

Meeting Notes

Date: 01.20.23

Notes Taken By: VHB

Place: Virtual (Zoom)

Re: Public Meeting

Project No.: 55607.01

PANELISTS:

Nate Howard, MaineDOT
Nate Moulton, MaineDOT
Natalie Bogart, NNEPRA

Maggie Maddox, VHB
Tim Bryant, VHB
Jack Benoit, VHB

Matt Hogan, VHB
Kathryn Rasmussen, VHB

Meeting Notes and Discussion

Nate Howard, MaineDOT introduced the project as an effort which assessed demand and viability including passenger rail between the communities of Portland and Bangor. He then handed it over to Maggie Maddox, VHB to begin slideshow. Maggie Maddox introduced the team from VHB. Maggie Maddox provided an overview of the project, including the project purpose, the Study Area corridor, and how the team worked with an advisory committee throughout the analysis. She outlined the process the team followed to understand existing travel in the Study Area corridor and shared relevant findings.

Question: Asked via chat if Bangor was the only terminus being considered or if any consideration had gone to areas like the town of Orono or the University of Maine campus (Jacqueline Gill)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: The catchment area around Bangor does include areas to the north and east. This would include Orono and the campus.

Question: A participant asked via chat what percentage of estimated trips are oriented to Boston and beyond.

Maggie Maddox, VHB: Based on data we have on existing bus service within the corridor as well as Downeaster data, there are 4.5-6.5 out-of-corridor trips for every in-corridor trip.

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT stated that eight questions had already been answered in the chat.

Question: Retired from the New York State Department of Transportation and had two questions for the team. He asked how the team handled the induced demand resulting from train service providing service to various stations where you have economic development? (Jack Madden)

Maggie Maddox, VHB: The team did not factor in induced demand because the mode of the proposed transit service was unknown. However, the team did use statewide growth projections to account for future anticipated growth. This took into account local growth and local economic development plans.

Question: Asked how the team accounted for the advantages you would have by use of passenger traffic on lower road by conflict avoidance? He said the lower road would have about 2/3 of the trip between Portland and Bangor on an alignment with very little freight traffic. Versus if you go on another line with direct conflict with CSX freight traffic. (Jack Madden)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: At this point this is a transit demand study. If you consider the lower road, at either end you are still on the CSX line. But overall, we are not at that level in terms of looking at these passenger rail and bus alternatives really in depth.

Comment: I am so looking forward to passenger rail to other major cities. She worries that VHB potential ridership numbers are underestimated because it only takes into account people who currently use the corridor. If there was a train between cities, her family would use it. The drive can be exhausting and hazardous. We would travel there because a train service would be available. We would travel because a train service existed. These potential numbers need to be included in the analysis, VHB is not counting us. (Patricia Barber)

Comment: Excited about passenger rail. He frequently uses Concord but it is difficult to get to Waterville or Augusta. He does not think VHB is capturing the amount of people that could get to those cities with new service. (Nick Navarre)

Question: How much is being looked at feeder bus services to this potential rail line? He lives in Ellsworth and there is the Downeast bus service to Bangor. Is enhancing connector services being considered? I.e. Belfast to Augusta to get riders to the train line.

Maggie Maddox, VHB: This analysis was not done for a specific mode. Feeder service is definitely something that would increase users on a service, but this is further down the planning line and relates to more specific station location.

Question: Were any environmental factors like parking availability? (Andrew)

Maggie Maddox, VHB: We looked at population and density for similar service in the peer study. Interconnected service were not considered at this time.

Question: How many more steps before Bangor passenger rail would move forward. Nate Howard rephrases it – where do we go after this study? (Nick Przekopowski)

Nathan Moulton, MaineDOT: There are a lot of steps in developing a passenger service. It takes time, funding, ordering equipment and doing the construction. The Downeaster hybrid equipment ordered this past summer is coming in 2030. How you move forward depends on the type of service, more round trips mean more equipment. Generally, it would take some time.

Question: Used to work for Maine Central Railroad. Q1: Are you going to try to activate both the lower road via Augusta and the back road via Lewiston to get to Bangor? (Stan Jordan)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: Those are the two rail alternatives, the either / or, right now we are just looking at overall demand.

Comment: Augusta line has essentially been de-activated in the past couple of years. Lewiston is CSX line. (Stan Jordan)

Question: What train speeds are you considering as part of this? (Stan Jordan)

Nathan Moulton, MaineDOT: As you start to develop a service you would look at all of these things: service, train speed. They would have to be competitive to travel times on the highway. Car travel times are 1-2 hours and bus at 2 hours. Speeds would have to be substantial. Minimum of class 3, probably a class 4 to be competitive with stops.

Comment: As you go up faster and faster, you end up changing signaling and it gets more involved. But you'll have to go fast enough so people will want to ride these trains. (Stan Jordan)

Comment: A Bangor City Counselor. A volunteer committee member. Comments thank you to project team's effort to put out study and lay down foundation of future studies. Thanks to all involved in meeting, this can't be done without active citizens. Feel free to contact him personally or target the Maine rail group if you'd like to get more involved with Rail in the state. There is universal acclaim and excitement for the potential extension of Portland to Bangor. There is a lot of support

from young people, specifically the U of Maine students. Wherever we expand rail across the world, we have economic boom in these areas. It makes it so much easier for working people located in these areas. (Joseph Leonard)

Comment: Thanks everyone for taking the time, doing study, and making available for public comment. He and his wife have three small children and this makes it more convenient. Rail more convenient than bus. Family comes in from Boston, it excites them to be able to offer this as an option for them. Definitely in support of all the work and making this available. (Michael Beck)

Comment: As a climate activist, rail is a big win for her. It is good for environment based economy. Better for environment than bus. Improving connections to the flagship university to Augusta and Portland would be great. (Jaquelyn Gill)

Question: What is capture rate of Downeaster?

Maggie Maddox, VHB: 0.43%.

Question: Has any consideration been given to tourism benefits in this study? (Andrew)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: No the team did not go into economic developments. This is just looking at demand in catchment areas. This is something we would maybe move forward with in a future Economic Analysis study.

Question: How much of existing rail could be used for the proposed corridor? (Ted)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: Both corridors are existing. Lower road from Brunswick to Augusta is currently out of service.

Question: There are three major colleges in or along the corridor, has this been considered in ridership analysis? He thinks they would be big contributors to ridership. (Jon Grabak)

Maggie Maddox, VHB: Each of these were included in catchment areas. Station placement is not included in study.

Question: At this point are we hoping to both expand Amtrak or operate by MaineDOT. (Nick Navarre)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: It would most likely be a service run by Amtrak.

Comment: Supports positive comments from pro-rail people. His organization has talked to the bus companies that operate in Bangor. They would be ready to expand quickly if enhanced service was brought to Bangor. They would expand to Acadia National Park. The local bus that now serves Orono is in place and would be willing to pick up the slack. In all other transit studies he's looked at in other states, the economic development is huge. Younger people stay, older people have better travel options. Students will start shuffling back and forth and may not want to own cars. These costs are hidden but they are there. (Russel Barber)

Comment: A new home owner in Brewer. Fiancé and her are one car household but both of them commute. The idea of having passenger rail while they commute is great. Young families may not be able to afford 2 cars or want to afford two cars. She went to college in Waterville and the barriers to getting off campus were big. The potential to retain talent in Maine would increase due to economic benefits. Envisions same type of access as she experienced in UK at least in Northeast one day. (Julia Endicott)

Comment: Comments they are glad this study is being done. Thinks that intercity passenger rail is a good direction to go for Maine. It's been successful up until Brunswick. He thinks ridership potential is more than we estimated. Catchment areas for Augusta and Waterville are probably larger than what's been shown. Capture rate would be more like Illinois and

Downeaster services. Ratio for regional to local trips would be closer to 6.5 as 85% of Downeaster trips are Boston-oriented. For every trip in Maine, number 1 destination is Boston. Streetlight can be weak on estimating long trips. (Evakg)

Matt Hogan comments that's the last of the raised hands.

Question: Have you looked at the pre- and post- Downeaster data? Did Downeaster meet or exceed expectations? What were the impacts to intercity bus service? (Andrew)

Nathan Moulton, MaineDOT: Does not remember off top of his head on what 20-year estimate was in Downeaster plan. 200,000 in first year was about what was expected. It is a market where there's congestion, things like they pandemic play a big role. We are still working our way back from that. One thing we have noticed is that commuters have not come back near the numbers that we saw pre-pandemic.

Nathan Moulton, MaineDOT: Bus service varies by destination. You can buy an Amtrak ticket through to Bangor, this is something which exists today. Whether we started a new bus service or enhanced the existing one or started a new rail service, it is reasonable to expect this would negatively impact the private bus service. They're in the business of making money. Tickets for new service would be cheaper.

Comment: Thanks the team. There are several questions that need to be answered. People who choose not to drive or can't drive, these people weren't estimated. The slideshow did not estimate people coming north from Boston or anywhere else in the US. 4.5M per year go to Acadia. People might choose to take a train instead of driving 6, 7, 8 hours or more. Many of the busses do not stop downtown. People must walk if they use them at certain towns. This was not factored into the ridership numbers. All signs point to getting a feasibility study done. A propensity study does not cut it. (Richard Rudolph)

Question: Will the call be uploaded for viewing? (Anonymous)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: Answer is maybe. He will have to take a look at the captions and if they're ADA compliant. The slides will get posted along with the Study.

Question: Are there any issues with operating on privately owned rail line? (Anonymous)

Nathan Howard, MaineDOT: There are issues, but these things are negotiated and are not impossible. Either route uses a large portion of the CSX owned rail.

Comment: Lives in Bangor. Comments the idea of having train transportation from Boston to Portland to Bangor and the other way around would be a huge thing for the city. Likes the idea of the trains. There is convenience and you're able to meet people within the train. Would be a great thing for the region and all of the people who have chosen to live up in the area. (Colleen Wiley)

Comment: He is licensed professional engineer. He comments it is significant to realize that in the very near future the technology will be moving toward hydrogen. If you have a locomotive that operates on hydrogen, the exhaust is just water vapor. Future passenger rail running on hydrogen would be wonderful in terms of the effect on the atmosphere. This type of equipment is already at use in Europe and it will be a very short time before this becomes common place in the US. (Stanley C. Koski)

Questions Answered via Zoom Chat

Comment: Can make a suspended track like what they have in New York City. (Michael Garvey)

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: Thanks Michael. We are only at transit demand between Portland and Bangor at this point. Next steps may include looking at specific bus and rail alternatives.

Question: How much cost per miles on railroad tracks up to between Wells and Bangor? (Nick Przekopowski)

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: We will show cost estimates later in the slides.

Question: May be a few steps ahead, but if passenger rail is returned to Bangor, would it be possible to reconnect the hypothetical station in Bangor with the line the Downeast Scenic uses in Ellsworth? (Joey Martin)

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: The CSX-owned line in Brewer connects to the state-owned Calais Branch to Ellsworth. So yes, it is still possible.

Question: Potentially can we add the automobile train? (Michael Garvey)

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: Do you mean the Amtrack Auto Train that also carries vehicles? We are only looking at general transit demand right now. The review of alternatives would be a next step.

Question: Can you address why Lewiston-Auburn isn't being considered in this analysis? (Christine Guerette)

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: That study is ongoing. More details here:
<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/larailplan/>

Comment: I have a comment, hopefully I didn't miss my opportunity: I'm not sure if I missed this in the presentation, certainly it could have been considered within the demographics of who has vehicles - but I think it's important to consider the needs of our aging population, as well as our working population. Many people who are aging have lost (or will lose) access to their own vehicle, and due to their age require access to high level healthcare only available in larger cities, such as Portland or Boston. For those who are working, providing public transportation has been proven to assist those in lower-class or working class to increase their standard of living. Both of these demographics would significantly benefit from a frequent rail service from Bangor to Portland, and by extension, Boston. (Gabrielle Wiley)

Comment: For context, I live in Bangor and take care of an aging parent and have worked in healthcare in both downeast Maine and Bangor, so I have seen both sides of the system.

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: Thanks for the input Gabrielle.

Question: Why is the area west of Bangor, such as the Newport area, not highlighted on the study map? (Steve Ingalls)

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: We presumed transit stops in the areas of Portland, Brunswick, Augusta, Waterville and Bangor.

Question: Will there be a stop near the Maine state police academy? (Michael Garvey)

Michael: Also can the stop be early in the morning for people commuting to the academy.

Nate Howard, MaineDOT: We have not identified station locations. Only demand "catchment areas" around Portland, Brunswick, Augusta, Waterville and Bangor.

Comment: I just have a comment I know there more groves in near future to boost up the economics with Portland, and Bangor population with rails through towns and cities cross in the state of Maine. With people coming in for vacation, or fun activities. Business development can eventually grow in future time like for examples restaurants, shops, hotels, healthcare, concerts, and apartments as well. Thank you! (Nick Przekopowski)

Comment: I don't really have a question, it's more of a comment on behalf of the young people of Bangor. We all really want a train. Not just for ease of travel but for reduction of GHG's in the environment. There would be some travel out, but

in my educated opinion, way more people coming in to see what beauty our area has to offer. Furthermore, it would be so much more enjoyable to live here and have ease of access to other areas. Thank you! (Hope Eye)

Comment: Echoing what others have said — as someone who moved here with my family in 2013, I know that feeling more connected with Boston and other areas in the state, while still having access to the small-town feel and natural beauty of our state, would make this such a huge draw. I think we'd see more young people staying, and more families moving here. (Jacquelyn Gill)

Attendee Report

Report Generated: 2/3/2023 15:31

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Bangor Transit Propensity Study, 55607.01	846 8047 5837	1/19/2023 17:28	111	56	69	45	No

Host Details

Attended	User Name (Original Name)	Email	Join Time	Leave Time	Time in Session (minutes)	Is Guest	Country/Region Name
Yes	Matt Hogan	matthogan@vhb.com	1/19/2023 17:28	1/19/2023 19:19	111	No	United States

Panelist Details

Attended	User Name (Original Name)	Email	Join Time	Leave Time	Time in Session (minutes)	Is Guest	Country/Region Name
Yes	Maggie Maddox	mmaddox@vhb.com	1/19/2023 17:31	1/19/2023 17:31	1	Yes	United States
Yes	Nate Moulton (Maggie Maddox)	mmaddox@vhb.com	1/19/2023 17:31	1/19/2023 19:18	108	Yes	United States
Yes	Maggie Maddox	mmaddox@vhb.com	1/19/2023 17:33	1/19/2023 19:19	106	Yes	United States
Yes	Kathryn Rasmussen	krasmussen@vhb.com	1/19/2023 17:32	1/19/2023 19:19	107	Yes	United States
Yes	Nathan Howard	nathan.howard@maine.gov	1/19/2023 17:31	1/19/2023 19:19	109	Yes	United States
Yes	Natalie Bogart (Natalie)	natalie@nnepa.com	1/19/2023 18:59	1/19/2023 19:19	20	Yes	United States
Yes	Tim Bryant	tbryant@vhb.com	1/19/2023 17:49	1/19/2023 19:19	90	Yes	United States
Yes	Jack Benoit	jbenoit@vhb.com	1/19/2023 17:31	1/19/2023 19:19	108	Yes	United States

Attendee Details

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Yes	LeeAnne		1/19/2023 19:05	1/19/2023 19:09	4	Yes	United States
Yes	Colleen		1/19/2023 18:01	1/19/2023 19:19	78	Yes	United States

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Yes	Julia Endicott	1/19/2023 18:00	1/19/2023 19:11	71	Yes	United States
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Yes	Rep. Amy Roeder (she/her)	1/19/2023 18:49	1/19/2023 18:57	9	Yes	United States
	Anne Krieg# Development					
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	Kathleen O'Brien - Bangor					
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