

NOTES OF MEETING OF AUGUST 9, 2021

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

DATE PREPARED: August 10, 2021

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

ATTENDEES: Shelly Winters, NHDOT
Lou Barker, NHDOT
Shannon Rogers, PhD, UNH
Mark Debowski, GPI
Carolyn Radisch, GPI
Nicole Rogers, GPI
Public Representation

PURPOSE: New Hampshire Rail Trail Public Meeting #1

Discussion:

1. Introduction – Shelly Winters (NHDOT)
 - a. Project Overview
 - b. Project Team
 - c. Stakeholders
2. Project Scope – Mark Debowski, GPI
 - a. Update Rail Corridor Inventory
 - b. Economic Impact – Shannon Rogers, PhD (UNH)
 - c. Tiered System for Prioritizing State Investments in Rail Trail Projects
 - d. State Funding Mechanisms
 - e. Rail Trail Maintenance Definitions, Costs, Insurance, Agreement Template
 - f. Recommendations on Ensuring the Integrity of Publicly Owned Rail Trail Corridors
 - g. Rail Trail Design Standards
 - h. Final Report
 - i. State Rail Trail Pamphlet
 - j. Public Engagement
3. Timeline – Mark Debowski, GPI
4. Requested Public Feedback – Mark Debowski, GPI
 - a. Tier System for Prioritizing State Investments
 - b. State Funding Mechanisms
 - c. Other Items
5. Public Comment Period

Boyd Smith - Concord, NH Resident

Q: Will draft scope items be posted on the website as they are completed for review and will there be an official comment period?

A: It is the intent that scope items will be added to the website as completed, however, there will be no formal public comment period. Comments must be filtered through respective stakeholder committee members who will relay to project team for review and consideration.

Q: Will there be any adjustment for spending based on the length of the trail? (since longer trail are generally more connected)

A: The survey does provide a question regarding the length of the length, however, an adjustment is not required given that a majority of the trips observed are day trips only (typically half a day).

Don Moyer - Northern Rail Trail

Q: How are you incorporating contractor expenses (mowing, supplies, maintenance, etc.) into the economic analysis?

A: These costs have not been incorporated into the economic analysis scope that Dr. Rogers is performing. The intent of the economic analysis is to focus on user spending to gauge an accurate ROI which will help advocate for purchase, construction and maintenance of existing and future rail trails. These maintenance cost figures from the public and trail organizations would be very helpful for the project team to review as we progress other items in the scope. **Some of this information may be included in the maintenance and construction costs that have been compiled.**

Q: The Northern Rail Trail currently has 3 active trail counters and will have a total of eight by next year. Don offered to provide Shannon with trail count data.

A: The project team requests and appreciates access to the active trail count data.

Kathy Anderson - Great North Woods Riders ATV

Q: Is location and usage data of the completed 204 surveys available? Worried that there is not enough OHRV data being collected.

A: This specific data is not available at this time as the project team is still collecting surveys and users typically select multiple trail uses. The project team will also work to identify potentially another trail with more established OHRV usage to better represent this usage.

Arthur Shaw - Rockingham Rail Trail User

Q: Expressed concern for obsolete rail trails such as the Rockingham Rail Trail that has extremely small tunnels which in turn restricts usage due to height limitations. Rockingham Rail Trail provides only eastbound route for snowmobiles to reach Manchester and is a very important link in the network.

A: Although the plan does not intend to provide specific repairs, it is within the scope to develop standard design details for rail trails. This not only takes into account ROW but also height restrictions and surface conditions. The state will continue to work with all their partners to ensure all users are considered.

Tim Blagden - Friends of the Concord – Lake Sunapee Rail Trail / Rail Trail Builder

Q: Expresses concern that rail trail count collection is difficult. Suggests the use of Street Light data (ADT and Origin-Destination data) as their non-motorized use data goes back to 2018 (pre-pandemic).

A: The project team will look into Streetlight data.

Bob Spiegelman - Bike Touring / East Coast Greenway Alliance

Q: There currently exists poor connectivity for bike touring in New Hampshire. Encourages the project team to investigate a viable connection between Concord and Manchester and the East Coast Greenway. Also encourages project team to recommend substantial funding efforts.

A: Thank you. The project team will review connectivity and recommended viable funding mechanisms. **This plan is predominantly focused on state-owned railroad corridors; currently the railroad from Manchester to Concord is privately-owned.**

Tom Levesque - Merrimack Valley Trail Riders Association

Q: There is a great need for connectivity as the E-Bike has greatly improved ability to travel great lengths. Mr. Levesque also expressed concern that there was not enough OHRV representation in the economic survey collection efforts. Encourages project team to work closely with touring industry as it will boost economic value of rail trail network. Trail fees are opposed by tourism representatives.

A: Thank you. The project team will review connectivity. The project team will also work to identify potentially another trail with more established OHRV usage to better represent this user type within the economic analysis.

Bruce Stuart - Cotton Valley Rail Trail

Q: Mr. Stuart expressed his concern utilizing user fees as a viable funding mechanism and is of the opinion that a big influx of money is required in order to properly fund the rail trails network instead. Mr. Stuart also alluded to the significant maintenance costs that are required and often times are completed by the trail organizations. It is of Mr. Stuart's opinion that the OHRV community is greatly involved in the maintenance efforts and would like to see how the project team may be able to encourage other user groups to participate in trail maintenance efforts.

A: Although user fees may be part of the solution, the project team is understanding that it is not the only solution. The project team is keen on hearing input from the community as to what other ideas they have as potential funding mechanisms. In regard to upfront maintenance costs, these costs have not been incorporated into the economic analysis scope that Dr. Rogers is performing. The intent of the economic analysis is to focus on user spending to gauge an accurate ROI which will help advocate for purchase, construction and maintenance of existing and future rail trails. These maintenance cost figures from the public and trail organizations would be very helpful for the project team to review as we progress other items in the scope.

Buddy Dionne - NHOHVA

Q: Are all trails being surveyed as part of the economic analysis?

A: A subset of state-owned trails have been selected based on stakeholder input. This subset of trails reflects diversity across the rail trail network in terms of geography, length, usage, etc.

Q: The NHOHVA is conducting its own economic study with help from Plymouth State and Dr. Daniel Lee. Is this something the project team would be interested in reviewing?

A: Dr. Rogers to coordinate with Dr. Lee to review information.

Don Moyer – Northern Rai Trail

Q: It is our experience that as non-profit organizations trying to fund maintenance efforts that contractors provide services at a higher rate than they would to the state. Is there anyway the state

can aide in those efforts to reduce cost? Regarding criteria for funding prioritization, the whereabouts in the lifecycle of a trail should be considered.

A: Thank you. The project team will consider your comment.

Bruce Stuart - Cotton Valley Rail Trail

Q: There is not much cooperation between the three main agencies dealing with rail trails (Fish & Game, Division of Aeronautic, Rail and Transit, and DNCR), Moving forward there needs to be more cooperation regarding the state's assets regardless off jurisdiction or ownership/management, etc. One team, one goal.

A: It is agreed that State Agencies need to communicate and work better together. It is the intent that this effort will provide specific language (standards across all departments) as to ensure the State is operating as one.

Q: There needs to be better enforcement regarding encroachment. There have been several incidents in the past that could have benefited from a more refined process. The State needs to take care of the rail corridors.

A: The project team understand that there have been some negative experiences. Therefore, the state needs the community's help as to how to better identify property lines that may need to be reestablished. We are open to your ideas as to how to enforce ROW.

Debbie Briscoe – New Hampshire Horse Council

Q: An organization is needed to manage and allocate funds appropriately. The equestrian community is more than willing to pay user fees,etc. but access is required for horse trailers as parking is limited at trail heads. There needs to be better representation of the equestrian community in regard to the economic survey as it brings in a lot of money being the end users of many services (transportation, supplies, feed, etc.). Online surveys work best for the equestrian community as they are hard to capture on foot.

Q: The Forest Society (particularly at Mt. Major) have a donation app and board/welcome table at the trail head which asks for donations. This is a potential funding source.

Q: There needs to be better public communication about funding initiatives to potentially capture more matching funds by private donors, etc.

Q: Please be cognizant of trail surface. Once a trail is fully paved, you essential remove several user groups from enjoying the trail.

A: The project team will look for additional ways to capture more equestrian users within the existing framework of this plan's economic analysis to better represent this user group.

Warren Denby – Friends of Goffstown Rail Trail

Q: The New Hampshire Rail Trail system has an image problem (as well as a financial problem). There needs to be more advanced marketing and social media presence to encourage use on trails and make them a true asset for many users.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Roland Berube – Friends of Merrimack River Greenway Trail

Q: Requests that public meetings such as this one be better advertised. Many of the attendees are common players and it is the state's job to attract a more diverse audience. Need to get more input from trail users.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Scott Bogle– Rockingham Regional Planning Commission

Q: Mr. Bogle sees the value in trail counts not only for this project but on a regional level. Would also suggest looking into StreetLight data to potentially share with regional planning commissions in future.

Q: Mr. Bogle sees the value in user fees and understands it is part of the solution rather than just the one solution. Other ideas for potential funding mechanisms include:

- specialty license plates,
- money from utility leases,
- full utilization of federal funds (TAP & CMAQ) not allocated elsewhere.

Q: Mr. Bogle provided per mile costs for maintenance (\$2000 per mile) and trail building costs (\$60K per mile for an easy trail, \$1M for a complicated trail). The costs cited in the funding paper by the Rockefeller Center should be revised.

Q: He noted that to maximize ROI a connected network is needed. Enable legislation to allow rail w/ trail and trails on utility corridors.

With respect to encroachments, follow the model of the land trusts which use volunteers that visually inspect properties. Develop a form to report encroachments.

A: The project team is aware of cost issues and is working to get those resolved. Thank you for all your comments.

Buddy Dionne – NHOHVA

Q: If ROW is 30-90', is it possible to look into providing a multiuse trail (provide space for OHRV, walkers, horse, etc.). In this scenario all users would pay fees and have space for each use.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Tim Blagden - Friends of the Concord – Lake Sunapee Rail Trail / Rail Trail Builder

Q: In order to maximize the ROI, the state must first make New Hampshire a destination for multi-day trips. Network connectivity should be a priority in regard to funding prioritization.

Q: Apps like Map My Ride etc. should be leveraged to show what a day on the trail is really like. It is also a great marketing tool.

Q: Encourage the project team to look at the trails spatially. Motorized users use a lot more of the rail network than other users such as hikers.

Q: Encourage the project team to reach out to Two Rivers / Ottauquechee Regional Commission (Vermont) who monitor rail property easements annually.

A: Thank you for your comments.

Page 6

Bob Spiegelman - Bike Touring / East Coast Greenway Alliance

Q: As a potential funding source it would be great to see at least 1%, maybe 5% of NHDOT's annual construction budget allocated to rail trails.

A: Thank you for your comment.

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