

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Tuesday, August 22, 2023 9:18:02 PM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Tuesday, 22-Aug-2023 21:13:39 EDT
Name: Erin Arneson
Organization(if applicable):
Phone: 970-227-7428
Email: e.arneson.r@gmail.com

Topic:

Comments:

Dear Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council,

On behalf of the Town of Topsham's Bike and Pedestrian Committee, I write in strong support of the Merrymeeting Trail: Interim Trail Proposal. As a committee whose mission is to improve access to safe, active transportation throughout Topsham, we recognize that the interim trail is the most cost-effective option of all proposals that will expand recreational opportunities, improve health outcomes, and spur economic development in our region.

In 2019, Topsham residents participated in a community-wide event that established a comprehensive town plan, which lays out ambitious goals and serves as a guide at how to achieve them (Topsham Comprehensive Plan Update 2019). Through this process, residents have compelled this committee to improve local and regional mobility, improve access to nature, and improve opportunities that foster social/community connection. Specifically, the Comprehensive Plan Update identified the following strategy: Work regionally to seek funding opportunities for the Merrymeeting Trail to Kennebec River Trail. Supporting this interim trail would address this strategy and these key pillars of active transportation in Topsham by providing a safe route to neighboring towns that is accessible for all ages and mobility levels. Having access to safe places for active transportation also supports creating a healthier community and reduces economic impact of physical inactivity - which ranges from \$76 - \$117 billion annually across the United States (Gotschi and Mills, Active Transportation for America). More locally, the added opportunities for physical activity could be an "annual savings of \$287,331 from reduced spending on health related expenditures (RKG, Lower Rail Corridor Demographic and Economic Analysis)."

Beyond the impact of equitable access to open natural space for biking and walking (both ambulatory and non-ambulatory), the interim trail will also meet an expressed need of Town residents to use existing infrastructure to maximize economic return on investment. Access to recreational green spaces, such as this interim trail, improves property values with conservative estimates ranging between 2.5% to 5% increase in property values (RKG, Lower Rail Corridor Demographic and Economic Analysis). The economic gains from future sales with these increased property values would be even more impactful when factoring in the increased level of interest in moving to and living in towns along an interim trail (which is not often the case for living near railroads). Given the current projections of usage for interim trail (342-515 people per day) compared to rail (153-219 people per day) and the costs associated with the interim trail option as \$100,000,000 less than trail with rail, the interim trail option is the cost-effective and desired option for Topsham (RKG, Lower Rail Corridor Demographic and Economic Analysis).

In summary, the Town of Topsham Bike and Pedestrian Committee supports the Merrymeeting Trail: Interim Trail Proposal as a strategy to address Topsham's critical need for safe routes to commute to neighboring towns and access to natural recreational spaces.

Sincerely,

Erin Arneson

Chair of Town of Topsham Bike and Pedestrian Committee

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Wednesday, August 16, 2023 11:25:51 AM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Wednesday, 16-Aug-2023 11:24:01 EDT
Name: Audie Lee T Arbo
Organization(if applicable):
Phone: 2077357922
Email: audie.arbo@gmail.com

Topic:

Comments:

Dear Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council,

The Topsham Conservation Commission would like you to express our desire for the use of the Lower Road rail corridor. Upon reviewing the data on costs for the various alternative uses, potential users and economic benefits, it seems clear that the interim trail option provides the greatest benefit to the Town of Topsham at the lowest cost. We come to that conclusion for the following reasons.

- Freight Rail Use Unlikely

The potential for freight use along this line in the next couple of decades is very low. There is unlikely to be an industrial user in the towns along the corridor that would require shipping of heavy or bulk materials at frequent intervals. Trucks could provide all the anticipated shipping needs in the area.

- Passenger Rail Demand Low and Too Costly

The cost of upgrading the tracks for passenger use is substantial. Obtaining federal funding for passenger rail improvements is a competitive process. Maine in general has too low a population density to rank high in the process. This corridor in particular has exceedingly low demand and lower population density than the alternative Back Road route from Portland to Bangor through Lewiston. In addition the ongoing subsidy to support reasonable fares is higher than the existing passenger rail in Maine. Plus the potential demand could easily be handled by buses at a tiny fraction of the investment and little or no ongoing subsidies as the existing commercial intercity bus lines demonstrate.

- Rail with Trail Adds Substantial Additional Costs and Environmental Impacts

The cost of keeping the rail and putting a trail alongside is 4 times the cost of the interim trail option. Considering the unlikely demand for freight along this line, this seems like a high burden for little future gain. Upgrading the tracks for passenger use would require replacing the rail anyway. In addition close to 50% of the ties need to be replaced as well as most of the signals. There seems to be no benefit to keeping the existing rail infrastructure in place allowing it to deteriorate further only to be replaced when passenger rail becomes feasible again.

There would also be environmental impacts to adding the additional width needed for a rail with trail. This corridor crosses many sensitive habitats that are already threatened by development and climate change. We don't need to make it worse for little benefit.

- Trail would provide safe active transportation and recreation.

Many people in Topsham run, walk, bike, and skate board along our arterial roadways. While there are many trails, the roadways are more accessible to most people and are often needed to access trails without trailhead parking. A trail along this corridor would provide a safer way for residents in our urban core to access active transportation and

recreational options they don't have today.

The trail would connect to the Head of Tide park, the Cathance River trail, and several Brunswick Topsham Land Trust holdings including The Cathance River Nature Preserve, the Rogers Property, the Tarbox preserve, and Hideaway Farm. The trail passes through the Lower Cathance River and Muddy River high priority focus areas identified in Topsham's Natural Area Plan and BTLT's strategic plan. This means that more open space parcels along this corridor could be conserved in the future.

- The Merrymeeting Trail is an implementation strategy in Topsham's Comprehensive Plan. The Topsham Comprehensive Plan effort brought together over 300 town residents in the fall of 2017 to shape the future vision of the town. Out of that effort came a set of big ideas. One of which was Access to Open Space. Within that was the goal of developing regional trail connections. Building the Merrymeeting Trail to connect to the Kennebec River Rail Trail in Gardiner is one of the implementation strategies for this goal. Due to the costs, we don't see that happening unless we choose to use the existing rail bed for the trail.

Sincerely,
The Topsham Conservation Commission
Victor Langelo
Shana Stewart Deeds
Audie Arbo

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Sunday, August 20, 2023 10:32:10 AM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Sunday, 20-Aug-2023 10:29:20 EDT
Name: Amy Ruksznis
Organization(if applicable):
Phone: 2075042778
Email: ruksznis@topshamvet.com

Topic:

Comments:

I would love to see a trail connecting all of these communities. As a resident of Bowdoinham and a business owner in Topsham, I would utilize this trail. I already enjoy the rail trail in the Gardiner area.

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Sunday, August 20, 2023 2:47:16 PM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Sunday, 20-Aug-2023 14:21:24 EDT
Name: Scot McFarlane
Organization(if applicable):
Phone:
Email: scot@oxbowhistory.com

Topic:

Comments:

Good day,
I'm writing in support of the Merrymeeting Trail as a resident of Bowdoinham and an environmental historian.

No one has the ability to predict the future, but it seems clear that if the trail were built then it would serve to connect and strengthen the communities through which it passes. It would be a safe way for community members to travel between towns and get exercise. Currently, I do not feel safe having my sons bike down 24 to Richmond with me given the narrow shoulder and the busy road.

I'm all for trains, and often take the Brunswick train into Boston for work, but there is no current scenario where freight or passenger service makes any economic sense on this line. Surely in two or three decades there will be comfortable electric buses that could offer passenger service between the river towns. To reconnect with our rivers and our shared history we cannot let nostalgia hold us back from repurposing this route.

In some ways this situation is reminiscent of another controversy downriver in which a small group of citizens attempted to use the courts stymie the removal of the FJW bridge in Brunswick/Topsham. Their efforts have served to increase the cost of the bridge as well as add significant delays that will inconvenience many people. In this case, it is clear that the Merrymeeting Trail offers a host of benefits and will someday be built, so the question appears as to how much longer will this valuable project be delayed. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and service.

Best regards,
Scot

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Sunday, August 20, 2023 4:02:17 PM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Sunday, 20-Aug-2023 15:53:26 EDT
Name: Susan Rae-Reeves
Organization(if applicable):
Phone: 406-2195
Email: susan.baydur@gmail.com

Topic:

Comments:

I know only a little about plans for the Merrymeeting Trail, but what I have heard sounds very positive. I do know that the current roads connecting Topsham and Bowdoinham are treacherous for cyclists. And unfortunately, in the 2022 repaving that took place, that has only gotten worse, with fairly narrow shoulders dropping off precipitously into a sandy area that would cause a nasty fall for a cyclist who misjudged the shoulder in an attempt to avoid 45 mile an hour vehicles. So a Merrymeeting Trail sounds like a very good idea. Rail service, light or heavy also sounds like a very good idea. Anything that might reduce carbon emissions on Maine roadways. Thanks for listening.

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Monday, August 21, 2023 8:42:32 AM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Monday, 21-Aug-2023 08:39:03 EDT
Name: Jarrod Dumas
Organization(if applicable):
Phone: 2075570790
Email: jdumas2016@gmail.com

Topic:

Comments:

I am so excited about the possibility of this trail being created! As a runner and cyclist, it is challenging to find safe routes to cover significant distances on a bike, but this would be absolutely amazing!!

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Monday, August 21, 2023 3:22:36 PM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Monday, 21-Aug-2023 15:16:58 EDT
Name: Franklin Burroughs
Organization(if applicable):
Phone: 207 522 4021
Email: fburroug@bowdoin.edu

Topic:

Comments:

I strongly support the trail, and believe that the intermediate option would bring the greatest benefit to the most people.

Thank you.

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Tuesday, August 22, 2023 2:12:58 PM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Tuesday, 22-Aug-2023 13:50:34 EDT
Name: Rebecca Jauch
Organization(if applicable):
Phone: 207-522-7438
Email: rebecca.jauch@legislature.maine.gov

Topic:

Comments:

I am writing as the current State Representative for House District 51 (Topsham, part) to express my support for the Interim Trail proposal by the Lower Road RUAC. As noted in the council's majority report, an Interim Trail will provide our community with a usable trail at a fraction of the cost of the alternative Trail with Rail option, and given the many competing transportation needs in our state, I believe it is prudent in this case to choose the most fiscally responsible option that still allows people to use and enjoy the corridor.

Thank you for your consideration,
Rebecca Jauch
State Representative
House District 51 (Topsham, part)

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Tuesday, August 22, 2023 3:27:57 PM

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of the State of Maine Mail System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Tuesday, 22-Aug-2023 14:38:22 EDT
Name: Dan Ankeles
Organization(if applicable):
Phone:
Email: dan.ankeles@legislature.maine.gov

Topic:

Comments:

To the Lower Road RUAC:

As the state representative for District 100, the central part of Brunswick that contains the corridor in question, and a member of the Legislature's Transportation Committee, I strongly urge members of the RUAC to vote in support of the interim trail option.

The Lower Road trail would be a major opportunity to connect our communities, get more people off the road and increase pedestrian and bicycle safety. This trail would be an important economic development driver for Brunswick and the entire region, especially with the rise of e-bikes, and accomplish a longtime goal of town officials and staff.

It should be clear by now that a vote for the rail-with-trail option is a vote to do nothing, because, despite what passenger rail expansion advocates will tell you, the cost is overwhelming, both to governments and to those who would ride. There is no magic federal money tree - at least none that we would qualify to pick from. And the lack of ridership potential means the fares would be inaccessible to low-income Mainers, even with massive subsidies.

The shame of it all is that expansion of passenger rail, when compared to other means of transportation, is completely ill suited to meet the needs of Maine's most vulnerable citizens in every single Maine municipality, especially the largest ones. Because of my work in the Legislature, I've spoken with people who live in those places, and what I've heard is a need for expansion of bus service, both in terms of routes and better hours.

To truly look at this vote through the lens of advancing equity and not through the lens of train nostalgia, know that a rail-with trail-vote would cannibalize resources that could otherwise be used to strengthen existing (and very underfunded) public transit systems that could help people of limited means get to work, school, medical appointments or even just the grocery store.

We have people in this state who turn up their nose at better and expanded bus service and point-to-point on-demand public transit because somehow a train to Boston is going to lift up Mainers living larger cities. When we point this out to our friends in Bangor, we are dismissed as "southern Maine liberals." That's regional politics for you.

The truth is that Maine isn't these other well populated, densely packed states, and even climate migration isn't going to change this for many decades at minimum. Spend our train dollars making the service we have now better. NNEPRA has some strong plans for doing just that, and that's what we should be supporting.

An interim trail is the best, most efficient and most productive option, and this RUAC should embrace it full on. Thank you for your consideration.

If required, please respond as soon as possible.

From: Communications.MaineDOT@maine.gov
To: [Howard, Nathan](#)
Subject: Lower Road Public Comments
Date: Thursday, August 3, 2023 12:21:42 PM

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The following message was submitted from your MaineDOT website contact form .

Date: Thursday, 03-Aug-2023 12:14:23 EDT
Name: Matt Abbott
Organization(if applicable):
Phone:
Email: matthewabbott87@gmail.com

Topic:

Comments:

I'd like to see a multi-use trail established here. That maximizes the amount of people that can use the trail and funds that can support the maintenance of the trail.

Multiuse allows the midcoast area to take advantage of some of the economic benefits of the motorized community that has benefited other communities in the state. The last number I recollect seeing on this is that the motorized community has a \$1.2 billion positive impact on the state.

If required, please respond as soon as possible.