

MEETING AGENDA & PLAN STATUS

Tuesday, September 28, 2021
10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

PROJECT: New Hampshire Statewide Rail Trail Plan

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

PURPOSE: Rail Trail Advisory Stakeholder Committee Meeting # 4

MEETING PREPARATION

If you did not attend one of the public hearings, please visit the project website (<https://www.nhrailtrailsplan.com/>) and review the “NH Rail Trail Public Hearing Handout” and the “NH Rail Trail Public Hearing Presentation” found under the heading “Stay in the Know.”

AGENDA ITEMS

- A. Introductions
- B. Tom Sammon Resignation
- C. Summary of DOT / DNCR Meeting (Held Thursday, September 9, 2021)
- D. Review Public Feedback
- E. Status Plan Update and Discussion (See Below)
- F. Next Steps

PLAN STATUS UPDATE

1.0 RAIL TRAIL CORRIDOR INVENTORY AND RAIL TRAIL ORGANIZATION LIST

- **Description of Work Completed** - A GIS based inventory of the state-owned rail trails and rail trail management organizations has been completed. The database includes the following information for the state-owned rail trails and corridors:
 - Trail Length
 - Surface
 - Property Owner (i.e., NHDOT, DNCR, Municipality)
 - State Management Entity (i.e., NHDOT, DNCR, Municipality)
 - Local Trail Management Organizations and Contact
 - Permitted Uses
 - Year Acquired
 - Acquisition Funding Source(s)
 - Status (i.e., inactive, active, abandoned)
- **Public Input Themes** - Specific corrections were offered. We are following up on corrections offered through the public input process.
- **Status** - This task is substantially completed.

2.0 ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

- **Description of Work Completed** - UNH is preparing an impact study using primary sources data collection (in-person survey) of direct economic impacts (i.e., spending for room, meals, etc.) of rail trails to the New Hampshire economy. Data collection will continue through the fall and the study and economic impact analysis will be completed in early 2022.
 - **Public Input Themes** – The following feedback was offered:
 - Many comments were made regarding secondary economic benefits of rail trails such as community health and wellness, increased property values, reduced dependency on automobiles, etc. All these benefits are worthy avenues for future study, but the scope of this effort was set by Senate Bill (SB) 185.
 - The economic impact study may include a short narrative to summarize other actual or anecdotal secondary economic benefits that are not included, but will focus on the in-person, actual expenditures
 - OHRV and equestrian users were concerned that their use may be underrepresented based on the original survey locations (some corridors which have use restrictions)
 - Additional survey locations and methods are underway to try and obtain more data from OHRV users and equestrian users.
 - One of the overarching themes from the public input sessions was that to maximize ROI (return on investment) to the state, greater rail trail connectivity is necessary. New Hampshire lacks a connected rail trail system within the state and to rail trails in adjacent states that would attract multi-day users and higher visitor spending.
 - Plymouth State University is preparing an economic study related to motorized users. This study will be provided to the UNH team for reference.
 - **Status** - Data collection will continue through the fall and impact analysis will be completed in 2022.
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3.0 MAINTENANCE DEFINITIONS AND COSTS AND INSURANCE BEST PRACTICES

- **Description of Work Completed** - This task is intended to clarify maintenance obligations between the state and local trail management organizations, cost expectations, and provide a consistent template agreement for use between the state and municipalities.
 - *Categorization of Maintenance Tasks.* Routine and capital maintenance tasks have been identified. The state is responsible for capital maintenance and municipalities are responsible for routine tasks.
 - *Typical Maintenance Costs.* Typical cost ranges for routine and capital maintenance tasks have been developed through multiple sources.
 - *Template Agreement.* A template trail management agreement has been developed and circulated for comment.
 - *Insurance Best Practices.* We are seeking input on insurance options for volunteer trail management groups.
 - **Public Input Themes** - Input has been provided on the template agreement and typical construction and maintenance costs.
 - Agreements should be same regardless of which state agency (DOT or DNCR) they (town or trails group) deals with.
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- DNCR provided comments that the draft agreement was DOT-heavy and didn't address some of their concerns. DOT suggested that DNCR submit specific comments, concerns, questions for review & consideration
- **Status** - Maintenance definitions, typical costs and template agreement are substantially complete. Insurance best practices are in process.

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE INPUT - Could you share your knowledge of what insurance options are available for volunteer management groups?

4.0 TIER SYSTEM FOR PRIORITIZING RAIL TRAIL INVESTMENTS

- **Description of Work Completed** - Have developed a preliminary list of factors for prioritizing state investments in rail trails based on public input.
- **Public Input Themes** - The following feedback was offered:
 - Connectivity
 - DOT Leadership: *"Target Short Breaks and Maintain What We Have"*
 - The public identified several corridors that may be investigated for future connection
 - East Coast Greenway – Connect to Massachusetts and Maine via Hampton Branch line along Seacoast
 - Granite State Rail Trail – Lebanon to Salem via the Northern / Londonderry / Windham / Salem Rail Trails. Includes Manchester to Concord connection.
 - Lebanon to Lakes Region – Northern / Winni / WOW Trail
 - Cross New Hampshire Trail – Connect to Cross Vermont Trail at Woodsville: Woodsville -Ammonoosuc and Presidential Rail Trails –
 - Keene Area to Boston (Depends on Massachusetts Trails)
 - Keene to Concord
 - Other Suggested Prioritization Criteria:
 - Access to Nature / Scenic Qualities
 - Contribution to Local Economy
 - Potential for Everyday Trips.
 - This category would qualify for CMAQ funding.
 - Equitable Geographic Distribution
 - Community Income
 - Trail Lifecycle
 - Trail Volumes
- **Status** - In progress.

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE INPUT - What are the gaps that need to be filled/should be prioritized?

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE FUNDING MECHANISM AND MANAGEMENT OF FUNDING

- **Description of Work Completed** - Rockefeller Center draft report currently under review by state departments. Current work includes understanding existing funding.
 - Agreement between NHDOT and DNCR regarding categories of funding
 - Acquisition
 - Construction
 - Operations and Maintenance
 - ROW/Encroachment
 - The plan will discuss these categories:
 - What funds can be used?
 - Here is what other states are doing – not advocating
 - What are some options for NH?

5.1 STATE FUNDING MECHANISM

- **Public Input Themes** - The following feedback was offered:
 - User Fees – User fees are part of the answer, but not the whole answer. Several questions were raised about user fees:
 - Motorized users already pay via registration fees
 - Liability question (Does collecting user fees incur liability?)
 - Maximize Federal Funds - Question about success of projects in NH – under-engineered / losing out on federal funding question. What are the problems? Can we recommend processes for better success?
 - Dedicate percentage of NHDOT construction budget to Rail Trails
 - Other Funding Ideas:
 - Donations
 - Volunteer (Maintenance)
 - Tax Source
 - General Fund
 - Fundraising Events
 - QR Code System similar to Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) Rail Trail
- **Status** – In progress.

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE INPUT - Recommendation for State Funding Mechanisms...what have you heard from those you represent? Any new ideas or suggestions?

5.2 MANAGEMENT OF TRAILS / FUNDS AT STATE LEVEL

- **Public Input Themes** – The following feedback was offered:
 - Confusion regarding trails managed by DOT vs DNCR. There is a need to streamline the process, eliminate overall and confusion and facilitate inter-agency partnerships.
 - Most use is recreation-based.
 - Idea for DOT to acquire property and construct trails and the Trails Bureau of DNCR to manage trails but funding is required.
 - Explore Multi-Agency Partnership Models

- MassTrails - Partnership between state agencies: MassDOT, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Manages grant awards for recreational trails (funding from RTP and state capital budget).
- Eastern Trail Management District (Maine) Partnership between non-profit Eastern Trail Alliance and municipalities along the Eastern Trail to fundraise and promote Eastern Trail.
- **Status** – In progress.

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE INPUT - Any overarching feedback from the stakeholders you represent to who (what agency) should manage funding for rail trails?

6.0 INTEGRITY OF CORRIDORS

- **Description of Work Completed** - Meetings with state staff to understand problem and current efforts.
- **Public Input Themes** - The following feedback was offered:
 - Regarding Encroachment:
 - Volunteer trail management organizations should visually inspect properties
 - Fences and barriers
 - Survey boundaries
 - Notify landowners
 - Fines
 - Enforcement
 - Addressing Abutter Concerns
 - Eliminate or restrict ATV/motorized use of rail trails – direct these users to more remote areas and more appropriate terrain
 - Provide mechanism for abutting landowners to register a compliant
- **Status** – In progress.
 - Recommendation to initiate multi-year process of re-establishing boundaries
 - Survey and Markers: Plan and budget for XX miles per year – how to prioritize?
 - Some of this may be addressed using ARP (American Rescue Plan) funding – proposal is in process by DNCR for GIS Application that may include some sort of ROW element
 - Trail groups monitor – Develop a form for reporting encroachments
 - Municipalities send permitting requests on abutting properties to State (DOT) for review

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE INPUT - Input on handling encroachment and abutter concerns. Any suggestions as to how this can be accomplished with current funding & staffing limitations? Suggestions as to how this could be accomplished if additional funding or staffing resources existed?

7.0 TRAIL DESIGN STANDARDS

- **Description of Work Completed** - Review of trail design standards and Rail with Trail research.
- **Public Input Themes** - The following feedback was offered:
 - Review East Coast Greenway trail standards

- Be cognizant that trail surface type influences or limits user groups that can easily use the trail
 - Other design factors including clearance standards, parking, and trail accessibility should be considered
 - Equestrian Specific – There is a desire for 5 feet of unpaved trail width and horse trailer parking
- Consider a multi-user trail design (utilize ROW to provide dedicated space for different user types along trail)
- **Status** – In progress

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE INPUT - Review of trail design standards. (Will come in future via email.)

8.0 FINAL REPORT

- **Status** – Not started yet.
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9.0 PAMPHLET

- **Status** – Not started yet.
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10.0 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- **Description of Work Completed**
 - Stakeholder Committee
 - Ongoing
 - Public Meetings
 - Completed - three (3) in-person & one (1) virtual-only meeting
 - Combined Attendance ~ Over 200
 - Website
 - <https://www.nhrailtrailsplan.com/>
 - Regular project updates provided