

Maine State Rail Plan

Rail Advisory Committee Meeting #3

11:00 AM-12:30 PM ET, 12/6/2022

Attendance

- *SRP PM and Technical Team: Nate Howard (MaineDOT), Nate Moulton (MaineDOT), Andreas Aeppli (CS), Lisa Destro (CS), Leah Pickett (CS), Patricia Quinn (NNEPRA), Jim Russell (NNEPRA), Will Gayle (NNEPRA)*
- *Railroads: Steve Corcoran (Amtrak), Jonathan LaBonte (Lewiston-Auburn RR Holding Company), Jason Birkel (SLR / G&W), Ted Krug (CSX), Will Roseborough (CSX)*
- *Regional Planning: Sara Devlin (BACTS), Larry Allen (AVCOG), Stephanie Carver (KACTS)*
- *Trade and Industry: Tony Cameron (Maine Tourism Association), Dana Doran (Maine Professional Loggers), Maria Fuentes (Maine Better Transportation Association)*
- *State: Randy Charette (Maine Department of Agriculture)*

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Update on State Rail Plan Technical Activities
- Overview Draft State Rail Plan Document and Executive Summary
- Review and Input on Needs, Performance Measures, and Rail Service & Investment Program
- Review and Input on State Rail Plan Strategies
- Next Steps
- Questions and Answers

Meeting Notes

Welcome and Introductions

- *Nate Howard (MaineDOT)* – opened the meeting by welcoming everyone.
- MaineDOT, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), Cambridge Systematics (CS), RAC Members provided introductions via webcam.

Update on State Rail Plan Technical Activities

- *Lisa Destro (CS)* provided a status update on the state rail plan tasks, scope, and schedule.

Overview of Draft State Rail Plan Document and Executive Summary

- *Lisa Destro (CS)* provided an overview of the 90-page plan structure and contents. The plan follows the FRA outline guidance.

- Plan is supported by technical memos that provide additional detail: Rail System Existing Physical Conditions; Rail System Use and Economic Profile, Future Freight Rail System Demand, and Rail System Performance, Needs and Opportunities.
- Executive Summary is intended as a short public-facing document that focuses on high-level overview of plan purpose, vision and goals, and recommendations.

Review and Input on Needs, Performance Measures, and Rail Service & Investment Program

- Needs
 - *Lisa Destro (CS)* discussed passenger rail improvements, which are divided into major categories of safety, passenger service improvement, passenger service expansion, corridor preservation, and multimodal connectivity. In each category, the presentation offers potential benefits and examples.
 - *Lisa Destro (CS)* discussed freight rail improvements. These improvements are divided into the categories of SOGR/infrastructure upgrades, customer access, grade crossing safety, rolling stock, multimodal connectivity & terminal improvements. In each category, the presentation offers potential benefits and examples.
- Performance Measures
 - Performance measures for the Downeaster are categorized by financial, on-time performance (OTP), train delays, and customer service indicators (adjusted for train performance).
 - Analysis identified room for improvement in end point OTP due to single-track sections of the routes' right-of-way in ME and NH; even minor disruptions result in passenger train interference and delays.
 - *Jonathan LaBonte (LARC)* asked whether MaineDOT might frame a performance measure as seeking operational support from NH or MA? Looking at future opportunities, it limits to how much Maine can improve passenger rail in the state given Federal funding limits.
 - *Nate Moulton (MaineDOT)*: Not out of bounds, but can get to the target via different means and that might be one way of getting there. Continuous improvement target. In the current draft, that particular political issue is not referenced.
- Rail performance measures are categorized by system effectiveness, condition, safety, and initiatives. System effectiveness sets targets for the system's use; system safety is tracked by FRA reportable incidents; system condition measures establish targets that meet current standards; and system initiatives aim to raise current standards.
 - *Jonathan LaBonte (LARC)* asked whether there are performance measures around grade crossing closures, given the measure about rehabilitation and upgraded rail crossings.
 - *Nate Howard (MaineDOT)* noted that the original intent had been to keep it more general, but MaineDOT and LARC agreed that it would be appropriate to revise this measure. **Action**: Revise measure to include crossing closures in the language.
 - *Andreas Aepli (CS)* added that Section 130 increased funding that could be spent on rail crossing closures to 100k.

- *Will Roseborough (CSX)* noted that CSX considers this issue very important as well. There is a direct correlation between safety and closing/consolidation. The more we can partner with the states/FRA to work through improvements, the better.
- *Nate Moulton (MaineDOT)*: Open to taking a look at crossing closures. Closed 2 crossings in Fairfield Center a few years ago, and there have been others. Local town support is crucial. The Grade Crossing Plan also provides more detail on strategy around crossings.
- *Nathan Howard (MaineDOT)*: 286,000 target could be more specific. **Action**: Rather than “no” or “yes,” consider revising measure to include total mileage/percentage complete of that mileage.
- *Nathan Howard (MaineDOT)* added that the draft Rail Plan will be available soon for this group’s review, but that the team is currently completing edits.

Passenger Rail Program

- *Andreas Aeppli (CS)* provided an overview of the six elements to the short-term passenger rail program:
 1. Downeaster Wells Station Double Track and Platform
 2. Positive Train Control (PTC) on the Downeaster
 3. Portland Station Relocation
 4. New West Falmouth Station
 5. Rockland Branch Coastal Connection Service Extension Pilot
 6. Passenger Rail Service Expansion Planning
- *Jonathan LaBonte (LARC)* asked how projects move from planning to actual extension, citing Lewiston-Auburn studies as one example of 25 years of planning without action. Will the plan lay out how these things move along?
 - *Nate Moulton (MaineDOT)* said that if projects show a certain level of promise or ridership or viability for funding, they move forward. Otherwise, they do not. All programs require showing Feds that you have significant match in hand.
 - *Jonathan LaBonte (LARC)* stated that the more DOT can do in this report to offer harder metrics would be helpful. How one study’s outcomes will be measured as far as “go” or “no go.” As it is now, it’s grey. It makes it hard to talk to stakeholders when there’s not a rigorous “what needs to be in place for a go.”
 - *Nate Moulton (MaineDOT)* noted that this document does include a section that lays out these basic parameters for what would be required to get funding.
 - *Will Roseborough (CSX)* added that CSX carefully tracking the Corridor Development Program. Wants to ensure that CSX can support studies so they’re not done in a vacuum.
- *Andreas Aeppli (CS)* provided an overview the long-term passenger rail program:

1. CSX Mainline Double-Tracking to Accommodate Downeaster Operations
2. Preservation of Rail Corridors
3. Continue Passenger Rail Service Expansion

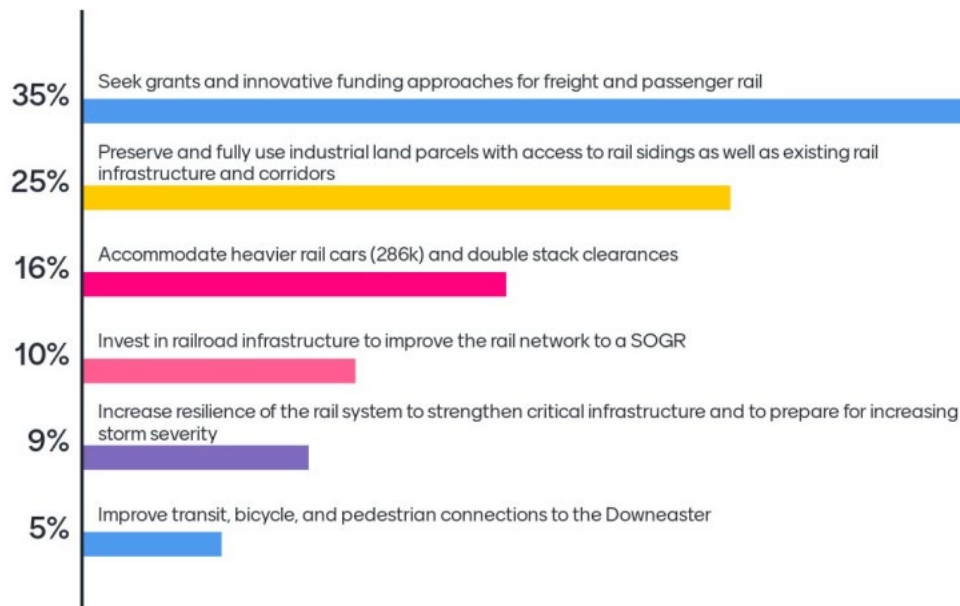
Freight Rail Program

- *Andreas Aeppli (CS)* provided an overview the short-term freight rail program. Some privately-funded, some are a mix of public and private
 1. Rockland Branch bridge improvements
 2. Waterville-Mattawamkeag 286k capacity and safety improvements
 3. Waterville-North Yarmouth upgrades and rail crossing safety improvements
 4. 286 capacity
 5. Rail Highway Crossing Safety Program
 6. Industrial Rail Access Program
 7. Bridge upgrades
 8. Various, 286k rail car capacity
 9. Improve tie conditions
 10. Rail bridge improvements
 11. Increase Rigby Yard capacity
 12. Maintain and expand Northern ME freight car fleet
 13. SLR locomotive modernization
 14. Upgrade trackage from Bangor through Moosehead
 15. Maine Northern Rail Improvements Project
 16. Maine Woods to Water Rail Connection Project
- *Dana Doran (Maine Professional Loggers)* commented on #12, noting that rail cars that can move logs are unavailable right now. Demand and need for more rail car availability, mostly in CSX and CP territory. Trucking capacity so low that having the ability to move product by rail would be a great opportunity. **Action:** Make this modification.
- *Andreas Aeppli (CS)* provided an overview the long-term freight rail program.
 1. Upgrade trackage from Bangor through Moosehead
 2. Rail Highway Crossing Safety Program
 3. Add/expand sidings between Waterville and Portland
 4. Increase usage of International Marine Terminal in Portland
 5. Improvements in Waterville
 6. Add loading site at Skyway Industrial Park
 7. Upgrade rail spur at Skyway Industrial Park, Presque Isle
 8. Propane Storage Tracks at Auburn, Millinocket, Hampden, Presque Isle
 9. Maintain and expand Northern ME fleet to meet customer needs
 10. Double-stack clearances on main lines
 11. Improvements at Auburn
 12. Woodland pulp mill bridge improvements
- **Action:** Propane storage project (#8) requires edits; is not just MNR in terms of responsibility and should be modified from just “Northern Maine.”
- *Andreas Aeppli (CS)* reviewed the rail service and investment program. It also includes funding MaineDOT is likely to win through competitive programs. *Nate Moulton (MaineDOT)* noted that on the freight side, much of the funding is private investment. Much of this private investment is underreported.

Recommended Policies and Strategies Workshop

This section was conducted using Menti polling software. The first question asked participants to prioritize short-term strategies offered in the MSRP (Figure 1). Respondents ranked “seeking grants and innovative funding approaches” as the top priority, with preservation and use and industrial land parcels and accomodation of rail cars as the second and third top-ranked choices.

Figure 1 Poll: How would you weigh the short-term strategies of the MSRP?



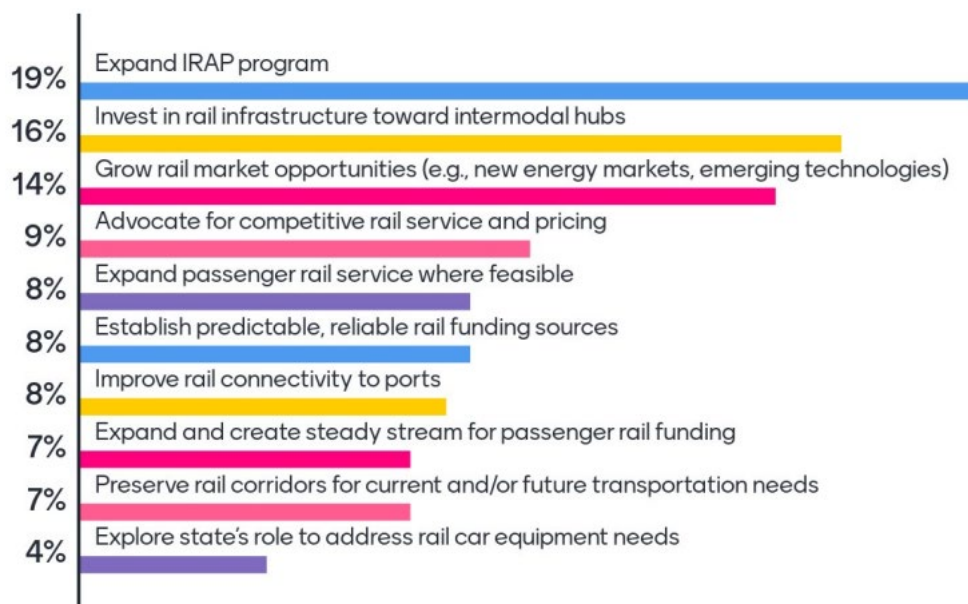
The next question asked participants about any additional strategies MaineDOT should consider over the short term, which was defined as the subsequent four 4 years. Respondents submitted two answers to this question, both of which focused on financial tools:

- Cross-department business development incentives (DECD?)
- Public/private partnerships for rail car purchases beyond those just with rail or mill owners

The third question asked respondents to prioritize long-term strategies offered in the MSRP (Figure 2). The top-ranked strategy was to expand the IRAP program, which was consistent with the strong support for the program expressed during stakeholder outreach interviews. The second and third top choices, respectively, were to invest in rail infrastructure toward intermodal

hubs and to grow rail market opportunities. Perhaps because it was highlighted as a short-term strategy as well, addressing rail car equipment needs was the lowest-ranked priority.

Figure 2 Poll: How would you weigh the long-term strategies of the MSRP?



The next question asked if participants to identify any additional long-term strategies for MaineDOT's consideration. *Jonathan LaBonte (LARC)* contributed two strategies:

- Whether existing funding allocation for passenger rail funding should be revisited (including existing service locations and non-Maine service). Maine should consider the cost of serving wealthier states.
- Land use performance incentives (municipalities that zone for certain uses like industrial or create density zoning to support housing) see state investment. Towns between major hubs have no interest in industry but have enormous sway on rail service. Every town wants passenger rail, but are not supportive of freight.

Next Steps and Proposed Studies/Activities

- *Lisa Destro (CS)* summarized the next steps, activities and studies once SRP is completed:
 - Update Downeaster Service Development Plan
 - Continue Rail Use Advisory Council process
 - Complete ongoing passenger rail feasibility studies
 - Develop a baseline planning criteria that functions as a high-level screening tool for passenger rail service expansion proposals. The initial set of screening criteria includes 11 factors.
 - *Jonathan LaBonte (LARC)* added that climate impact and equity are important pieces for inclusion in the screening criteria. Suggested benchmarking with existing Downeaster corridors where possible. *Lisa Destro (CS)* noted that the

“comparable corridor” factor could include the Downeaster. **Action:** Consider how climate and equity considerations might be integrated into screening criteria.

- Next steps are to incorporate input from MaineDOT and this group into the plan and to post the draft plan for public comment end of December 2022. The final public meeting will take place in January 2023 and the final plan will be submitted to FRA in February 2023.
- *Nate Howard* (MaineDOT) offered closing remarks. The team will aim to send the RAC the plan as soon as possible.