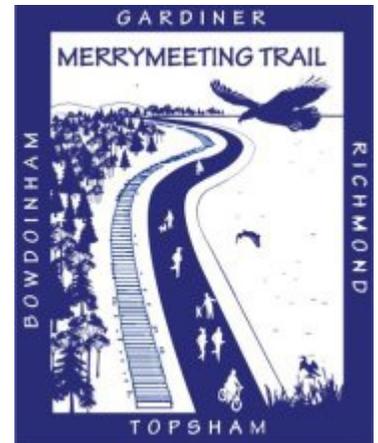


Merrymeeting Trail Committee
Wednesday, December 14, 2016
Meeting Notes

The meeting convened at 9:00 a.m.

Attending:

Ruth Indrick, KELT; Jeremy Cluchey, Bowdoinham; Carol Eyerman, Topsham; Steve Musica, Richmond; Bill Najpauer, MCEDD; Carrie Kinne, KELT; Victor Langelo, Topsham; Tom Reeves, Gardiner; Lee Cataldo, BTLT; Hugh Cox, MDOT; Patrick Adams, MDOT



Discussion of Rail and Trail Options and Approaches with Staff from MDOT

A variety of files were shared by MDOT at the meeting. They included:

- MaineDOT Fact Sheet: Planning Partnership Initiative (PPI), updated 10/2016
- MaineDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Funding, outlined program information
- MaineDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program, 5 page application score sheet
- MaineDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Funding Application
- Maine Revised Statutes; Title 23:Transportation; Chapter 615: State Railroad Preservation Act; §7107. Dismantling of State-owned Track
- Maine Revised Statutes; Title 23:Transportation; Chapter 615: State Railroad Preservation Act; §7105. Railroads; Lease or purchase of certain railroad lines by the Department of Transportation
- Maine Revised Statutes; Title 23:Transportation; Chapter 615: State Railroad Preservation Act; §7102. Findings of Fact

Current position of Maine DOT

- strong disposition to keeping rail
 - against pulling any rail either double or single track
 - there had been some allowed use of double tracks in the past, but DOT mentality has changed
 - why:
 - the cost effectiveness of rail exceeds other modes of transportation; there is hope things will evolve and develop to create demand
 - the concern is that if rail is pulled now and in the future it turns out there is a need, they would not be able to put it back due to cost and public opinion
- there is no master plan
- DOT priority for \$ now is maintaining current road infrastructure, road safety
 - \$ for bike-ped
 - \$2.3 million next year
 - \$400,000 federal \$ cap per-project
 - spread out across the state and by population
- current disposition toward rail vs. trail and bike ped funding based on evolution of thought over time, not firm legal decisions

- change in practices would take push from legislature
- state has rail assets
 - pan am sold the rail line to the state because they didn't want it
 - state is railbanking because towns didn't want to lose rail when businesses wanted to sell
 - trains are operated by a private operator
 - rail line ownership is complicated because pieces are combination of purchase, easement, or eminent domain; some revert back to owner if not kept in rail
 - as long as right-of-way is used for railbanking, right-of-way stays intact
 - rail to trail is a form of railbanking
 - are two places in state where there are discussions about pulling rail
 - Pan Am owned track in Brewer, DOT was going to purchase right-of-way so town could use
 - Sunrise trail to Calais

Discussion of Statutes

- maintain railway corridor with intent/purpose of enabling/reactivating, leaning toward substantial use; because rails have strong economic potential
 - substantial commercial or passenger use
 - railway excursions don't qualify as substantial use, have been companies expressing interest in these at locations around state
- rail is a significant asset, when a company abandons it, the state preserves it long-term for use in the future
- statute for removal of rail requires consultation with a council of governments planning, then it needs to go to the transportation committee
- corridors are maintained long-term for 'future transportation use' (Title 23; Chapter 615; Subchapter 2; §7154)
 - bike trail could be an interim transportation use
 - would use the corridor in a way that would make it an asset for the state of Maine
 - bike ped users are a component of future users, as are rail advocates

Alternatives to Rail to Trail

- Rail with Trail
 - challenges : bridges, choke points, embankments, steep areas, environmental impacts, wetland impacts and mitigation costs - prohibitively expensive
- multi-option trail with variety of on and off road portions

Options for covering rail

- question asked what would be the option for covering the rail with material that could be used as a trail
 - the material could be removed if the rail needed to reopen in the future
 - similar things have been done at rail crossings
 - some other states have utilized this as a strategy

- SM is meeting with Lionel Cayer (City of Augusta) to do preliminary cost studies/engineering concepts
- DOT objection is that if people used the bike-ped trail, they would not want it to be removed; it would be difficult to revert back to train use - would pit community interest vs. state interest

Augusta Lower Road rail corridor

- there is no master plan for this route
- DOT owns entire corridor
- DOT is open to leasing corridor, but it is not currently leased
- there are no details about immediate opportunity along this line, although we could check with the cities of Augusta and Waterville
- any current work on the line is very basic
 - vegetation management, ditching, drainage
- is heavy gauge rail
- improvements needed: limited at this site compared to others in state
 - rail: most is ok on this line
 - ties: many may need to be replaced
 - bridges: could need fixing
 - the quality of the rail needed for operation depends on the weight and the speed
 - the state maintains many rails across the state at a 10mph level
- line has been virtually unused for 30 years
- having market opportunity answers about this line are vital for understanding if rail to trail is an option

State rail planning:

- there is a freight plan with a 10 year time frame
- rail projects are included in the 3 year work plans
- there is not rail line prioritization across the state based on areas expected to see individual growth
- Planning Partnership Initiative
 - can't do design
 - can do conceptual planning and feasibility and complex issues
 - 50/50 match with max \$50,000 total
 - Hugh is the person to talk to about this

Trail of Statewide Significance

- 4 in state: Capital to Coast Trail, Sunrise Trail, Eastern Trail, and Mountain Division Trail
 - any way to build consistent foundation for funding? like snowmobile trail system?

Process of Rail to Trail

- work with HC and PA to broach project
- discussions with the department are important, but conversations with legislators along the entire rail line will need to happen in order for it to change

- if believe it needs to move forward, need to build a coalition to convince communities along the line
 - get local businesses and residents involved
 - community support would be needed to overcome voices of individuals who wish to see rail remain
- grassroots, build up to legislative level
- build public support
 - both inside and outside towns where the trail is located
- economic study, to show that as far as foreseeable future there is no freight or passenger service expected on the line, would be needed
 - their estimate of a cost to do a statewide study/planning - would be \$150,000-\$500,000
- could compare our rural state with other rural areas where economic development resulted from rail to trail, \$ impacts of bike tourism
- show how is a market for social and economic development
 - example is Washington County Bike ME
 - sold out in 3 weeks, had a great success, bike tourism surprised people and had a positive impact
- information should be for variety of target audiences
 - communities along the trail, state administration (DOT, legislature, gov), rail and others expressing state-wide interest
 - Factual information
- communication with rail advocates could be helped by answering the economic questions about the rail line, a market study, id economic opportunity
- building all at once is not an option, it will be done piece by piece

Next Steps

- PA will talk with Nate at MDOT about the feasibility of covering the tracks
- RI will follow up with HC about planning

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Next Merrymeeting Trail Blazers meeting: January 25th at 9 a.m. in Bowdoinham

Submitted by R.I.