

MEETING NOTES FROM STAKEHOLDER MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

New Hampshire State Rail Trail Plan
New Hampshire - Statewide
MAX-2018023.01

DATE PREPARED: October 21, 2021

LOCATION: New Hampshire Department of Transportation - Conference Room 114
7 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301

ATTENDEES: Project Team
Shelley Winters, NH Department of Transportation
Shannon Rogers, PhD, University of New Hampshire (via Zoom)
Mark Debowski, GPI
Carolyn Radisch, GPI
Nicole Rogers, GPI

Advisory Committee Members
Chris Gamache, Polaris (formerly NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources)
Ben. Clark, Plymouth and Lincoln Railroad
J.B. Mack, Southwest Regional Planning Commission
Charlotte Harding, Conservation Land Stewardship Program (alternate for Steve Walker of Office of Strategic Initiatives)
Scott Crowder, Office of Outdoor Recreation

Other Attendees
Alexis Rudko, NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
Nick Sanders, NH Department of Transportation
Patrick Herlihy, NH Department of Transportation

PURPOSE: New Hampshire Rail Trail Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting

Discussion:

1. Introduction – Shelley Winters (NHDOT)

2. Tom Sammons (Abutter) Resignation – Shelley Winters (NHDOT)

The project team will not be appointing another member since the plan work has already been going on for over a year and a half now, and the composition of the committee is not legislated. The project team does have other avenues to reach out to abutters, including other stakeholder committee members that have abutter and general public interactions. Also, there was abutter participation in public hearings and via surveys collected to date.

3. Summary of DOT / DNCR Leadership Meeting (Held Thursday, September 9, 2021) – Shelley Winters (NHDOT) & Mark Debowski (GPI)

The project team provided a brief overview of the discussion had with DOT / DNCR leadership in early September 2021. A few of the main discussion points included the following:

- a. Additional funding is required to significantly expand the mileage of state-owned rail trails.
- b. Focus funding to maintain existing trails and target short breaks in the network.

- c. Better coordination between DOT & DNCR is necessary to manage funds and maintain trails.
- d. There is overall broad-based support and leadership from both agencies, both of which are happy to see the plan moving forward.

4. Review of Public Feedback – Mark Debowski (GPI)

Mark Debowski reviewed public feedback received during the public outreach period. In-person public meetings were held in Concord on August 9, in Keene on August 11, and in Littleton on August 12. A virtual public meeting was held on August 18 via Zoom. The public meetings were well attended with approximately 200 in attendance across the four meetings. The public could ask questions and provide comments at the meetings, fill out a survey online or on paper (distributed at the public meetings), or send email comments to Mark. The team has compiled and identified the themes from the public comments, which will be discussed. Overall, 324 online and paper surveys were returned. Mark reviewed data from the survey which indicated how people use rail trails, how frequently people use rail trails, and what trails were most favored by survey respondents.

Alexis Rudko stated that the number of people indicating OHRV/Snowmobile use on the rail trails seemed too low, but **Mark Debowski** pointed out that the numbers shown are from the survey results and are not intended to indicate how many people are using the trails and this information is not being used in the economic study. The chart displayed shows what people indicated in the survey results.

Shelley Winters stated that additional outreach (2-3 days of unannounced intercept surveys) targeted to equestrians and OHRV users was planned to be undertaken this fall. The project team will connect with Avis Rosenfield (Non-motorized user rep) and Chris Gamache (DNCR appointee) to aid in this effort. We unfortunately cannot send out economic impact analysis related surveys by email as the data received is often skewed.

Shannon Rogers stated that collection efforts for the number of trails analyzed was now beyond scope and also that a lot of out-of-scope feedback regarding the economic analysis was collected. This feedback may be utilized within the study as vignettes.

JB Mack offered to reach out the Regional Planning Commission (RPCs) to obtain more trail counts.

5. Economic Impact Analysis

Public comments regarding the economic impact analysis of rail trails included the following:

- Concern from special interest groups that their group is not represented enough in the data collection
- Other economic analyses are underway and may be useful in this study
- Some are interested to see the data broken down and analyzed by geographic location, user group, etc,
- A belief that greater economic benefit (i.e., direct spending for rooms, meals, etc.) comes with connected trail systems that attract overnight/multi-day trips. There are examples of these systems in other states.

Because one of the inputs into the economic model is trail usage, we are always looking for more trail counts.

JB Mack asked if there would be COVID-19 related adjustments applied to the economic analysis data. **Shannon Rogers** stated that the project has been extended by 1 year to gather better data. Nationwide standard guidelines for the use of the economic analysis software, IMPLAN, will be followed.

6. Maintenance Costs and Definitions and Insurance Best Practices

Mark Debowski reviewed feedback received on maintenance definition and costs and insurance best practices. To date we have received input on the template agreement and typical construction and maintenance costs.

Alexis Rudko stated that DNCR provides insurance for certain registered groups. These insurance policies are applicable only on DNCR property. She will provide additional information on the insurance program to the project team.

Patrick Herlihy noted that the insurance is heavily on the rail company for rail with trail segments.

Scott Crowder stated that he was recently on a call regarding liability and reiterated that liability sits mostly with rail company on trails with rail. Lawmakers are in the process of suggesting new language to reduce rail liability, however, there has been unsuccessful legislation related to this matter in the past. Scott to send notes from call to the project team.

Shelley Winters noted that DNCR follow-up is needed on issues recently raised by DNCR on the template agreement. It is advised that the DNCR work from the distributed template agreement and, in short order, provide comments or overarching feedback on the template and any issues or concerns that DNCR has with the template that has been previously reviewed and nearly finalized.

7. Tier System for Prioritizing Rail Trail Investments

Mark Debowski reviewed public feedback on this topic. A desire for long-distance connectivity and connectivity to trails in adjoining states was a common theme. The public identified several corridors that may be prioritized including the East Coast Greenway, the Granite State Rail Trail, connecting the Northern Rail Trail to the Lakes Region via the Winni and WOW Trails, a Cross New Hampshire Trail extending the Cross Vermont Trail picking up the Ammonoosuc and connecting to the Presidential Rail Trail, and connecting the Keene area to Boston and connecting Keene to Concord.

JB Mack questioned if the study would make recommendations as to how to utilize certain funding based on criteria. **Shelley Winters** stated that the study likely will not provide specific guidelines for which types of funds should be used for certain efforts. The recommendation will likely state that additional funding is required, provide possibilities for sources of funding, and the give criteria for prioritization by phase types (acquisition, construction, maintenance, ROW, etc.).

8. Recommendations for a State Funding Mechanism and Management of Funding

JB Mack asked about the historical spending amounts for rail trails from TA, RTP, and CMAQ funding sources. **Shelley Winters** stated that the state is currently reviewing the Rockefeller Center draft report to clarify funding and funding sources and outreach to NHDOT Planning & Community Assistance and NHDNCR Bureau of Trails is underway.

Alexis Rudko stated that federal funding sources (i.e., RTP) can intimidate trail groups and municipalities. **JB Mack** agreed and noted that Transportation Alternatives (TA), CMAQ and LPA projects are perceived to be difficult by towns.

Shelley Winters stated that the project team also heard from several public meeting attendees that projects often go under-engineered, leading to utility and ROW issues that hinder projects from moving forward.

9. Integrity of Corridors

Mark Debowski reviewed public input on integrity of corridors including encroachment from abutters and abutter concerns with public use of rail trails. There was a lot of input regarding negative effects of motorized use of corridors on abutters.

JB Mack stated that the State Asset Data Exchange System (SADES) could be utilized in collecting data within interns with GPS units for encroachment-related issues.

Chris Gamache warned that agencies need to enforce encroachment issues based upon written policies that are applied equally to all parties.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30.

These minutes constitute our understanding of the discussions and conclusions reached. Please advise us within ten (10) days, in writing, of any exceptions or corrections.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Rogers
Project Engineer

cc: Mark Debowski, GPI
Carolyn Radisch, GPI