



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: May 31, 2023

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Virtual Meeting

Date: 05/31/2023

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:

- > Hi-Rail Tour Observations
- > Initial thoughts on a majority and minority recommendations (Matt, 40 min.)
- > Draft Rail Corridor Study (Phil, 25 min.)



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- › Other business (Nate, 5 min.)
 - Public Meeting details
 - Agenda for June RUAC meeting
- › Public Comment Period (15 min.)

Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

Hi-Rail Tour Observations

- › Keith: it was a great ride with the only downside being the time it took to get to Augusta (3 hours) at 25 mph with the tracks in current condition.
- › Jeremy: many parts of the corridor I had not seen. Incredible how many sections runs through a narrow corridor, blasted through rock etc.
- › Keith: I really came to appreciate the investment that went into building the corridor....huge amount of fill and blasting.
- › Gary: the route would make a great fall foliage tour route if rail comes to fruition
- › Tony: great scenery and it make it much easier to understand to context
- › Matt: what struck me was the elevation of the corridor

Majority/Minority Recommendations

- › Matt E: let's do a round robin, one by one
- › Jeremy: I've appreciated all of the work by DOT and VHB on the project. Six months ago, I recall a broad consensus that we wanted something to happen though it was either interim trail or passenger train service. However, now the choice is interim trail or the status quo as I don't think rail service is very realistic. The concern with RWT option for me is that it would mean "neither" given the huge constraints in the corridor. To me, if we ever get to passenger rail in the future, at that point we can move forward with RWT and have the best of both worlds. The corridor is first and foremost a public asset and therefore we need to consider the many, many benefits for the trail and there is deep support for the Merrymeeting Trail in the towns along the corridor.
- › Tony: I've kept in mind "what is the best investment" for the future and I don't know if I have my mind made up. I do love rail but think we need to be realistic about demand for rail. Right now, it is a great resource that is being underutilized and provides few bene's to the many communities on the line. A trail would be on an interim basis so in the future, if rail is brought in, the RWT could be done since rail would need to be improved anyways. So...I am leaning towards a trail as I think it would be beneficial.



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- › Nicole: I agree with comments made earlier, and I think a trail could bring benefits in the short term that could help our Town. We would preserve the rail line and there could be rail opp's in the future. I'd like to see a trail until rail becomes viable.
- › Bruce: I think we should stop using the word "interim" since the issue has much more to do with the costs, rather than the public support issues. The cost of adding rail in the future is a huge impediment to moving towards RWT. In my opinion, if we go with the trail option, there will never be rail...even with public support, it will simply be too expensive in the future. We don't yet have passenger projections for use of the train service. There hasn't been enough work done on ridership given the scope of the RUAC project. There are lots of people going up I-295 on their way up to Augusta on a daily basis and many of them probably want to go via rail. We don't know what that number is yet, however. We improved the rail line up to Brunswick and that would end up being a dead end, which would decrease the value not just of future corridors, but of the current rail line too. We don't know what we are throwing away by removing rails and replacing it with a trail, which I think will indeed bring benefit to the region. We don't have enough info on what rail passengers would be spending for their trips. The \$\$ that Downeaster riders spend on the route has not been translated to this study. I asked a number of questions last month and haven't heard any answers yet. I vote strongly for RWT as the best option.
- › Carolann: the transportation benefits are nice to know but I lean towards an interim rail configuration though find Bruce's comments potentially persuasive. Since the corridor is an unused resource, I think we could quickly get benefits from the trail.
- › Tom: all input is really important and Bruce makes some great points. We know there are similar processes related to other corridors and I know that costs would be considerable however, just for the Lower Road, they are quite substantial. Given the demands from other corridors, it puts state in a tough spot. Bruce's point about the costs of replacing the trail with rail in the future is a good one. However, I think we should include an investment that brings benefits to the community now. In the future, we may look at this through a different lens.
- › Keith: I'm in the same place from meeting #1. I prefer 'trail until rail' methodology, in that we have an asset that we need to do something with it. If we don't go with trail, I can see 10 years going by and nothing happening. In Augusta, we are saddled with maintaining some of the rail infrastructure and it is being used for nothing. We would like to see 'something' that benefits the City and the region. We do already have an active rail line that is used along the east side of the Kennebec River by a few businesses. On the west side, there is very little business activity and unlikely to see that in the future for freight rail.
- › Laurisa: I'm jealous that I didn't take the tour as it looked beautiful. I checked in with the Select Board and they lean towards Interim Trail as well.
- › Gary: let's look at the future...sometimes 100 years in the future. We don't really know what demand will be in long term, so let's preserve the opportunity for rail with a trail next to it. I lean towards RWT.
- › Matt: I am there between Gary and Tom...I see 20-40 years in the future and want to see the asset used. I was overwhelmed with how beautiful the corridor is. Let's revisit this in the future.



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- › Doug: in Farmingdale, we like what we have: rail besides trail and we would like to see a RWT configuration from end to end. We don't want to see any tracks torn up.

Draft Corridor Study Overview (Phil)

- › Matt: related to Bruce's comments about removing the trail and the challenges of the cost issues. How would VHB address that?
 - Mike (VHB): if we are to tear up the ties, rails, and ballast for a trail. When that infrastructure is put back in place, a sub-ballast would need to be included to support future rail. That is not included in the estimates that we've included. That would be the highest price item.
- › Matt: with the cost of culverts, etc along the corridor, what would happen if we do nothing for the next 20 years?
 - Mike: I'd defer to Nate and MaineDOT on that. We didn't assume any failure of culverts in the cost estimates per deferred maintenance.
- › Matt: it doesn't seem like we have had a robust analysis of building a hub of development around the future rail stations so we could understand what the economic spin-off would be. Is that possible?
 - Phil: we could flesh out any analysis of TOD development a bit more but we can't get into the \$\$ numbers per the Scope of work. Therefore, we could address development at a high level and at very least, say that more study is needed.
- › Gay (via chat): I would like to see the draft have a one or two page summary of bullet points at the beginning, perhaps as an executive summary.
- › Gay (via chat): If the new rails were electric, wouldn't they require different tracks and other infrastructure?
 - Mike: yes, that would be significant for the overhead catenary infrastructure like the MTA corridor in CT and elsewhere. In the future, that may not be needed however with fuel cells, etc. Short answer is 'yes'.
- › Jeremy: the law says that the corridor is always to be preserved for rail use in the indefinite future, right?
 - Nate: yes, it needs to be interim trail
- › Jeremy: in the RKG infographic, what does the \$131.42m for rail with trail, vs the \$37.14m for interim trail figures refer to?
 - Phil: that refers to the construction job dollars that would go into the state economy for each of the two options listed
- › Bruce: those \$\$ numbers are just the off-setting figures for the construction. I had 10 questions for the economic study that I would like to have answered...can that be provided?
 - Nate: we will work with the consultant to answer those and/or to make changes to the draft economic impact report and be incorporated into the final version and/or post to the web site.



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- › Nate: Gay mentioned an Exec Summary idea in the chat
- › Matt: the Executive Summary should come from the Board and I think Gay has volunteered to draft one.
 - Phil: the closest thing we have in the summary report is the "Summary of Findings" on p. 11-14.

Other Business

- › Nate: regarding the public meeting, I propose that we have it between now and the June RUAC meeting. The week of June 19 is best, ideally Thursday night June 22 at 6 pm. The presentation would be from me and from Phil and then open it up to the public. A week later, we would then have our Council meeting (6/28) to debrief on what we heard. The preference is to have the public meeting virtual.
- › Gary: I vote to have this in-person.
- › Matt: how about a hybrid option?
 - Nate: if a municipality has an opportunity to stream it live, then that is OK. The Zoom hybrid orientation is still tricky however.
 - Matt: I think hybrid Zoom could work?
 - Nate: in my mind, I think we should pick one or the other.
- › Tony: if we choose one, I would go with virtual
- › Matt: OK...let's go with Zoom
- › Nate: I will have the link available for people to send out to their networks.
- › Matt: for the Wed. June 28 RUAC meeting, we will:
 - Debrief from the public meeting
 - review the Draft recommendation memo from the Council
 - discuss responses to Bruce's questions submitted to DOT

Public Comments:

- › Ryan Gordon (Hallowell): I commute to Augusta every day and I think the Interim Trail is the best bet and the most logical. The demand and benefits are here now, not in the future. The funding is realistic too. RWT cannot be built and is a vote for continued decay and decline.
- › Ed Hanscom: construction benefits are just one-time benefits so it shouldn't enter into the discussion about the cost of building a trail in the corridor. To replace the rail with trail at \$40m could be better spent on new sidewalks and shoulders in the communities along the corridor. We would be more bang for the buck that way, and this would be consistent w the state's active transportation plan.



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- › Jack Sutton: I was on the RUAC for the Mtn Division. The estimate is for 1600 ties per mile but 3200 is standard, leaving 50% as good ties. How is that accounted for in the estimate? If the trail were built, what would happen to the 80,000 existing ties that are still useful?
 - Mike: we proposed only replacing enough ties needed to accommodate a Class III condition. Any leftover ties would be disposed or re-purposed but we didn't carry that cost in our estimates
 - Nate: the Dept of Conservation put out a bid for salvage/disposal recently for a different trail and brought \$\$ into the project budget. It would be up to the contractor. I'm not sure which "bin" the \$\$ credit would go to in the budget.
 - John: I would ask the same about left over rails too.
- › Matt: is it possible to get a dollar figure that would include the interim trail and what it might mean to estimate bringing rail BACK in the future?
 - Mike: we will get back to you in the future on that cost.
- › Jack: how did we calculate the need for sidings? One siding every ten miles is not much for passenger service that is envisioned? It seems like too much given that there is no envisioned freight service.
 - Mike: it is based on a typically class III service similar to the Downeaster.
 - Nate: it is what we would expect from a Downeaster type service, but we will relook at that.
- › Bruce: do we really need 2-mile long sidings?
 - Nate: we try to err on the conservative side when doing these studies since there are no proposals for any rail service in the future. We are comfortable with the 2-mile siding assumption
- › Nate: I will provide a link for the 6/22 meeting soon and our next meeting will be on Wed June 28

Meeting adjourned at 12:06 pm