Maine State Rail Plan

Rail Advisory Committee Meeting #1

9:30-11 AM ET, 12/13/2021

Attendance

- *SRP PM and Technical Team:* Nate Howard, Nate Moulton, Andreas Aeppli, Lisa Destro, Leah Pickett, Patricia Quinn
- *Railroads*: Steve Corcoran, Charles Hunter, Jonathan LaBonte, John Ray, Ian Simpson
- *Regional Planning*: Colin Burch, Stephanie Carver, Jennifer Williams
- *Operation Lifesaver*: Jeff Pitcher
- *Economic Development*: Jay Kamm, Wade Merritt
- *Trade and Industry*: Tony Cameron, Dana Doran, Maria Fuentes, Brian Parke, Pat Strauch
- *State Agency*: Brian Bronson, Randy Charette
- *Federal Agency*: Rachel LeVee

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions

- Plan Overview and Approach

- Preliminary Technical Activities

- Draft Vision and Goals Review and Input

- Rail Trends Discussion and Input

- Next Steps

Meeting Notes

1. Nate Howard (MaineDOT) – opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and describing the significance of the State Rail Plan (SRP) project and stakeholder input.
2. Introductions
   a. MaineDOT, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority **(**NNEPRA), Cambridge Systematics (CS), RAC Members provided introductions via webcam.
3. Plan Purpose and Approach
   a. Lisa Destro (CS) provided overview of the purpose of the Plan, noted the last SRP update was developed in 2014, and provided an overview of the new IIJA bill and potential funding opportunities for rail transportation. Provided overview of RAC involvement and expectations, the Plan's technical approach, all key

deliverables and schedule, and emphasized how the 2022 SRP will meet all current and changing federal requirements, as well as additions mandated in 2021 state legislative session.

    b. **Poll**: *Why do you think freight and passenger rail service is important to the state of Maine?*

        i. Responses highlighted freight rail service's relationships to economic growth and development; ability to deliver cost-efficiencies; and climate and congestion benefits associated with fewer trucks.

        ii. Responses noted passenger rail's ability to keep Maine connected, particularly for those who do not drive, and to support commuter and recreational travel.

    c. **Poll**: *What does Maine do well to support freight rail?*

        i. Several responses highlighted the Industrial Rail Access Program (IRAP), and others mentioned funding support; good working relationships with shippers, ports, and other stakeholders; and at grade crossing safety work.

        ii. Chat box: Support of the CSX / Pan Am Railways acquisition.

    d. **Poll**: *What does Maine do well to support passenger rail?*

        i. Funding is the most important contribution; responses noted MaineDOT's provision of funding for operations and infrastructure improvements, and its productive partnership with NNEPRA. Others noted that Maine "keeps Amtrak honest" and "understands the importance of connectivity of Downeaster service to New Hampshire and Massachusetts."

        ii. NNEPRA agreed that support of passenger rail is something unique to Maine.

4. Preliminary Technical Activities Update

    a. Lisa Destro (CS) presented initial result of the freight rail commodity flow historical trends, including annual tonnage and carloads, top commodities, top trading partners, directional split, and rail freight originations and terminations in Maine.

    b. Andreas Aeppli (CS) provided an overview of historical and recent Downeaster ridership and on-time performance trends.

    c. **Poll**: *What could Maine do better to support freight rail?*

        i. Responses highlighted better integration of ports with coastal port planning as well as continued coordination with railroads, ports, and shippers.

        ii. Some responses highlighted marketing, such as collective effort to attract more intermodal and shorter haul segments and to market U.S. rail connections to international shippers.

        iii. Others considered economic development, such as growth opportunities in the agri-food and forest/paper industries, including the suggestion to purchase or lease freight cars to assist in transporting logs; some Class I railroads are short on cars. Another improvement highlighted for its economic development potential was to upgrade the sidings and underutilized lines.

        iv. Responses also reiterated the importance and usefulness of IRAP.

    d. **Poll**: *What could Maine do better to support passenger rail?*

  i. Funding was a major theme, with responses highlighting the need to secure operating subsidy support from Massachusetts and New Hampshire and to increase funding to areas of the state not served by the Downeaster.

  ii. There is also a need to support investment in additional track capacity on multi-use trackage.

  iii. One response stated a need to relocate Portland Station; another called for integrating land use/housing policy expectations with existing stop locations.

5. Draft Maine State Rail Plan Vision and Goals

 a. Lisa Destro (CS) presented the draft SRP vision and goals to the RAC, as well as explained the ongoing process to develop these including coordination with the LRTP vision and goals.

 b. *Nate Howard (MaineDOT): Vision based on MaineDOT strategic vision. Draft goals are taken from last plan's goals.*

 c. Draft vision input

  i. **Poll**: *Is there anything else you would like to see included or emphasized in the Vision statement?*

   1. Responses called for environmental sustainability and connections to local land use decisions.

 d. Draft goals input

  i. **Poll**: *Is there anything else you would like to see included or emphasized in the Goals*?

   1. Reponses were focused on multimodal connectivity and engagement with partners. Collaboration with Canadian rail providers, CSX, and neighboring states and markets would provide opportunities to grow intermodal opportunities, enhance connectivity for freight and passenger rail beyond Maine's borders, and increased transloads.

   2. Land emerged in two responses; one called for linking to land use policies at the local level, and another suggested a proactive effort to ensure land use policies leverage the rail infrastructure.

   3. One response noted the growth in other states in large distribution centers/warehouses. If this were to happen in Maine as well, it would be key to ensure that these centers could be served by rail.

   4. A comment called for "stronger designation of freight routes to and from sidings to users" as well as heavy haul route designation.

   5. In terms of language, one comment suggested replacing "maintain" service, with "grow" or "expand."

   6. One comment raised the question of how we define equity in Maine and whether there is an effort to coordinate with Wabanaki groups.

 e. Trends Impacting Rail Discussion and Input

  i. Andreas Aeppli (CS) provided an overview of the key market, consumer, rail industry, regulatory, and technology trends impacting the rail.

  ii. **Poll**: *How significant of an impact do you think these market trends will have on freight rail service in Maine?*

1. Forest products emerged as the most significant of the market trend by far (4.5), followed by agriculture and international trade (3.25), energy (3), consumer products (2.5), chemical (2.3), and construction (2.3). .
        iii. **Poll**: *How significant of an impact do you think these consumer trends will have on rail service in Maine?*
            1. Demographics emerged with the most significant impact (3.1). e-commerce, and consumer spending due to COVID-19 were generally equal (2.8 and 2.7, respectively).
        iv. **Poll**: *How significant of an impact do you think these rail industry trends will have on rail service in Maine?*
            1. Rail industry strategies for growth emerged as the clear front runner (4), with future of merchandise and longer trains tied at 2.9.
        v. **Poll**: *How significant of an impact do you think these regulatory issues trends will have on rail service in Maine?*
            1. Pan Am Railways / CSX merger was the most significant regulatory issue (3.6), followed by truck size and weight (3.1), changes is economic regulation (2.8), and safety (2.6).
        vi. **Poll**: *How significant of an impact do you think these technology issues trends will have on rail service in Maine?*
            1. Technology trends were all anticipated to have only moderate impacts on rail service: electrification (2.7), positive train control version 2 (2.4), and autonomous trucks and trains (2.1).
            2. Chat pod response: Another tech trend for railroads is the use of alternative locomotive fuels - LNG, bio diesel, batteries.
        vii. **Poll**: *Are there additional trends that should be considered in the plan?* Submissions raised the following topics:
            1. Population densities and housing in areas served or potentially served by passenger rail.
            2. Intermodal trends, such as trends in truck vs. rail percentage of tons moved. Rising fuel costs and the declining number of drivers in the trucking industry. Data on global freight movement trends where Maine may be positioned for intermodal options.
            3. Quebec's plans for their rail infrastructure – will they be going electric before the U.S.?
            4. Building resiliency in the infrastructure to withstand the impacts of climate change.
6. Lisa Destro (CS) summarized the next steps in the plan development and stakeholder outreach including conducting stakeholder interviews Jan-Feb 2022.
7. Discussion
    a. Pat Strauch offered to put project team in touch with his organization's membership. Dana Doran also offered to provide connections to the logging and trucking community.
8. Nate Howard (MaineDOT) provided closing remarks and thanked RAC attendees.

Next Meeting – Spring 2022