

Mountain Division Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes 10/28/21

Attendees: Paul Schumacher (Chair), Nate Moulton, Nate Howard, Meghan Russo, Carolann Ouellette, Jack Sutton, Russ Barber, Dan Hester, David Kinsman, Paul Hunt, Katie Haley, Theresa Egan, Dwight Warren, Colin Burch, and Zach Mosher.

Presentation #1: Trail Opportunities

Tom Sexton, the Northeast Regional Director for the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, gave a presentation on several topics:

- the mission of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the resources provided by this group
- the concept of “railbanking”
- the New England network of rail trails
- the benefits of trails including health, economics, mobility, and sustainability
- the importance of trail connectivity

Tom’s PowerPoint is available of the web at:

<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofbs/ruac/mdrcc/meetings/>

Presentation #2: Rail Opportunities

David Swirk, President & General Manager for the Conway Scenic Railroad, gave a presentation on the Conway Scenic Railroad and the potential future rail use of the Mountain Division.

- Conway Scenic Railroad has been in business for 47 years
- No external funding. Self-sustaining company.
- Discussed the “Yankee Candle Project” – an industrial redevelopment project with rail access in Massachusetts
- Estimated \$35,000,000 per year impact to the economy of the State of New Hampshire
- Opportunity for increased tourism if connected to Port of Portland
- The White Pass & Yukon Railroad: 800,000 riders in 2019. This could be a model for the Mountain Division
- It would take federal funds to upgrade the Mountain Division if Conway Scenic were to operate on the line
- Not always easy to return a railroad once the grandfathered rights are gone

Next Steps

- Outline/Agenda for future meetings
 - Next meeting, we will share scope of work for HNTB, recap today's discussions and review comments so far
 - Next meeting scheduled for November 18th
 - Other agenda items could include:
 - What uses would be allowed on a proposed rail?
 - Portland Water District land
- Public meetings
 - 1 public meeting is required by law. The plan is to hold 2 public meetings
 - Comments are encouraged though the study website
- Consultant work/information
 - Update data, including costs, from the 2007 Mountain Division Study
 - We will share the Scope of Work with the Council

General Public Comment

Art Bell: Would like Council to consider more input from bicycling interests

Paul Drinan: Member of Maine Trail Coalition. No railroad owners or operators have expressed any real interest in the Mountain Division line. Rail line is public property. Rail line is in disrepair. Vast majority supports some sort of rail trail. Reasonable to look at affordable uses of the corridor. People are getting outside in records numbers. Reassessing our transportation choices because of climate change. Data shows trails support human and economic growth. Property values shown to increase on rail trails. Supports railbanking. Shared Maine Trails rail trail plan for Maine.