



# Meeting Notes

**Meeting Date:** April 26, 2023

**Notes Prepared By:** Phil Goff, Project Manager

**Place:** Virtual Meeting

**Date:** 04/26/2023

**Project No.:** WIN: 24759.00 / VHB: 55647.00

**Project Name:** MaineDOT RUAC Supporting Study – Lower Road Rail Corridor

## RUAC Meeting Attendees (*bold indicates attendance*):

MaineDOT Team	RUAC	Guests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nate Howard</b>, (MaineDOT, PM)</li> <li>• <b>Nate Moulton</b>, (MaineDOT Dir. of Freight and Passenger Services)</li> <li>• <b>Dakota Hewlett</b>, MaineDOT Active Transportation Program Manager</li> <li>• <b>Phil Goff</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Tim Bryant</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Mike McDonough</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• Eric Halvorsen (RKG)</li> <li>• <b>Larry Cranor</b> (RKG)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chair Mathew Eddy</b> (Executive Director, Midcoast Council of Governments)</li> <li>• <b>Doug Beck</b>, ME Bureau of Parks and Lands</li> <li>• Nicole Briand, Town Manager, Bowdoinham</li> <li>• Tony Cameron, CEO, Maine Tourism Assoc.</li> <li>• <b>Jeremy Cluchey</b>, Chair of Merrymeeting Board of Supervisors (Bowdoinham)</li> <li>• <b>Doug Ebert</b>, Chair of Select Board, Town of Farmingdale</li> <li>• <b>Tom Farrell</b>, Director of Parks and Rec., Town of Brunswick</li> <li>• <b>Gay Grant</b>, City of Gardiner and chair of Trail Committee</li> <li>• <b>Gary Lamb</b>, Hallowell City Manager</li> <li>• <b>Keith Luke</b>, EcDev Director, City of Augusta</li> <li>• <b>Matt Nixon</b>, Select Board, Town of Topsham</li> <li>• <b>Carolann Ouellette</b>, Director, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation</li> <li>• <b>Richard Rudolph Ph.D</b>, Chair, ME Rail Users Network and on board of MRTC</li> <li>• <b>Larissa Loon</b>, Richmond</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peter Cole, Maine Rail Group</li> <li>• Joe Leonard, Maine Rail Group/Bangor City Council</li> <li>• Phil Garwood, Merrymeeting Board of Supervisors</li> </ul>

## Agenda:

- > Introductions
- > High-level Summary of the Benefits of Passenger Rail for the Lower Road Corridor (Peter Cole and Joe Leonard from the Maine Rail Transit Coalition, 10 min.)



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- Q&A and Discussion (10 min.)
- › High-level Summary of the Benefits of a Trail for the Lower Road Corridor (Peter Garwood from the Merrymeeting Trail organization, 10 min.)
  - Q&A and Discussion (10 min.)
- › Overview of the Draft Economic Impact Analysis report (Larry Cranor, RKG Associates, 20 min.)
  - Q&A and Discussion (30 min.)
- › Agenda for May RUAC Meeting and other events (Nate, 10 min.)
  - Draft Summary Lower Road Corridor report, VHB
  - Hi-rail Tour (May)
  - Public Meeting (June)
  - Other?
- › Public Comment Period

### Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

After the slide presentation from the Maine Rail Transit Coalition's Peter Cole (to be attached), the following discussion ensued:

- › Richard: getting up to date on the State Legislature bill 860...the work session has been postponed. Last year's study did not cover the key issues involved. In the 1980's, the Legislature had the wisdom to preserve rail corridors for future rail and the current Governor and DOT Commissioner seemed very interested in converting the corridors to bike trails.
- › Gay: I've studied 19<sup>th</sup> century history of rail in Maine. How do we take fixed rail lines from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a 21<sup>st</sup> century model of transportation that is economically feasible? Is there technology to help move us forward?
  - Peter: in the 1950's, we started suburban sprawl, hollowing out Town centers based on rail stations. We need to build more urban areas that attract young residents who want to live there. If we lose the rail ROWs as the population grows, it will prevent that. We are in a weather sweet spot that more people will want to experience in the future. A Maine corridor system of trains will prevent expansion of I-95 and I-295. Look at the Strong Towns web site to understand the Ponzi scheme associated with continued suburban development.
  - Gay: In your presentation, I could slide "bus" into each slide that referenced "train" and I believe it wouldn't be much different. How can we afford trains when buses are more flexible?



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- Peter: if we have the corridor available, I believe the Federal Gov't can fund our network. Buses are more wear and tear on the highways (equivalent of 11,000 cars), and trains are better for ADA and even those with back problems who aren't comfortable on the bus.
- › Matt N: Cars were invented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century too. There is a technology that can be used: hydrogen fuel cell light rail could be used. It cost \$30m in San Bernadino, CA. In 2024, the New Haven to Boston corridor will be electrified is \$3m/mile but the estimate in this report is \$11m/mile. The economic impact for rail used Sept 2021 data which was a spike in COVID related problems. I think we have technology options that can work. We need to save \$\$ on roadway expenditure.
  - Peter: in LA area, all asphalt bus stops needed to be replaced by concrete
- › Matt E: if you are interested in increased service to Augusta and Bangor, is this the best route or would running thru L/A from Portland be a better route?
  - Peter: that is why we need a new study in Bill 860. Perhaps both routes are needed with passenger rail on Lower Road and LRT on the Berlin Subdivision. In San Diego, the expanded the LRT system after one initial line.
  - Nate H: our position now is a two-year bus pilot to better understand demand, implemented as soon as next year. This comes from the Portland to Bangor study we did last year.
- › Gay: we keep hearing about other technologies that are south of us, but what has DOT looked at for other technologies?
  - Nate H: we haven't really looked at other technologies beyond what is currently available and what was documented in the Bangor Propensity Study.

KRRT's Phil Garwood presentation about the Kennebec River Rail Trail history and programming:

- › Originally, the route was RWT trail because the segment was still considered "active"; funding came in 1995
- › 1996 – KRRT Board of Supervisors established., with Augusta as the lead Town
- › 1997 – engineering/design began, with lease agreement w DOT in 2000
- › 2002 – Phase 1 with Phase 2 in 2003. Phase 3 in 2007. In Hallowell, people consider it the "Great Wall". Prior to 2010, it was stonedust trail and it was paved afterwards.
- › 2018 – 10 ft trail extended to Augusta's riverfront area
- › Friends of the KRRT works closely with the Board of Supervisors, but we can raise \$\$, so they fill that role
- › Primarily, the offset from edge of tracks in 18' but in one section, the trail is 6 ft wide and offset only 10 ft
- › Gardiner to Augusta route is so heavily used, even in winter, that we now have the trail plowed. The same issue may come up in other Towns with an extension of the Merrymeeting Trail to connect to the KRRT
- › I've heard many people from out of state who eat at the A-1 Diner in Gardiner and use the trail
- › Half Ironman event in Augusta used the KRRT which was one reason the event located there



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- › Trail is well used for fundraising events and is a community focal point

After Phil's presentation, the following discussion ensued:

- › Richard: I've ridden from end to end many times and think the trail is great, even with the rail crossings that are part of the design (these would need to be converted to be bridges). I appreciate that planners figured out a way to have the trail and the rail side by side
- › Matt N: in the past, concerns have been expressed about the discomfort of having rail next to trail. What was the nature of the resistance encountered 20+ years ago?
  - Phil Garwood: even bicycling on a trail next to an active rail line is better than riding alongside motor vehicles on a roadway
- › Gay: when the trail was built, there was no option other than RWT, correct?
  - Phil: yes, and we wanted to run some of the route near the river to get away from the rail line where feasible. If the Council decides to go with Interim Trail, that would make it simpler to connect to the Gardiner landing. This is why the KRRT Board of Supervisors supports that option.
- › Jeremy: the Bangor Study was mode agnostic and made clear only about 5 bus loads of people. If/when that demands change in the future, the "trail until rail" option allows for future technologies to be used.
  - Richard: the propensity study that VHB did focused primarily on Bangor-to-Portland, and did not focus on opportunities to link to Boston. That is why we need a full-blown feasibility study, projected out to the future, not just today's demand.

After the slide presentation from RKG's Larry Cranor (to be attached), the following discussion ensued:

- › Matt N: The \$363m cost estimate seems really high. The cost for the Northeast Corridor update was \$4m/mile while this corridor is \$11m/mile. How can we account for that?
  - Nate H: Nate M reviewed some examples from New England last time and VHB's numbers seem to correspond
  - Mike M (VHB): The Northeast Corridor supports dozens if not hundreds of trains per day, requiring ongoing maintenance: tie and rail replacement, maintenance of signal and overhead catenary systems, etc. The Lower Road has not supported train traffic for decades and there are a lot of deferred maintenance that would need to be done to get up and running. For instance: there is no PTC on the line and the signal system needs to be replaced. Both corridors start at totally different starting points, so it is not an apples-to-apples comparison.
  - Matt N: I accept the answer but it still is hard to get my head around it
  - Tim B (VHB): per the project web site ([Northeast Corridor \(masselec.com\)](https://www.northeastcorridor.com)), the Northeast Corridor is simply an electrification project, not a full upgrade or replacement of infrastructure like it would be along the Lower Road corridor. So, it isn't a fair comparison.



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- › Richard: big difference between \$300m to \$900m as a range.
  - Nate H: in our report, we can add some comparable to people understand the various project.
- › Matt E: what would it take to do a more full analysis?
  - Larry: for the Berlin Subdivision corridor, we had more specific sites that came from another study so we were able to translate that into development activity for jobs and housing. We also had assumptions made on development. (Lots more detail...) In prior studies completed, specific identification of sites was really critical.

### General Discussion on Next Steps:

- › Nate: regarding the next Council Meeting on May 24:
  - VHB presentation summarizing the report
  - Summary of the Hi-rail tour
- › Gay: it was interesting to hear about theoretical ideas, but should we hear from NNEPRA, Amtrak and others so our report is thorough? (Matt E: great question...Nate?)
  - Nate: we could hear from NNEPRA, but we are not sure if they will want to present
  - Jeremy: we need to finish in 9 months no matter what. Can the testimony from Bill 860 be provided to the Council for our review (CSX, Portland Chamber, etc.)?
  - Matt E and Nate: yes, that is a good idea
- › Richard: some of the speakers, such as Patricia Quinn, are focused on existing service and she hasn't put much thought into a statewide network. We should hear from all speakers related to 860.
- › Gay: I would like to know if any of those in the rail industry have an interest in this corridor, either for passenger rail, or freight rail.

### Public Comment:

- › Frank O'Hara: Congrats to everyone. The final decision needs to be an act of faith, and not be about numbers in many ways. 30 years ago, I was chair Friends of the Rail Trail.. No one regrets the use of the current KRRT. Along the Merrymeeting Trail corridor, perhaps there is demand but let's not wait 30 years without any activity.
- › Bruce Sleeper: does the Draft report not appear on the web site until Monday AM? (Nate: yes, it was a few days late.) I have lots of questions that I hope can be answered prior to the next Council meeting. (Nate: yes, we will try.) Has there been a full property title search relative to Property Ownership or was the rail corridor established through easements? Has any portion of the ROW been acquired by others?



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- Nate: there may be places where we only have an easement and not outright ownership. At the Downeast Sunrise Trail, where similar easements exist, we won the case from those who challenged our ability to use the corridor as a trail
- › Victor Langelo: for the KRRT, we worked with MaineDOT . Voting RWT is simply preserving the status quo.
- › DJ Merrill: in the econ study, there is info about trails...is it just for walking/biking, or include snowmobile spending as well?
  - Larry: our work was walking/biking only. Other studies that did include snowmobile users show a substantial increase in spending, but it wasn't included. The KRRT does not include snowmobile, so we made assumption that it would be the same from end to end.
- › Andrew Walton: someone mentioned earlier that bicyclists "like hills", which I totally disagree with. I and many others like easy rides, not difficult rides.
- › Ed Hanscom: I take issue with the assertion that there is no rail potential. Perhaps 30 years ago, that was the case, but not now. The Brunswick station is the 3<sup>rd</sup> busiest after Boston and Portland, which indicates a clear demand. When the company that purchased Pan Am, they looked at the Lower Road corridor as an option. The state rail plan said that we can envision 3X the use in the near future.

### Web links posted in the meeting Chat:

- › Jeremy: The report Nate mentioned is here: <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/portland-bangor-study/>
- › Jeremy: testimony for 860: [https://legislature.maine.gov/bills/display\\_ps.asp?snum=131&paper=SP0357PID=1456](https://legislature.maine.gov/bills/display_ps.asp?snum=131&paper=SP0357PID=1456)

Meeting adjourned at 12:38 pm

### Additional information provided by VHB after adjournment related to comparing cost of rail corridors:

Per the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study Workshop on 1/11/2023 on Mass.gov: [Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study Public Workshop Wednesday, January 11, 2023, 6:00 PM \(mass.gov\)](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/northern-tier-passenger-rail-study-public-workshop-wednesday-january-11-2023-600-pm)

- "Anna Barry (HNTB) compares the initial cost estimates of the initial lower investment alternative, which is approximately \$1,044,850,000 (total project cost per mile is \$7,358,100), and the initial higher investment alternative, which is approximately \$2,187,350,000 (total project cost per mile is \$15,403,875)." at top of page 7

Per the Northeast Corridor project site at: [Northeast Corridor \(masselec.com\)](https://www.masselec.com)

- "The \$500-million project involved the installation of over 14,000 foundations and catenary poles; 300 miles of static, feeder, messenger, and contact wire; power supply, including four feeding substations,



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three switching stations and 18 paralleling stations; interlock lighting; backup signal power; and bridge carriers."