line. What are the obstacles there?
 - Nate H: Bangor propensity study covers this. Obstacles for Back Rd is that sidings and double track needed for higher speeds for service between Lewiston and Bangor
- › Tony Donovan: the question is: can the Lower Road corridor be used for freight?
 - Nate H: yes, but there needs to be an operator and demand however
- › DJ Merrill: will the econ analysis include snowmobile/ATV use or not?
 - Phil: we will need to check on that, but it will be made clear in the report.
- › Jeremy: are we able to compare the costs of the RWT and Interim Trail from the 2010 Merrymeeting report that VHB did to today's cost estimate?

Meeting adjourned at 12:25