

Route 113 Corridor Committee

Corridor Committee Meeting

February 21, 2008

2:30 – 5:30 PM

Fryeburg Town Office

Meeting Notes

Attendance: Marlee Turner (Brownfield); David Knapp (Fryeburg); Phil Pomerleau (Standish); Gordon Billington (Standish); Lou Stack (Standish); Glen Reynolds (Baldwin); Eric Noble (Hiram); Larry Seidl (Baldwin); Steven Wood (Baldwin); Conrad Hartford (Hiram); Dana Roffler (Hiram, Manager, Fryeburg Visitor Information Center); Steve Gourley (Brownfield); Toni Seger (Western Maine Cultural Alliance); Leslie Farrin (Fryeburg); Jon Shute (North Yarmouth)

Staff and Guests: Tom Reinauer (SMRPC); Julia Dawson (SMRPC); Caroline Paras (GPCOG); Bob LaRoche (MaineDOT); Duane Scott (MaineDOT); Nate Moulton (MaineDOT); Ralph Mazzeo (HNTB)

1. News

Standish: Standish is working on improvements to the library and park in Steep Falls as well as an expansion of the Town office. They have also appointed a Conservation/Open Space Committee.

Baldwin: The Historical Society hosted a “Meet your Town” event at the library. The Baldwin Business Association is gearing up for various events this summer.

Brownfield: The SAD may make the Brownfield school available to the Town. It is in excellent condition.

Hiram: The Town may also be acquiring a school, which they could turn into the Town office.

Fryeburg: The Town’s new Bike/Ped Committee met last week for the first time. Route 302 between Bridgton and Fryeburg finally has a PSN # from the Maine Department of Transportation, which means it is in the planning stage. Daryl Belz of the MaineDOT is in the process of enhanced project scoping (EPS) on order to determine the best treatment for the roadway.

David explained how the Lakes Region Transportation Coalition prioritized the region’s projects so that every Town put the replacement of the Causeway Bridge in Naples as their #1 project. Something similar could be done in the Route 113 Corridor.

Phil mentioned that Standish passed a resolution supporting the relocation of the Maine Narrow Gauge Railroad to Hiram. Other Towns in the Corridor could do something similar. Such a letter should be addressed to the organization’s Board of Directors. The other entity with a

major stake is the MaineDOT, which owns the Mountain Division line on which the Narrow Gauge would like to operate.

2. Economic Opportunities Strategy for the Saco River Valley

The plan was adopted at the last meeting on January 17, 2008. Issues that need to be settled tonight include: feedback on the Executive Summary of the plan, approval of the Cover Letter, and signatures on the Cover Letter. Caroline circulated a clipboard and noted that members and friends of the Committee could sign the document as individuals. It was suggested that signators include their town of residence. Suggested changes to the Executive Summary included the following:

- Changing the name of the Plan as follows: “Economic Opportunities ~~in the Saco River Valley~~ along the Pequawket Trail.
- Editing of the cover letter to read, “Please join us in ~~preserving~~ improving our quality of life in the Saco River Valley.”
- Insertion of a new map of the Route 113 Corridor that encompasses Gilead.
- Insertion of the Scenic Byway logo
- Adjusting the description of Evans Notch to make it more equitable to other area descriptions.
- Minor edits to the descriptions of each town, including changes of pictures.
- Editing of the Tourism section as follows: “~~Attain State and~~ Consider Federal designation of Route 113 from Standish to Gilead as a Scenic Byway.”
- Identification of the Mountain Division Trail by its full name in the Recreation section.
- Editing the Tourism section as follows: “The State recognizes the Saco River Valley as part of Maine’s Lakes and Mountains tourism region, ~~which includes the Sebago Lakes area plus Lewiston Auburn, Bethel, Farmington, and Rangeley.~~”
- Editing the Creative economy section as follows: “Develop and promote a creative economy tour of the ~~Saco River Valley~~ Pequawket Trail.

Caroline will also make these changes to the plan now posted online. Hiram and Baldwin each need 50 copies of the Executive Summary for their Town meetings on March 1 and March 8, respectively.

3. Scenic Byway

A. Brochure

Dana from the Maine Tourism Association, who is housed at the new Fryeburg Visitor Information Center, encouraged the Committee to think about their audience and their purpose in developing a brochure. The two most frequently asked questions are, “Where can I see a moose?” and “Where can I eat a lobster?” Also, visitors looking at pictures in the information center frequently point to a picture in a light box and ask, “Where is that? I want to go there.” Light boxes are display cases that can be purchased for \$1,000 for a three-year period by a member of the tourism association on a first come, first serve basis. As there is only one left,

Phil urged the Committee to consider buying a “light box” at the Fryeburg Visitor Information Center as soon as possible. The \$1,000 cost could be split five ways amongst the Towns.

Toni reviewed the different types of brochures developed by Scenic Byways in Maine, including two-color and four-color. The more folds you have, the bigger the map can be on the inside. In addition to color and size, the Committee might think about the style. Toni showed the group one brochure for Route 201 that was paid for by local businesses through advertising revenue as well as the same route in a four-color brochure with no specific mention of businesses.

B. Roundtable with MaineDOT

Duane Scott and Bob LaRoche from the Maine Department of Transportation joined the Committee for a roundtable discussion. Bob was the State Byways Coordinator when the Pequawket Trail was designated; however Duane is now the State Coordinator and has taken over byway responsibilities.

What are the advantages of being a Scenic Byway? Being a Byway opens up marketing opportunities, such as websites and brochures. It also offers brand name recognition. The Committee could develop a marketing plan that specifies a brochure and pay for that brochure with grant funds. The State also sponsors a variety of training opportunities, including an annual conference.

What are the advantages of Federal designation? Probably the “bragging rights” are the most significant. The Feds have their own marketing arsenal as well as a resource center that provides technical assistance.

Can we use Federal funds to develop a brochure to promote local businesses? They can, but a brochure funded by a Federal grant must take a more generic approach. For example, the Byway map could show icons for gas, food or lodging but it could not name specific businesses.

Now that we are a State Scenic Byway, do we need to apply for Federal Designation? No. But in order to apply for any funds for marketing or capital improvements, a Byway must develop a Corridor Management Plan. The State has no dedicated funding source for Scenic Byways, the funds are administered and distributed by the Federal Highway Administration. And the only Federal dollars that the Pequawket Trail Scenic Byway can apply for at this time are planning funds to develop the Corridor Management Plan. The 2008 Funding Cycle is now open. Applications are due to the State by ~~April 11~~ March 28. Receiving a grant and developing a plan does not automatically trigger Federal designation. That is a separate process. Byways can still receive Federal funds without the Federal designation.

Now that designation has been granted, what are the responsibilities of Towns in relation to the MaineDOT? Towns must strive to maintain the Byway’s intrinsic qualities, such as natural or scenic beauty. The Scenic Byway designation is maintained until “somebody” determines that the intrinsic qualities for which it received designation are no longer there.

Will the State regulate land use along the Byway? No. Municipalities will retain local control over land use decisions. Route 201, for example, has seen a lot of economic growth because of the Byway. But being a Byway does motivate local action. In Rangeley, for example, the Byways Committee helped the IGA design a sign that was more in character with its surroundings.

Can the Committee obtain Federal funds for a brochure without developing a Corridor Management Plan? No.

The Committee discussed the issue of whether to apply for funds now to develop a Corridor Management Plan or wait a year and see what happens. At first the Committee voted to do the latter. But after clarifying with MaineDOT that the development of a plan does not mean Federal designation, the group authorized SMRPC to register at www.grants.gov in preparation for a decision at the next meeting.

4. Mountain Division Rail Study

- A. Presentation of rail study by Nate Moulton, Maine Department of Transportation and Ralph Mazzeo, HNTB Corporation

Ralph started with a historical overview of the Mountain Division. The rail line was used to carry long haul, not local traffic. The “Canadian differential” also helped make the line competitive, despite the expense of operating and maintaining the difficult route. When Guilford acquired all of Maine Central’s trackage, however, there was much redundancy, and most expensive lines, like the Mountain Division, were orphaned.

The rail line is in very good shape, with some exceptions, including the bridge decking and leaning abutments. About \$20 million needs to be invested to bring the line to Class I or II standards. To attain Class III, the cost doubles to \$42 million for the Maine section, mostly because all of the steel would have to be replaced.

The most promising freight opportunity is aggregate, such as gravel and cement. Other businesses feel that their cargo is too fragile or lacks sufficient volume to be shipped via rail at competitive rates. Ralph estimated that the total cost of shipping aggregate via rail is about twice the cost of trucking, based on figures that businesses were reporting. The optimistic assessment is 82 carloads per mile per year, and pessimistic, 37. Freight might be more competitive if hauled to Boston.

The potential for commuter service was compared to lines in New Haven, Connecticut, Nashville, Tennessee, and Fitchburg Massachusetts. Overall, Ralph felt that there was insufficient density along the route to support commuter rail. Only South Windham had the right balance. The line through Gorham, while dense by comparison to the outlying towns, travels through an unpopulated part of town. Further hampering the assessment is the location of the Portland Transportation Center. A train station needs to be downtown in order to enable commuters to walk to their jobs.

Nate then provided his assessment of the report. The report provides a bird's eye view that is "about what we thought it would be." But this is not the end. It is a starting point to look further. The State owns 312 miles of trackage. The Mountain Division is in Tier 1, "the next rail line that shows promise." To that end, the State is still negotiating with Pan Am to purchase down to Mile 6, with a connectivity agreement to the Portland Transportation Center.

In terms of next steps, the Towns can encourage the State to:

- Encourage the State to continue funding the operating costs for the Downeaster Amtrak service
- Locate a train station in downtown Portland
- Purchase the rest of the corridor
- Build the trail so that it is compatible with the rail
- Enforce the ban on ATV's

At the local level, Towns can prevent encroachment into the rail corridor from competing land uses.

Jon Shute, who used to operate the Maine Eastern Railroad, said the report shows that the Mountain Division could be a break-even venture, which is good for a shortline operation. There is a lot of potential to ship aggregate from Portland to New York via the barge service that is now serving the paper companies.