

NOTES OF MEETING OF AUGUST 11, 2021

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

DATE PREPARED: August 12, 2021

LOCATION: Keene Recreation Center Multi-Purpose Room
312 Washington Street, Keene, NH

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

PURPOSE: New Hampshire Rail Trail Public Meeting #2

Discussion:

1. Introduction – Shelly Winters (NHDOT)
 - a. Project Overview
 - b. Project Team
 - c. Stakeholders
2. Project Scope – Carolyn Radisch (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 – Carolyn Radisch (GPI)
4. Requested Public Feedback – Carolyn Radisch (GPI)
 - a. Tier System for Prioritizing State Investments
 - b. State Funding Mechanisms
 - c. Other Items
5. Public Comment Period

Jason Soukup – Manchester Moves

Q: Will the economic analysis focus on the benefit of a safe, reliable rail trail network? In particular, will the study focus on the reduction in reliance on automobiles through means of a safe, reliable rail trail network that can improve home ownership rates and reduce poverty?

Q: In regard to trail counts- how do you anticipate you will project usership and therefore estimate the potential ROI for a potential statewide connection?

A: This economy study is very narrow in scope as we are closely following SB185 and its contents. Therefore, effects of homeownership and automobile reliance are not part of this study. We are, however, collecting a lot of anecdotal information that may be used for future studies. In regard to trail use projections, this would require extensive scenario modeling that is also outside of the scope. The plan, will however, provide NH with great information to start thinking about expanding the network for an even greater economic impact.

Mike Waslick – Swanzey (Monadnock Region)

Q: Look at the plans for the Ashuelot and Cheshire South Rail Trails that the SWRPC did. Are they included in this plan? They recently went through similar public outreach efforts and that information may be useful to for this study.

A: J.B. Mack, the RPC stakeholder committee member, will provide the project team with any pertinent information.

Q: Connecting trails with neighboring states (particularly MA and VT) is critical to vastly enhance the trail network and attract users from other states.

Q: Regarding the prioritization of investments, the project team should consider low-income towns to ensure equity across the system.

Q: It is recommended the project team investigate utilizing StreetLight data for ADT and Origin-Destination data.

A: Thank you for your comments.

Ray Jackson – STAC / SPNH / Trail Rights

Q: In regard to non-state-owned rail lines, is there an agreement with the state about potential first rights to buy the rail line in order to further connect the system?

A: Yes, under **NH** Statute 228:60-b – “All rail properties within the state offered for sale by any railway corporation after July 1, 1990, shall be offered for sale in writing to the commissioner in the first instance. In no event shall a railroad corporation offer to sell or otherwise dispose of rail properties to any person or entity on terms or conditions more favorable than those offered to the state. The state of New Hampshire acting through the commissioner shall notify such railroad corporation in writing of its acceptance or rejection of an offer within 90 calendar days of receipt of such offer. When the commissioner accepts an offer, he or she shall promptly notify the governor and the governor's council.”

This does however depend on current use and ownership of the rail line and whether it is inactive or active.

Wendy Grossman – Walpole Trail Committee

Q: Where can I submit updates for the rail trail inventory? The Walpole rail trail should be changed to not improved as it is poorly maintained (grass growing high).

A: You can view the maps online at <https://www.nhrailtrailsplan.com/> Please feel free to email the project team any other comments and updates to the inventory.

Q: The lack of maintenance agreements seems to be holding up restoration efforts for rail trails across the state.

A: It is understood that there have been some isolated, negative experiences. Agreements are made either by NHDOT having a direct rail trail agreement with the municipalities or the DOT enters into a cooperative agreement with its sister agency, NHDNCR, who then enters into maintenance agreements with municipalities or trails groups. This can be confusing for all involved and unfortunately funding is an issue for all agencies. It is not the project team's intent or decision to be holding up trail maintenance efforts, but there is no DNCR representative at the meeting to speak to this specific issue. Rather, the intent is that the study will produce a standard template agreement regardless of the managing agency. Therefore, all can expect a standard process.

Q: In regard to funding priorities, please consider those rail trails that are completely deteriorating. Preservation of existing rail trails should be prioritized.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Jim Creighton – Resources, Recreation & Development – Hillsborough County District 38

Q: The project team should consider the use of QR codes along the trail system to provide additional information as is done on the Alleghany Rail Trail.

Q: If you can get users to stay overnight through multi-day trips, the ROI vastly improves. It is recommended that the project team prioritize connectivity to increase length for avid bike riders to truly make NH a rail trail destination.

Q: We have had concerns from communities regarding disruption (noise, pollution, etc.) as well as capacity (food, lodging, parking, etc.) issues. Need to account for impact on small towns

A: Thank you for your comments.

Chuck Redfern – NH Rail Trail Coalition

Q: Will the economic value be broken up by geography as well as a cumulative statewide number?

A: Yes, we do have the ability of breaking down data in that regard to provide a regional snapshot as well as a statewide average. We'll consider how we make the data outward facing as we progress.

Q: It would be beneficial to see the breakdown (percentage) of existing funding sources over the past five years.

A: The Rockefeller Center did provide a funding report. The project team is in the process of validating those numbers.

Q: Snowmobile users would need a break on any user fees as they already pay through registration fees.

Q: Cheshire Phase III is being held up. The city is waiting for NHDOT to sign off on the project. The bids are in, but maintenance issues are up in the air. This is to be a state-built project. It is important that downshifting of maintenance costs does not occur for municipalities.

A: The study intends to produce a standard template maintenance agreement regardless of the managing agency so hopefully all can expect a standard process. NHDOT staff will follow up with the City of Keene on the specific contracting issues for the cited project.

Dan Reed – Marlow ATV Club

Q: With respect to user fees, legally right now the public can walk on private land without liability for the owner. If you collect a user fee, then you are taking on liability.

Q: Motorized users will spend a lot of money to ride on a trail and thus they create a big economic impact. The public is using trails the ATV clubs have spent a lot of money to maintain. Will the economic study breakdown economic impact by user type?

A: User designation is asked on the survey and therefore, yes we should be able to break down the economic data by usage type if advantageous to the plan's development. We'll consider how we make the data outward facing as we progress.

Jerry Livesey – Mt. Pisgah ATV Club

Q: There are several trails that do not allow ATV access based on federal regulations. Will this study look to reconsider those restriction as ATV use brings a lot of economic value to region as well as a lot of funding and volunteer efforts?

A: ATV clubs will need to complete the federal waiver process for change in usage type (although it should be noted there are no known waivers that have been approved in the entire nation). Many of these trails were funded using Federal Highway Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds before Transportation Alternatives (TA) funds existed and therefore have federal restrictions intact.

Alan Gross – RTAC (Swanzey)

Q: The rail trails are a great resource to the state of New Hampshire. It is nice to see the state advancing these assets.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Pat Rodrigues – Cheshire Rail Trail

Q: It is important to promote connectivity (Bellow Falls to Boston region would be very beneficial).

There seems to be regional favoritism in regard to funding. The southwest part of the state feels neglected. There needs to be equity based on geography- not just in regard to population centers.

The Connecticut River is a natural resource that should be prioritized.

Proximity and historic nature of trails should be prioritized. (Stone arch structures)

Snowmobile use is not fair. Pedestrians don't have much of a say because they don't pay fees. However, rail trails are supposed to be public and free to use for all.

A: Thank you for your comments.

Alex Gaffney – Hinsdale ATV Club

Q: Snowmobile and ATV club funding is hard to come by, too. All users are encouraged to join a club to help maintain and fund the trails.

A: Thank you for your comment.

Jason Soukup – Manchester Moves

Q: Connectivity should be prioritized. Provide connection from Manchester to Concord.

Q: Pan-Am corridor is being sold. Did NH do a benefit-cost analysis to convert to a rail trail?

A: This is a case where PanAm is selling an active operating rail line to another railroad corporation that will utilize the active operating rail line. The State is not acquiring the line, but we do have the ability to comment. Unfortunately, this is a federal process.

Q: Population centers should also be prioritized. What would the economic impact be for a Manchester-Concord trail? Can inferred trail counts be used to apply multipliers to see what those impacts could be?

A: This would require a significant number of projections and scenario modeling which is unfortunately outside of our scope. The data produced during the economic analysis of this plan may be useful to this effort and something that could be used to then develop a corridor approach or model.

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