



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: June 28, 2023

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Virtual Meeting

Date: 06/28/2023

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 • Bruce Sleeper, ME Rail Users Network and on board of MRTC • Larissa Loon, Richmond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • na

Agenda:

- › Summary of public comments from public meeting
- › Follow-up questions from public meeting
 - Will MaineDOT reconsider RWT policy to permit <10.5' offset from rail?



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- Will the RUAC consider ATVs as an allow use?
- A review on the interim trail, removal of rail and the difficulty of putting rail back in.
- If we took the amount set aside for interim, how much rail/trail could we actually do?
- Were trail connections through Hollowell included in the estimates?
- In our report, can we suggest focusing in on the Back Road for passenger rail?
- Are there opportunities on the system, particularly where this double track or connections to other ATV trail systems where we can accommodate ATVs?
- Others?
- › Other business (Nate, 5 min.)
 - Agenda for July RUAC meeting
- › Public Comment Period (15 min.)

Council Discussion re: summary of comments from Public Meeting

- › Nate H: General overview of the meeting. One good question came up that was related to use by equestrians. We will need to consider this in our recommendation (including the issue of ATVs and snowmobiles). At the Mtn Division, the RUAC referenced ped/bike only with snowmobile use.
- › Bruce: I was surprised about the number of people who commented vs. the SLA. There were lots of trail advocates at the meeting for sure but remember, this is not a popularity contest.
- › Jeremy: There was a perfect amount of time for the meeting. How active right now is the online portal?
 - Nate: we have had 100 comments in June, after a quiet month in May. I will send those out next week to VHB. We will post them to the web site too, along with the link to the Zoom recording of the meeting
- › Gay: I wonder if the public was aware that the Council was listening? It is important for them to know that many of us were listening.
- › Gary: I wasn't surprised by the turnout, but it was good. The comments were generally what I expected.

Follow-up Questions from Public Meeting

Will MaineDOT reconsider RWT policy to permit <10.5' offset?

- › Nate H: our policy is 15' offset based on best practices and the length of a tie which is 8.5' long. Narrower than 10.5' is a maintenance issue and a safety issue as well. We would consider <10.5' in some circumstances but don't think we should revise our policy.
- › Bruce: the wide offsets of 30' or more are on private property corridors. Even if we went with 10.5' we need to think about the comfort level of a rail operator. I would have a hard time with <10.5'



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- › Matt H: For CSX, they don't want trails within 100' of their lines
- › Keith: there is a portion of the rail line is really high above the adjacent wetland area and it is hard to imagine a trail immediately adjacent. In some areas, a RWT will be a huge challenge.
 - Nate H: in areas like that, there would be expensive retaining walls for the 10.5' offset
 - Matt N: there are examples in Maine where the trail uses a nearby roadway so that would accommodate ped/bike in those constrained situations. There are some trails that are as low as 2' offset per the FHWA RWT document. I'm not sure how much work has gone into a RWT study for the corridor.

ATVs as an allowed use?

- › Matt N: this would be a massive transportation system that might be covered up and therefore, as many people as possible should be able to use it. I would only use it on the weekend. The trail advocates were even more organized than the ATV people. The Topsham Select Board voted unanimously to approve a trail but only if it is for both motorized and non-motorized users.
- › Gay: I'd like to have maximum use of the asset as well. Part of the fun of ATVs are high speed...so how would you envision a family walking on a trail and having an ATV passing by?
 - Matt N: I am a member of the Topsham ATV users group board; we have lots of ATVs and mountain bikers on trails in Topsham and there have been no crashes. There have been some in the North Country however. Generally, in Topsham ATVs go 20 mph typically, sometimes slower. Bikes and ATVs can share the same space
- › Nicole: we've been discussing this since 2009. Re: usage, different towns will want different things regarding the user base. I think snowmobiles should be allowed but for ATVs, we will need to look at the connection options for ATV users.
- › Gary: I question whether we have the width to snow-blow a trail and to allow ATVs in the winter? With ATVs and the high % of bike and ped traffic in this part of Maine—vs more rural areas—they are not a good fit.
- › Keith: from Gardiner to Augusta, ATVs won't be allowed so we'll need to have some certainly. Politically, we would get highly criticized by residents if there is even an appearance that ATVs might be allowed along the entire Lower Road corridor.
- › Jeremy: the discussion about motorized use is really about the Merrymeeting Trail portion that is south of Gardiner. This is a long stretch of trail, so I can see portions that have multiple uses including motorized. We'll need to work with the municipalities along the route and determine which are open to all uses.
- › Gay: I don't see the RUAC as the forum to solve this issue. We should include in our recommendation that the individual discussions town by town will need to occur.



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- › Matt E: at the last meeting, Jeremy and Gay volunteered to draft our recommendation that we will get a full look-at at the next meeting. (though a draft will be sent to the Council prior to it)

Difficulty of putting rail back in?

- › Nate M: short answer is “maybe”. With passenger rail, it is 6 of one, half dozen of other re: the extra cost required for the simple upgrade of what is there now (up to Type 3) vs. the cost of replacing a trail with rail infrastructure. The equipment can run on existing rails or on the ground. With freight up to Type 1, then having rails available is more cost effective.
- › Nate M: Re: the idea to cover the existing tracks with a trail...it would rot the ties much more quickly. It was done in Augusta for the parking lot but it isn't something we would recommend.
- › Gay: if we saved these rails, will they be usable for service?
 - Nate M: depends on the service. For passenger, we would want to replace the existing rails with welded rail to cut down on the clickity-clack noise and swaying back and forth. That may be OK for scenic excursions or freight but not for high quality passenger rail service. DMUs on the Rockland branch. LRT runs with a waiver to mix with freight rail for safety. In California, it is \$25m/mile for electrification. Right now, no one runs on long distance on battery powered trains.
- › Matt N: how fast does Downeaster go? (Bruce: 79 mph max but along other stretches 40-50 mph.) I work with offshore wind and oyster growing operations, both of which have a major sustainability feature. All of these projects are fought over by small groups of people. If any future paths are planned to be removed, there will be major groups trying to stop it, and likely succeeding. National organizations would sue to stop any transition to rail as well. Therefore, I don't think we should ever consider this an “interim trail”...to me, it would be permanent. We could have battery-powered trains like Calif and Europe.
- › Bruce: Conrail Scenic's testimony for the Mtn Division made it clear how expensive it would be to replace the trail with rails. Regarding electric trains, there are not only battery powered but hydrogen too in 5-10 years. Catenary-based electric trains will be way too expensive.

Use of Interim Trail funds for RWT work?

- › Jeremy: the RWT is 4-5X the cost of the Interim Trail, so the mileage could be based on that.

Were trail connections through Hollowell included?

- › Phil: yes

Can we focus on using Back Road corridor for passenger rail?

- › Matt E: is that even within the scope of the Council? (Nate H: it could be...up to the Council)



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- › Jeremy: support for rail and support for trails goes hand in hand for me. IMO, the Back Road corridor from Portland to Bangor thru Lewiston/Auburn makes more sense. However, I think it is more of the Legislature's role to determine that, not the RUAC.
- › Gay: from the section at the end of the KRRT down to Brunswick, that was our core focus, so I want to have a fuller discussion of the trail from the KRRT up to Augusta's rail bridge east end. Did VHB's cost estimates incorporate the KRRT as an existing condition for reuse or replacement?
 - Phil: the cost estimates for both Interim Trail and RWT assumed that the KRRT would remain in place and provide a "discount" on the estimated cost of each option. We saw no reason to replace the KRRT but did include the cost of building the link in Hallowell.
- › Bruce: I agree that use of the Back Road is beyond our scope. If we did, it would create a dead end. Re: my questions, what document set the Scope of Work, and can that be sent to me? (Nate: yes)

Are there opportunities to incorporate ATVs in double track areas?

- › Matt E: this has already been addressed in a previous question.

Other Business

- › Matt E: we would like to circulate a memo and arrive at some level of consensus and determine if we need to draft a minority report.
- › Bruce: I would be interested in drafting the minority report, if it is needed.

Public Comments:

- › Patty: the whole Interim Trail thing is a farce...the Council should just say it: "removal of rails". Where are the 3 members of the train supporters to match the trail supporters?
 - Jeremy: this isn't a jury trial. We are members of the Trail Committee but specifically because our Select Boards have consistently voted in strong favor of a trail.
 - Bruce: the question isn't about bias, but it is about whether the Council has the information about rail that is needed to inform their recommendation. Don't forget that this is not a popularity contest, but a policy decision. Let's consider what we are willing to give up for a trail and I don't think we have quantified that entirely for our recommendation.
 - Gary: we would be delinquent in our duties if we didn't think 100 years in the future.
- › Neil Stottler: The FTA has \$300m available for the rail project in Maine.
 - Nate H: we do have many \$ Millions available for freight service now.



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- Nate M: per criteria, our ability to compete puts us in a lower rating for passenger rail (ridership levels, low-income housing in the corridor, environmental factors, etc. These are very competitive grants, and we've been relatively successful on freight projects but passenger rail is harder (\$1.3 billion available and \$8-9 billion in applications). In the larger urban areas like Boston and NYC, they are looking for large grants.
- › Joe Leonard: don't rip up the tracks and consider the climate impacts in the future. There is space for a greenway for both trails and rails along the route. We need to have a full feasibility study for the economic impacts but MaineDOT opposes this. I advocate for bike infrastructure in Bangor but our residents really want rail service. Think long term and remember that climate militants like me to work hard to bring rail back.
- › Victor Langelo: I am a climate advocate too and I don't think we need rail service. Bus service should work well too and is more flexible. There are very few backups on I-295 and there is no strong argument for trains...buses can work really well in rural areas like this.
- › Neil Stottler (via chat): in reference to the wetlands, down in Mass. they actually have elevated trails that use a mini bridge solution to get the trail above the wetlands to help preserve it below. Would DOT consider that if it's needed rather than filling in?

Meeting adjourned at 11:55 am