



Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: December 22, 2022

Notes Prepared By: Phil Goff, Project Manager

Place: Cumberland Town Hall

Date: 12/23/2022

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"> • Nate Howard, (MaineDOT, PM) • Nate Moulton, (MaineDOT Director of Freight and Passenger Services) • Phil Goff (VHB) • Tim Bryant (VHB) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair Bill Shane (Cumberland Town Manager) • Brian Harris (ME Yacht) • Jason Birkel (General Manager, St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad) • Chris Chop (GPCOG Transportation Director) • Christine Landes (New Gloucester Town Manager) • Diane Barnes (North Yarmouth Town Manager) • Dick Woodbury (CBTA) • Hope Cahan, represented by Amy Kuhn (Falmouth Town Councilor) • Jeremiah Bartlett (Portland Transportation Engineer) • Jonathan LaBonte (Transportation Analyst, Auburn Town Manager) • Scott LaFlamme (Yarmouth Economic Development Director) • Tony Donovan (Maine Rail Transit Coalition/MRTC) • Angela King (BCM Advocacy Director) • Nate Wildes (Exec. Director, Live and Work in Maine) • Natalie Thomsen (New Gloucester Town Planner) • Becky Taylor-Chase (Town of Pownal) • Charles Hunter (St Lawrence and Atlantic RR) |

Agenda:

- > Introductions
- > Council Work Session
 - o Key points for majority recommendation
 - o Considerations for minority recommendation
- > Next Steps (2:10 pm): January Council meeting?
- > Public Comment



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Clarifications and General Discussion:

- › Bill: we need to establish a recommendation and a minority recommendation based on the three options of 1) leave corridor alone, 2) trail until rail, or 3) rail with trail
- › Nate W: is this a working group session or Council members making a case for the majority or minority recommendations?
 - Bill: kind of both, with the hope that this is our last meeting.
- › Jonathan: assuming City of Auburn is in the minority opinion, I want to have a January meeting so I can have time to draft and revise the minority opinion.
- › Chris: Can we go around once and allow everyone their two minutes first?
 - Bill: OK
- › Chris: I want to thank the team and the 800 members of the public who commented. I support the interim trail option (ie. Trail until Rail) and think it can be part of a larger trail network to benefit the entire region. The costs are far more feasible to make the trail a reality (\$55m) whereas other options are far more expensive.
- › Dick: I agree with Chris, Trail until rail (TUR)
- › Angela: TUR
- › Diane: TUR
- › Natalie: New Gloucester abstains
- › Jonathan: Auburn City Council voted 7-0 to go with rail with trail option (RWT)
- › Tony: (detailed comments to be submitted to MaineDOT in writing with associated graphics.) We support having a RWT as an option.
- › Amy Kuhn, Falmouth Town Council and State Rep.: Our Town votes for TUR for public health and recreation. Falmouth residents overwhelmingly support having a trail and doing it cost effectively.
- › Bill: when I look at L/A and Portland as metro areas, I can't support removal of the existing rails. I therefore support RWT even though the trail may not be fully realized and some on-road links are needed. There are large segments of the corridor that can definitely support both rail and trail.
- › Charles: we support retaining the rails for potential use of freight rail in the future. Returning rail service in the future will be a huge challenge if the trail is there. I support the 'do nothing' option but would be amenable to RWT.
- › Nate W: per feasibility and timeliness, I support TUR. The worst thing is to do nothing. All else being equal, I could support RWT but with the information I have now, the TUR is the better option.
- › Scott: this is a complicated issue and glad the state is doing this process. Yarmouth supports a TUR and that has only been further solidified after hearing the public comment over the past 6 months.



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- › Jeremiah: I've talked with Metro and have a better understanding proposed land uses along the corridor. I was also reminded of a City Council vote to promote high quality transit between primary communities. I feel a co-location of trail and rail is likely the best (RWT) and we need more time to discuss that as an option. The time frame of the study has not been enough for the City to fully digest.
- › Chris: I don't think we have the population or employment to support passenger rail and the PACTS Board agrees. It is not enough to support passenger rail in the region. I feel a TUR could get built in 5 years, whereas a RWT may never get built. The CSX line does provide the additional option for passenger rail.
- › Dick: in my 10 years in the Legislature, I have never seen an issue that has elicited so much support and it is perfectly suitable for Maine and our way of life. The enviro issues will make it really, really difficult to do RWT. All of the studies have been clear that passenger rail is not a logical choice to run passenger train down to Ocean Gateway. If you remove the Back Cove bridge, this is only a \$25-30m project and very doable.
- › Angela: we are all on the same page as a Council re: the enviro and health benefits. Both BCM members and the general public support a trail and esp with MaineDOT's new AT Plan, this is the perfect timing.
- › Diane: from day one, I have leaned towards TUR and after reading the report, even more so. I read all of the comments received and that solidified my stance. I really don't feel a RWT will be possible.
- › Natalie: the NG Select Board did hear from constituents on both sides. This is why we abstained.
- › Jeremiah: in Gorham, PACTS is looking at an \$800k study for a huge roadway project that connects to a smaller community than those north of Portland. There is a major equity concern here and the discussion has been very "suburban". Also, why are trail advocates no longer interested in connecting to Portland?
- › Jonathan: the Commissioner is looking for perspective which we can give them. I don't like that 70% of the population of the corridor (i.e. City of Portland and City of Auburn) only has 2 votes on the Council. We already have 2500 housing units in the pipeline, and that is without zoning revisions.
- › Tony: PACTS has \$\$ for large parking garages....somehow we have the population to support that? (More, longer comments submitted in writing.) Let's support another study to look at RWT.
- › Amy: I want to clarify that we in this Council have voted so far 7 to 4 to support TUR vs RWT with one abstention. Regarding the Equity issue, I agree that it should be a focus of implementation but it should not slow us down.
- › Bill: I don't give up on Presumscott Street as a multi-modal hub. There are environmental obstacles no matter which option is preferred and will need to go through environmental scrutiny and permitting. In the next 15-year plan for the Maine Turnpike for nearly \$1 billion in improvements. L/A is close to 60,000 population and similar in size to Portland. We need to consider this in our transit planning. I really feel that nearly half of the rail corridor can easily accommodate a trail, with the other half needing some additional planning.
- › Charles: re: the former Pan Am line and the assumption that passenger rail can easily be run on CSX. Has the company been contacted yet?



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- Nate M: CSX is aware of the Study but have not been approached by MaineDOT.
- Charles: who owns the corridor from Downtown Auburn to the airport?
- Jonathan: downtown could be served from Danville Junction without using the CSX line
- › Scott: no additional comments
- › Bill: the 7 to 4 vote is final. I understand that people want something to be done. Recall that this is just a recommendation and that ultimately the Commissioner makes the decision, with further approval from the Legislature. Let's make sure that no matter what happens, there is more outreach to abutters.
- › Jeremiah: we are having differences of opinion of rail or trail but we all have in common that we want to improve active transportation.
- › Scott: for Nate and Nate: is there a timeline re: the Commissioner's decision?
 - Nate H: no. If he accepts a TUR recommendation, it will then go right to the Legislature
- › Nate W: can the Commission not take any action?
 - Nate H: the only action required is to submit a bill to vacate the rail IF he supports the Council recommendation for TUR.
- › Tony: will the recommendation say "tear up the tracks"?
 - Bill: It is clear that a TUR includes removal of the tracks. Also, I'm not sure passenger trains can run on the tracks regardless.
- › Nate H: two members who are missing: Brian Harris and Becky, so I will reach out to them for their opinion and if they want to register a formal vote.
- › Scott: I prefer a virtual meeting in January
- › Jonathan: let's hold the date and do a Zoom meeting
 - Nate H: OK, let's meet on January 26, 2023.
- › Jeremiah: it is very unlikely to get the Portland City Council to have a solid opinion on this before the late Jan meeting. Right now, it is just staff opinion.

Next Steps

- › Bill: we will reconvene on January 26 at 1 pm.

Public comments

- › Ken Capron, Portland: at what point do abutters and other groups get included? The financing could come from the New Starts program, a federal program that could pay for everything from beginning to end. Fins Sprague should be part of this conversation too. The old "rail bikes" could be revived and used along the corridor and should be looked at.



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- › Bruce Sleeper, legal Counsel for Train Riders Union: I emailed 6 pages of comments last night. Trail until rail is a mirage and rarely is rail ever brought back. Removal of the rails and ballast makes their replacement very difficult. The Study includes some problems...such as trail users spending money outside of the corridor, while rail riders only buy stuff on the train. Also, the housing units induced is very low. The Study says it will cost \$274m which includes \$60m for positive train control which may not be needed until service increases significantly. Is this really the time to be doing this given that there is another study happening? Let's wait until the other L/A transit propensity study is complete. The use of the Downeaster data is too low.
- › Ed Suslovic, Portland: nearly all comments were to move forward with the trail right away. 90% of the comments have come online and in person have supported the trail. The corridor from Roux Institute to Danville Junction has no viable freight rail use. Nashville TN STAR service is the closest thing I could find but their population is 2 million people to a city of 700,000 and ridership is low (800 riders). We are 10% the size which would come out to 2-8 passengers per day. This would make it uncompetitive for Federal grants. RWT is the 'do nothing' option.
- › Sue Ellen Bordwell, Yarmouth and Casco Bay Alliance: as frustrating as this process has been, I thank everyone for their work.
- › Jonathan: Portland area has 2X the density of Nashville.
- › Carl Wilcox: have we included any Facebook comments? (Nate H: it was only an ad for the public meeting, not a solicitation for comments.) The premise of using Nashville as an example is crazy. Auburn is the place for 800 housing units and people need transportation options.
- › Art Bell, Yarmouth: I look forward to the Commissioner's recommendation
- › Steve Parisi, North Yarmouth: I support keeping rails where they are. RWT would be okay for me. Removing rails means they will never come back. N Yarmouth approved 140 housing permits recently. Let's think of the future for both passenger or freight service. If rail service were there, I suspect B&M factory would likely still be there.