

## Mountain Division Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes 1/6/22

### 1. Attendees:

Nate Moulton (Acting as Chair for Paul Schumacher), Nate Howard, Meghan Russo, Jack Sutton, Katie Haley, Dan Hester, David Kinsman, Paul Hunt, Theresa Egan, Dwight Warren, Colin Burch, Carolann Ouellette, and Zach Mosher. Ian Moon and Patrick Adams attended as presenters.

### 2. Presentation #1: Funding for Trails

Patrick Adams, MaineDOT Active Transportation Program Director gave a presentation on sources of federal funding for trail projects.

- Patrick is MaineDOT's statewide bicycle and pedestrian coordinator.
- He manages a funding program at MaineDOT to assist in developing and improving the transportation network for walking and biking.
- Eligible projects must serve a transportation purpose. Cannot fund projects that are primarily recreational focused. Applicants should consider: how does the proposed project improve transportation and access to key locations in a community.
- Program has had limited funding since 2012 @ 2.3 million in federal funding per year.
- Funding has increased the last few years. Current funding is \$3.5 million.
- Program requires that funding is spread across state to balance spending based on population
- MaineDOT breaks down communities into catchment areas based on population
- From 2017 to 2021 projects were capped at \$500,000 based on funding split of 80% federal and 20% local match (not federal). Federal share up to 400K
- Prices have grown exponentially in last few years. We are flexible with the project cap.
- Continuously accept applications throughout the year and review and score once per year. July 15<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for consideration in MaineDOT's 3-year Work Plan.
- The Right-of-Way process takes about 12 months. We plan out projects for 3 years.
- A project that is submitted in 2022 project would be awarded in 2023 and constructed in 2025
- The Recreational Trails Program is administered by the Bureau of Parks and Lands. This program provides funding for recreational type facilities. Most of these grants are for \$50,000 or less at 80/20 split. Large scale projects up to \$120,000.
- Not a whole lot of options for trail funding, in general
- Encourage applicants to breakdown larger projects into phases with logical starting and ending points

Dan Hester: Describe recent projects. A: Lot of sidewalks and multiuse pathways

Terry Egan: Any state funds? A: Limited. This year we used some state funds for pedestrian safety projects. There is no recurring state funding for bike pedestrian projects. There could be potential opportunity for large federal grant funding.

Jack Sutton: The State turned the Madison branch into a trail. A: That was Branch was purchased by the Department of Conservation for conversation into a trail.

Nate Howard: How does this funding address ATVs? A: ATVs are Prohibited under MaineDOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program. Sporadic snowmobile use is considered but not preferable. Expectation is the owner and operators will ensure that the facility is suitable for year-round use.

### **3. Presentation #2: Potential Rail Use of the Mountain Division Line**

Ian Moon, Project Manager, HNTB presented on potential rail uses of the Mountain Division Line.

- HNTB Portland office specializes in the design of road, bridge and bike/ped projects. Ian works for the rail Office out of Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Authored 2007 Mountain Division study.
- Corridor History: Originally known as the Portland and Ogdensburg Railroad. Constructed after the Civil War. Line owned by Maine Central Railroad by early 1900s.
- The railroad ran from Portland, Maine to Conway, New Hampshire to Saint Johnsbury, Vermont. Freight service peak volume in 1970s. It was cheaper to move freight through Canada to the Midwest because of International Trade rules
- Mainly consisted of traffic into and out of local papermills. Almost all the to freight traffic originated and ended on other railroads. Mountain Division was a pass-through route.
- Passenger service ended in 1960s. Daily round trip from Portland to Saint Johnsbury, Vermont. Popular with tourists and skiers
- Freight service ended in early 1980s
- Substantial track work and timber bridge deck replacement is necessary to rehabilitate the track for rail service
- Any new freight rail options would duplicate SLR services
- Potential commodities: aggregate, cement, plastic pellet, propane, oil, gas, lumber, and paper products.
- Would a freight railroad generate a pool of manufacturers?

- Who would operate: PAN AM or and independent operator?
- Passenger rail options: Commuter rail is not viable due to a lack of population density
- Potential tourist excursion service: Portland to Sebago Lake to Conway, NH to Vermont
- Would need to operate at Class 3 tracks, fare revenue not sufficient to operate railroad. States would need to invest in annual costs
- Cost to rehabilitate the \$40 million 15 years ago.

Jack Sutton: Crown of New England envisioned a connection from Amtrack in Portland to Amtrack in White River, Vermont. Service would be a summer operation. We didn't envision through freight. No winter maintenance.

Dan Hester: How does demand for freight and passenger service compare from 60s to 80 to today?

Jack Sutton: Demand is happening today. Conway scenic is an example. Would like to see support between the 3 states to rehabilitate the line for passenger service.

David Kinsman: How does it help towns in Maine to take tourists to NH and Vermont?

#### **4. Update: Discussions with PWD Trustees regarding trail**

Paul Hunt, Environmental Services Manager, Portland Water District provided information regarding PWD's position on the location of a proposed trail on PWD property.

PWD was invited to the Council because they own a section of property. Core responsibility is treatment of water and wastewater. PWD will not allow a trail to follow the railroad. Board would consider an alternate route through PWD land.

Dave Kinsman: Great that the PWD will work with the council on the study. PWD should come to council with a plan.

Nate Moulton. We are not laying out an alignment for a trail or designing a trail as part of this study. To do this would require environmental review and permitting.

#### **5. Council input on the process moving forward**

*Questions:*

*a. How do we take HNTB's work and translate that into a committee recommendation?*

HNTB work will supplement the council report and recommendation. Details of the committee's recommendation are TBD.

Dan Hester: Doesn't the Council need to report out in March or April? A: The Council has 9 months to complete its work. That puts the completion date in June. We are working towards an earlier completion date.

*b. When should we schedule the Public hearing? To what extent does the Council want to be involved?*

Public meeting will be virtual. Date TBD.

Terry Egan: Will HNTB speak about cost of converting rail to trail? A: Yes. We should have that info next month.

Terry Egan: Public comment should come after we have cost information.

## **6. Schedule Next Meeting and Set Agenda**

Hold the date for 1/27<sup>th</sup> for the next Council meeting. We can push out a few weeks if necessary.

David Kinsman: When can HNTB provide a ballpark estimate to remove rail and construct trail?  
A: Early to mid-February

Dan Hester: According PWD land is not available in the vicinity of Sebago Lake. How does the Council make a recommendation for the area? A: The Council could recognize that further work needs to be done to identify a westerly trail location.

Dave Kinsman: Can we look at an alternative route from aerial mapping? This would be a next step if the Council recommends a trail.

Terry: What was process for other groups to follow for another route? A: Each project was different; however, in each case PWD will sit down with the groups and worked out a solution.

## **7. General Public Comment**

Sen. Rick Bennet: Appreciate that PWD is willing to work on a good solution. The Bill passed in June as an emergency measure. There is a desire to have opportunity to respond to the Council recommendation when Legislature is in session. Would like to hear about economic study in a future Council meeting.