

Route 113 Corridor Committee

Corridor Committee Meeting

March 18, 2009

3:00 – 5:00 PM

Brown Memorial Library, East Baldwin

Meeting Notes

Attendance: Steve Estes (Baldwin); Glen Haines (Baldwin); Bob Jewett (Standish); Dave Knapp (Fryeburg); Marlene Livonia (Hiram); Eric Noble (Hiram); Edward Pierce (Hiram); Phil Pomerleau (Standish); Glen Reynolds (Baldwin); Richard Rudolph (Standish); Larry Seidl (Baldwin); Mike Shaw (Standish); Lou Stack (Standish); Marlee Turner (Brownfield); Steve Wood (Baldwin).

Staff: Julia Dawson (SMRPC); Caroline Paras (GPCOG).

Guests: Nate Moulton (Maine Department of Transportation); Len Mulligan (Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority); Paul Hallett (Conway Scenic Railroad); Jack Sutton (MRG, Inc.); Everett Barnard (Augusta).

I. Welcome and Introductions

A. Minutes of 1/21/09

There were no changes offered for the minutes of 1/21/09.

B. Town News

Representative Mike Shaw sends his regrets, as he is meeting with the Governor to discuss high speed rail.

Baldwin: Town has officially adopted the bylaws for the Route 113 Corridor Committee and appointed Glen Reynolds, Larry Seidl, and Selectman Gary McNeil to be their representatives. A Pine Tree Zone amendment is still in the works.

Hiram: Went through major cuts at the recent town meeting. The town was hoping to convert the closed school in East Hiram to a new library, but residents voted down the project because the school district wants \$220,000 for the building. There is a new circus train at the Hiram Rail Museum.

Brownfield: Still working on a land use plan.

Fryeburg: Town representatives met with Community Concepts to discuss new designation of an industrial zone that be subject to Pine Tree Zone benefits. SAD 72 is exploring the idea of closing the Snow Middle School and relocating to a new site close to the Molly Ockett Middle School. Town has appointed two people to the Route 113 Corridor Committee: Dave Knapp and Selectman Tom Klinepeter. The Fryeburg Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan is near completion. The town will host the statewide Bike Rally this summer.

Standish: The Town has adopted the bylaws of the Route 113 Corridor Committee and appointed Lou Stack and Phil Pomerleau to continue as their representatives. The town is working on their budget which has meant cutting many items. They are also going to a four-day work week. The Town budgeted \$1,000 for the Route 113 Corridor Committee on an as-needed basis.

Jack Sutton: Invited the group to the MRG, Inc./DownEast Rail annual meeting in May. See attached.

Paul Hallett, Conway Scenic Railroad (CSRR): Supports the reconstruction of the Mountain Division. NHDOT is replacing and upgrading 10 miles of Class 2 track. NE Utilities will be shipping over limit cargo (200 tons) on the Conway Scenic but was unable to use the Maine portion of the Mountain Division to shorten the trip. CSRR purchased a dining car from DownEast Rail.

Richard Rudolph: Supports efforts of the group. Thinks we should definitely pursue the Mountain Division line for all user groups (freight, excursion and commuter).

II. Roundtable Discussion on the Mountain Division

Caroline recapped the highlights from the feasibility study on the Mountain Division rail line completed by HNTB in 2008. Estimates for restoration of the line range from \$20 to \$40 million. The major difference is that a \$20 million restoration would bring the track up to Class 2 standards, reusing the existing 85 lb rail. This upgrade would support freight and possibly excursion use. A \$40 million restoration would bring the track up to Class 3 standards by replacing the 85lb rail with 115 lb rail. This upgrade would support freight and excursion use as well as commuter service up to 60 mph. Below is a summary of what the HNTB study concluded:

Freight: Under an optimistic or minimal scenario, freight service could be self sustaining.

Commuter: There is not enough density to support commuter rail between Portland/Westbrook and the towns along the Mountain Division line.

Excursion: Quantifying what this tourist/excursion market may be is difficult, but the economic benefits to both Maine and New Hampshire's tourist industry could be significant.

Roundtable comments:

- For the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, which operates the Downeaster, funding is the major issue. In September, current funds, via the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program (CMAQ), will run out and the Governor has not included any funds in the budget to support the service.
- CMAQ funds can only be used for start up for a maximum three year period. In the past Senator Snowe has applied for an extension to keep using these funds for operation of the Downeaster; however, this is not a practical long term strategy.
- The State needs to find a dedicated source of funding for the Downeaster.
- RIF programs are an option that NNEPRA is currently exploring.

- All passenger services applying for funding need to demonstrate that they can support operating costs over the next 20 years.
- The Route 113 Corridor Committee should contact the Governor and/or legislature to show their support for the Downeaster.
- ME/NH need to work together on funding solutions. Currently Maine carries the entire cost of running the Downeaster.
- NNEPRA has bonding authority, but it can only be used for capital expenses.
- There is a competitive pot of money under the stimulus plan, but it is small (\$1.5 billion). Candidate proposals must be in excess of \$20 million. Requirements of the programs are not known yet.
- Is the Mountain Division “shovel ready?” This depends on the level of scrutiny required in a State versus Federal program. To receive approval for a loan from the Federal Railroad Administration, the Portland-Brunswick expansion is being subjected to tests of noise, vibration, and neighborhood disturbance.
- A proposed State Transportation Bond has set aside approximately \$20 million for rail. The Critical Corridors Program will be competitive.
- Jack Sutton pushed the group to advocate for a Class 2 upgrade that would support freight and excursion service from Portland to New Hampshire.
- Richard Rudolph pushed the group to should shoot for the moon, i.e., a Class 3 upgrade, and expect less.

Given the range of opinions in the room, a straw poll was taken amongst representatives of participating towns:

Standish:	Push for a Class 2 upgrade to support freight service
Baldwin:	Push for a Class 2 upgrade to support freight service
Hiram:	Push for a Class 2 upgrade in order to “get some traffic” on the line
Brownfield:	Push for a Class 2 upgrade to “get something going”
Fryeburg:	Push for a Class 3 upgrade because Maine’s future is tourism and people are the “commodity of the future.”

Caroline charged representatives to go back to their Towns to discuss this proposal.

Jack suggested we approach the businesses along the Mountain Division to solicit letters of intent to haul on the line.

Nate Moulton reminded the group that the Commissioner and the Department are aware of what the group is doing. He encouraged them to make their case as to why they should get ahead of other regions pursuing rail, i.e., Lewiston/Auburn, particularly when it comes to passenger rail.

III. New Business

The next meeting will be in Hiram.