

DRAFT MEETING NOTES

Statewide 42794 New Hampshire State Rail Trails Plan Advisory Stakeholders Committee Meeting Tuesday, August 4, 2020, 10:30am - 12:00pm

DATE PREPARED: August 5, 2020

LOCATION: Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

ATTENDEES: See attached list

DISTRIBUTION: Advisory Stakeholders Committee and Meeting Attendees

PURPOSE: Project Progress Meeting & COVID-19 Timeline Response

1. Introductions – Mark Debowski (GPI) and Shelley Winters (NHDOT) opened the meeting, and attendees took turns quickly introducing themselves.
2. Brief Review of 1st Advisory Stakeholders Committee Meeting Minutes
 - a. GPI briefly highlighted last meeting's topics including the project scope and committee member feedback.
 - b. GPI encourages attendees to visit the project website (www.nhrailtrailsplan.com) where meeting minutes are located for additional review and download. A project schedule is attached to the meeting minutes from the Feb 27, 2020 meeting, although it should be noted that this schedule is likely subject to change due to COVID-19. Users can also access the website to see real time updates to the GIS database (work in progress). Future events and meeting notes/documentation will be posted for download and feedback.
3. Economic Impact Analysis – Data Collection Efforts and Revised Scheduling (COVID-19)
 - a. Data Collection Progress – Shannon Rogers, Ph.D., of UNH Cooperative Extension provided an update to the economic impact analysis and subsequent data collection efforts. Winter collection efforts kicked off in February 2020 but due to a lack of snowpack not many surveys were collected at the 6-7 collection trails. To offset the lack of data, an online survey was developed. When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, in person survey collection efforts were postponed due to safety restrictions. In response, an online survey was published in early April 2020 for two weeks which yielded approximately 1800 responses, accompanied by 20-30 further contacts via emails/phone calls.
 - b. Data Collection Analysis – Although Shannon and her team are still in the process of cleaning up the data from the online survey and eliminating responses not relevant to the project scope, they were able to identify some trends. Shannon presented a table which showed the average

spending in different categories (transportation, food/drink, lodging, etc.) before and after the COVID-19 stay home order (see appendix). It should be noted that the survey was designed to request spending information from the date that the spending occurred rather than the date in which the survey was submitted. The data shows that despite record trail use, there has been a significant decrease in spending after the stay home order compared to before it, which is expected given the circumstances (restaurants operating at lower capacities or takeout only, strict out-of-state guidelines affecting the hospitality business, etc.). Shannon stated that the level of spending in NH's tourism economy is down 86% since COVID-19. No data has been collected following the state's reopening.

William "Wink" Faulkner (NH Municipal Association) questioned if information was acquired beyond the areas that were expected. Shannon explained that due to the online nature of the survey, they were able to get input from all across the state along with comments covering a wide range of topics. Data will be broken down by trail and comments received may be useful to individual communities. Wink requested that relevant data be sent to him to help justify spending for a bridge over Route 101 to connect Swanzey and Keene.

Tom Sammon (Abutter) asked if rail trails where OHRVs are allowed could be differentiated from trails where they are not. The GPI team explained that each rail trail has its permitted uses identified. He stated that OHRV use on the Ammonoosuc Rail Trail abutting his property results in maintenance issues that are inadequately addressed. He believes other users such as cyclists and pedestrians are deterred from using the trail due to poor conditions. Kim Bergeron expressed his understanding and suggests Tom reach out to him regarding these issues. Shannon Rogers explained that although the economic impact analysis is not a cost/benefit analysis she does understand that motorized users sometimes drive the economic impact with higher transportation and equipment maintenance costs.

- c. Data Collection Needs – In order to conduct an accurate economic impact analysis, Shannon's team requires information on average spending per person, average spending per visit (and therefore number of visits) so an appropriate multiplier can be applied. Shannon has received a significant amount of trail count data specifically within the southern portion of the state, but more data is likely required for the north country. J.B. Mack (Southwest RPC) expressed his ability to obtain additional data from RPCs as needed.
- d. Data Collection During COVID-19 / Schedule Moving Forward – Due to the COVID-19 crisis, this is a challenging time to do an economic impact analysis. According to Shannon's outreach to her colleagues nationwide, the current state of the economy warrants a halt in data collection this summer. In fact, Shannon knows of no other colleagues across the country who are doing economic impact analysis data collection right now. If data were to be collected this summer, it would likely reveal abnormal trends and therefore be indefensible in the future when trying to predict future economic patterns. Therefore, it is recommended that the data collection period be extended through next summer in hopes of being able to collect intercept surveys to provide the best product for the future. A one-year project extension is supported by both GPI and NHDOT although there are still some hurdles for a formal extension.

Both GPI and Shelley Winters (NHDOT) stated that extension of the economic impact analysis will delay the development of several tasks including the tiered system (prioritization plan) and recommendations for state funding mechanisms. Remaining project tasks, however, are not dependent on these data collection efforts and are moving forward as initially scheduled.

It should be noted that Shannon and her team are flexible and looking for other innovative ways to collect data if an extension is not possible, perhaps through signage on the trails with QR codes to online surveys.

4. Future Public Meetings Format and Scheduling

- a. Public Meeting Location - According to the scope, GPI anticipates three public meetings, two of which were initially scheduled to be held in September in different regions of the state. GPI stated that due to COVID-19 restrictions, these meetings will instead be held virtually. A third meeting will be scheduled in the future to present the draft plan and solicit feedback.
- b. Virtual Meeting Format Options - GPI presented two options for virtual style meetings which included 1) A pre-recorded presentation available via YouTube followed by an online survey to collect feedback and reactions and 2) A live virtual meeting with a comment and question segment.

Kim Bergeron and Wink Faulkner expressed their support of a YouTube style presentation allowing for more objective, thoughtful responses across the state. J.B. Mack expressed that using Zoom has been difficult for similar public meetings, but the breakout groups function allowed for a more interactive format. As the meeting progressed, there was a growing consensus for a YouTube video and accompanying online survey to reach a broader group statewide. Moving forward with this option eliminates the need for regional focus as it would be available across the state.

- c. Public Meeting Contents – GPI anticipates that the public meeting will provide an overview of the scope of the project and detail the efforts being made in updating the GIS data and conducting the economic impact analysis. GPI expects to solicit public feedback for ideas for state funding mechanisms as well as maintenance items (what is the public's priority and experience). Feedback will not be solicited for design standards or maintenance agreements.

Dave Topham (NH Rail Trail Coalition) expressed that GPI and NHDOT reiterate that this plan is for state-owned rail trails only prior to and during public meetings.

J.B. Mack suggested GPI reach out to other states who may have already developed some sort of mechanism to establish priorities for trail selections and maintenance. If soliciting feedback via an online survey, it may be more effective to provide the public with more guidance/defined categories for specific areas of feedback. In other words, the online survey must be carefully tailored to fit what the advisory team is looking for.

Tom Sammon (Abutter) expressed his concerns regarding the negative environmental impacts and affected quality of life for abutters/residents produced by OHRVs and whether this type of feedback would be solicited in the public forum. Shelley Winters (NHDOT) and GPI stated these concerns were outside of the project scope but understand that these concerns are valid and must be voiced in a way as to not incite any users. It is not the intent of the plan to provide opinions on allowed uses for rail trails use but rather to develop standards and strategies to make sure all allowed users can be supported in a safe and effective manner. Kim Bergeron expressed his availability to help Tom communicate with the motorized clubs.

Tom Sammon (Abutter) also suggested that cyclists register and donate money to the trails they are using so that funding is more appropriately allocated for all users.

Dave Topham (NH Rail Trail Coalition) suggests leveraging the Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth to do a study of how other states fund their rail trails. Dave has sent Mark a proposal in which he

and Shelley Winters (NHDOT) are reviewing. Dave suggests taking advantage of the public/private relationship as a way to balance out funding to serve all customers regardless of trail use.

Avis Rosenfield (Non-Motorized Users) stated that equestrians pay to use state parks and volunteer but there is an issue with insurance. She suggested reaching out to Chris Gamache and Jesse of DNCR to see how their attorneys are handling it. Avis reiterated from the first Stakeholders meeting that parking and trail signage is important for equestrian users, especially for emergency response. Avis expressed her interest in renaming the Hike Safe Card to Recreational Card and increase the scope of it to include equestrian users. The card offers exemption from liability for rescue costs for people engaging in outdoor activities from canoeing and kayaking to cross country skiing, rock climbing, orienteering and trail running.

- d. September Public Meetings – Shelley Winters (NHDOT) raised the idea of postponing the September public meetings a few months. If the project timeline is extended to obtain economic impact data next year, the project midpoint will shift. (The intent is to have these first public meetings at the midpoint of the project.) A shift will also allow more time to develop a list of what the committee is looking for from the public. GPI & Shelley will distribute this updated list to the committee for consensus and recommend a new timeframe. Shelley also suggested that given the new timeframe there may be a need for 1-2 additional Advisory Stakeholder meetings. There was consensus that this was appropriate and could be accomplished remotely so as to not impact the budget (for GPI).

5. Project Items Update – GPI

It should be noted that GPI and Shelley Winters (NHDOT) may reach out to specific Advisory Committee members for expertise regarding any of the following items. Receiving this information helps create better documents to share among the entire group.

- a. Update on Meetings with Chris Gamache (DNCR) and Dave Topham (NHRTC) – GPI met with Chris and Dave separately. They were both helpful in providing information regarding the updated rail trail database, ROW encroachment issues, maintenance costs and tasks, insurance issues and potential funding sources.
- b. Rail Trail Count Data – GPI received rail trail count data from the RPCs thanks to J.B. Mack. That information has been forwarded to Shannon Rogers.
- c. Website – The website has been developed and will be routinely updated with new documentation (www.nhrailtrailsplan.com)
- d. Rail Trail Inventory and Trail Organizations – GPI is looking for updated trail information and volunteer organizations/respective contacts for each rail trail. An updated Excel file will be sent out to the committee for feedback.
- e. Rail Trail Maintenance Definitions and Typical Costs – GPI has been developing a list of maintenance tasks and how much these typically cost. These are being divided into routine maintenance (yearly) vs. capital maintenance (culvert replacement, etc). Documentation will be sent out for feedback.
- f. Template for Trail Management Agreement – GPI is developing a technical contract template that will clearly state the responsibility of each party (State of NH and municipality) in maintaining a specific rail trail. A draft agreement will be sent out for feedback.

- g. Design Standards for Rail Trails – GPI is developing design standards for newly constructed rail trails. There will be two sets depending on whether there is no rail or if active rail is present to the side of the rail trail. GPI anticipates reaching out to railroad operators/ NHDOT for more input regarding design with rail.
 - h. Recommendations on Ensuring the Integrity of Publicly Owned Rail Trail Corridors – GPI and the State of NH are aware that many encroachments exist on the state-owned ROW but currently do not have a comprehensive inventory of said encroachments nor does the State have dedicated field staff to conduct extensive and regular field investigations.. GPI is looking for ways to identify them and develop a process moving forward to map them.
6. Action items – The following items require action by the person listed by each item:
- a. Shannon Rogers, GPI, and J.B. Mack will collaborate to obtain additional count data, specifically in north country.
 - b. GPI and Shelley Winters will continue to work on the project schedule.
 - c. GPI and Shelley Winters will work on a schedule and agenda for the public meetings. This information will be sent out to the stakeholder committee for input. Consideration of an additional Advisory Committee meeting in advance of public meetings (to review materials) may be warranted at the discretion of GPI and Shelley.
 - d. GPI and Shelley Winters will review the Dartmouth Rockefeller Center proposal for a rail trail funding study.
 - e. GPI will send out project documentation developed to date for review by the committee. Documentation to be sent out “bcc style” to avoid “reply all.”

These notes 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,

Mark Debowski
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603-766-8257

Attachments:

- Meeting Attendance List
- Average Spending Before and After Stay-At-Home Guidance
- Draft Revised Schedule for Potential Project Time Extension

Revisions: August 25, 2020 (Included attachments on average spending before and after stay-at-home guidance and draft revised schedule for potential project extension by one year.)

**NH State Rail Trails Plan
Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting #2
08/04/2020 @ 10:30 A.M.
Virtual Meeting through Microsoft Teams**

Members Present:

| Name | Stakeholder Group Representing |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Shelley Winters | NH Department of Transportation |
| Chris Gamache | NH Department of Natural & Cultural Resources |
| J.B. Mack | NH Regional Planning Commissions |
| Richard Samuels | Business & Industry Association of NH |
| Avis Rosenfield | Non-motorized users (bicyclist & equestrian) |
| Kim Bergeron | Motorized Users (OHRV & Snowmobiles) |
| Dave Topham | NH Rail Trails Coalition |
| William "Wink" Faulkner | NH Municipal Association |
| Paul Giblin (Alternate for Ben Clark) | Railroad Operator (operating on state-owned line) |
| Steve Walker | NH Office of Strategic Initiatives |
| Tom Sammon | Home Owner Abutting State-owned Rail Trail |

Members Absent:

| Name | Stakeholder Group Representing |
|------|--|
| TBD | NH Department of Business & Economic Affairs |

Consultants Present:

| Name | Stakeholder Group Representing |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Mark Debowski | GPI |
| Carolyn Radisch | GPI |
| Logan Stevens | GPI |
| Nicole Rogers | GPI |
| Shannon Rogers | UNH |

| Average Spending | Before Stay at Home Order | After Stay at Home Order |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Transportation | \$38.36 | \$5.94 |
| Food/drink (restaurants) | \$55.15 | \$5.62 |
| Food/drink (grocery) | \$19.39 | \$3.28 |
| Overnight Lodging | \$32.60 | \$0.82 |
| Gifts/Souvenirs/Other Shopping | \$6.16 | \$0.46 |
| Recreation | \$9.64 | \$1.46 |
| Equipment | \$14.23 | \$3.45 |
| ATV Maintenance/Gas | \$39.47 | \$8.44 |
| Other | \$8.16 | \$1.43 |

| Statewide 42794 - State Rail Trail Plan | | 2020 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| DRAFT Work Schedule - With Potential One Year Schedule Extension | | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
| Task 1: | Update Rail Corridor Inventory | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 2: | Statewide Economic Impact Analysis | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 3: | Trail Maintenance - Cost, Insurance, Agreement | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 4: | Tier System | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 5: | State Funding Mechanism | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 6: | Integrity of Corridors | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 7: | Design Standards | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 8: | Final Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 9: | Pamphlet | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Task 10: | Public Engagement - Stakeholder Meetings | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Task 11: | List of Trail Organizations | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Legend: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  Work Time (Includes Review Time) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  Project Deliverable | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  Stakeholder Committee Meeting | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  Public Meeting | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Statewide 42794 - State Rail Trail Plan | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
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|  | Project Deliverable | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | Stakeholder Committee Meeting | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | Public Meeting | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Statewide 42794 - State Rail Trail Plan | | 2022 | | | | | |
|---|--|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| DRAFT Work Schedule - With Potential One Year Schedule Extension | | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN |
| Task 1: | Update Rail Corridor Inventory | | | | | | |
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|  | Public Meeting | | | | | | |