



# Meeting Notes

**Meeting Date:** July 28, 2022

**Notes Prepared By:** Phil Goff, Project Manager

**Place:** Virtual Meeting

**Date:** 7/29/2022

**Project No.:** WIN: 25979.00 / VHB: 55607.00

**Project Name:** MaineDOT RUAC Supporting Study – SLA Berlin Subdivision

## RUAC Meeting Attendees (*bold indicates attendance*):

MaineDOT Team	RUAC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nate Howard</b>, (MaineDOT, PM)</li> <li>• <b>Nate Moulton</b>, (MaineDOT Dir. of Freight and Passenger Services)</li> <li>• Patrick Adams (MaineDOT)</li> <li>• Meghan Russo (Maine DOT Dir., Legislative Affairs)</li> <li>• <b>Tony Grande</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Phil Goff</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Tim Bryant</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Mike McDonough</b> (VHB)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chair Bill Shane</b> (Cumberland Town Manager)</li> <li>• <b>Doug Beck</b> (ME Bureau of P&amp;L, RTC Manager)</li> <li>• <b>Brian Harris</b> (ME Yacht)</li> <li>• <b>Charles Hunter</b> (Assis. VP for Genesee &amp; Wyoming)</li> <li>• <b>Chris Chop</b> (GPCOG Transpo Director)</li> <li>• <b>Christine Landes</b> (New Gloucester Town Manager)</li> <li>• <b>Diane Barnes</b> (North Yarmouth Town Manager)</li> <li>• <b>Dick Woodbury</b> (CBTA)</li> <li>• <b>Hope Cahan</b> (Falmouth Town Councilor)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Jeremiah Bartlett</b> (Portland Transpo. Eng.)</li> <li>• <b>Jonathan LaBonte</b> (Transpo. Advisor for Auburn Town Manager)</li> <li>• <b>Scott LaFlamme</b> (Yarmouth EcDec Dir.)</li> <li>• <b>Tony Donovan</b> (Portland Rail Advocate)</li> <li>• <b>Angela King</b> (BCM Advocacy Director)</li> <li>• <b>Nate Wildes</b> (ED, Live and Work in Maine)</li> </ul>

## Agenda:

- > Introductions
- > Review of corridor cross section options (Phil Goff, VHB)
- > Summary of cost estimates (Mike McDonough and Tim Bryant, VHB)
- > Opportunities and Challenges of freight rail service (Charles Hunter, G&W)
- > Next Steps
  - o August meeting agenda and guest speakers
  - o Draft Feasibility Study report (est. early October)



## Meeting Notes

- Public meeting
  - Council recommendation
- › Public Comment

### Meeting Summary and Discussion:

VHB staff presented the slides summarizing the cross-section options as well as the cost estimates for the various corridor options, along with maintenance costs. Following the presentation, the Council offered the following questions and comments:

- › Tony Donovan: how much of the project budget went into the trail analysis? Also, my organization would like to see a similar analysis related to passenger rail and relative to freight. Additionally, station site locations need to be determined to develop a good economic analysis. The \$250m project estimate appears to be a gold-plated, Amtrak type of service and we think it can be quasi-light rail type of service at lower cost. We have our own engineers and we would like to be on the next RUAC agenda to discuss our vision and how passenger rail service can be done at lower cost. Whereas the VHB engineers said in a previous study that light rail wouldn't work, our engineers are ready to make a counter argument. Can we do our presentation in August?
  - Nate Howard: let's talk about that later in the agenda. Re: VHB's budget, we don't have the \$\$ at the top of my head but their analysis is part of the Scope of Work for this contract.
- › Chris Chop: regarding maintenance, how would it be handled with any rail alternative? Would it be local municipalities (like trails) or the state?
  - Nate H: if there is an operator, it is on them. If no operator, like now, there is minimal maintenance from the state. DOT is not plowing any trails currently and we typically have an agreement with municipalities.
- › Richard Rudolph (non-Council member): what would the impact be on I-295 if/when passenger rail is incorporated on the corridor? We want to avoid the state asking taxpayers to fund a widening of I-295 in the future. We need to fund a study to look at that.
  - Bill: some of that will be covered in the economic impact analysis later on during this study.
- › Scott LaFlamme: would there be a less expensive way for the trail to avoid the need to bridge over Yarmouth Junction with an on-road portion instead?
  - Nate H: that could be possible but would need to be part of a subsequent feasibility study. The scope of this study is limited to the Berlin Subdivision corridor owned by the State.



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Charles Hunter (AVP – Governmental Affairs) from Genesee & Wyoming (G&W) Railroad then made a presentation focused on the freight-related aspects of the Berlin Subdivision/St Lawrence & Atlantic (SLA) line. Some of the key points included:

- › The line connects with three Class 1 Railroads, including CSX in Auburn, and the CP and CN lines in Canada and ultimately thru to Montreal. The rail network offers connections to the west coast and south to New Orleans
- › Currently, G&W freight serves companies with interests in heating fuel, plastics, lumber and other commodity items. B&M Baked Beans and a cement company in East Deering were the last customers south of Auburn, back in 2014. They also ran a seasonal ski train from East Deering up to Sunday River for 3-4 seasons back in the 1990s.
- › He sees future growth for G&W services in the waste/recycling, lumber, plastics and distribution warehouse industries.
- › A single rail car can carry the equivalent of 3.5 – 4 semi-trailer trucks. The G&W line is currently rated to accommodate 263K railcar loading and is actively upgrading their system to accommodate more modern 286K equipment used nationwide.
- › Recently, CP Rail has purchased MM&A railroad, and CSX has purchased Pan Am Railways.
- › Questions/comments from the Council included:
  - Tony: what is G&W's opinion about trail use or rail-with-trail use along one of your corridors? (Charles: we are generally not in favor on our own property but we don't own the asset in question, so we would defer to the state)
  - (unknown woman speaker): when was the last customers along the SLA line? (Charles: propane in late 1990s, also cement in E Deering, B&M Baked Beans.)
  - Brian Harris: how active is SLA further north? Can you explain what is the status of the Berlin Sub corridor...does SLA still have a lease? (Charles: we service a few customers 4-5 times/week going north from Auburn.)
  - Nate M: the St Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad (SLR) still has a freight easement and a "franchise". They have right of first refusal for any new freight service on the line. The State-owned portion is in "discontinuance" status currently, so they don't necessarily have to serve customers along the line, even for small car requests. SLR could elect to put the line back into service if there was a large enough customer demand. If the line were "abandoned" rather than "discontinued", than getting things started again would be more complicated and requires Federal STB approval process, etc.
  - Dick Woodbury: the CBTA visited towns along the line and brought up the idea of a rail-trail. The reaction in every single town was that they would like to see the freight option ended on the corridor and replaced with a trail. Presumably, the corridor was sold by SLR because it didn't seem to serve a public purpose.



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- Nate M: the STB provides the opportunity for the State of Maine to lease operations licenses; The State cannot be an operator, we don't get involved in the common carrier issue. We bought them under the Rail Preservation Act and under that statute, we need to hold them.
- Jonathan LaBonte: ownership by state was part of the negotiation related to the Downeaster service. There was a recognition that the use of the corridor was more than just freight rail service.

### NEXT STEPS:

- › Nate H discussed the Next Steps for the project, including:
  - Draft report in early October
  - Public meeting soon after the draft report is issued
  - Determine Committee recommendations
  - Next meeting agenda: we can have Tony present re: passenger rail, and a potential trail presentation. 30 minutes each
- › Bill: I've heard both rail and trail presentations before, but I think it will be good to avoid a "he said/she said" round of questions and comments. My concern is that residents along the route have not been engaged and the public meeting should be in a large facility to accommodate potentially hundreds. I still need VHB to tell us about when we should engage the people most impacted so abutters know if there will be landscaping, wide buffers, etc.
  - Nate: we are open to having the meeting in a larger space.
- › Dick: perhaps John Kachmar, the ED of the Eastern Trail Alliance could be the best selection for a guest speaker to discuss trail, especially to get into any of the details of the design and landscaping.
- › Scott LaFlamme: in Yarmouth, we are doing a pre-emptive survey so we understand the pitfalls and any level of excitement that exists amongst residents.
- › Nate H: we have gotten a lot of feedback online and we will send that out to the Council for their review.
- › Bill: I think the next RUAC meeting should be in webinar format to minimize interruptions.

### Public comments

- › Bill: I know there are lots of questions about detailed opportunities for rail service
- › Ed's I-Pad: noted that there is a CSX freight rail line that runs parallel to this corridor. There are also studies involving passenger rail service as well as regional bus service to Portland. Can we get a status update?
  - Nate H: there is a parallel study looking at passenger service between Portland and Auburn...in the economic analysis phase currently.



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- › Joe Leonard: I am on City Council in Bangor. I like that you are talking about how the trail can impact the community. In Bangor, we help our neighbors so I encourage you to consider the future related to climate change and that rail will be necessary to move people in Maine. We are a pro-trail city but we need rail too. We are downstream from this corridor and the work here could slow things down a bit. National rate for conversion of trail back to rail is <1% so we can't rely on that. We need rail access in Bangor and Penobscot County and District 2. Please consider your neighbors when making your decision. We need rail first before trails.
- › Kristine Keeney: what is the operator's interest in maintaining the lease in the line at this stage?
  - Nate H: we will look into that and get back to you.
- › Grayson Lookner, State Rep. from Portland. (Grayson read statement on behalf of Patricia Washburn disabilities commission board member in Portland who says: we need ADA accessible transportation options, including passenger rail along the corridor.) There are a number of costs that are not being considered when it comes to passenger rail service. For instance, people need to access jobs in Portland. We need to rely on other modes of transportation besides driving. I'm on the public safety committee and I think that rail service can help to mitigate late-night drunk driving, and rail service can help accommodate an alternative. I'm opposed to removal of any rails on the corridor.
- › Ben Davis: I am a current Portland resident and formerly from Lewiston-Auburn. I'm concerned about the lack of transit options between the two urban areas and would like to see passenger rail restored on the corridor.
- › Don Marietta: we need to think about the looming crisis of climate change. One aspect is critical: the housing shortage in Portland and that many can't afford to live in Portland anymore. If we have reliable light rail to Lewiston/Auburn, that should be a priority.
- › Carl Wilcox: I live along the corridor and I'm neutral on passenger rail vs. trail. If it is to be passenger rail, at very least it should go right into the middle of Franklin Street in Portland. Would also like to see a passenger rail station in New Gloucester.
- › Art Bell: I biked to the Blaine House this AM to meet with the Governor. Lots of groups (trail groups, AARP, etc.) there extolled the benefits of trails, so I would like to see that energy extended to this corridor.