

“Sept. 14, 2011 Northern New England Rally for Rail”

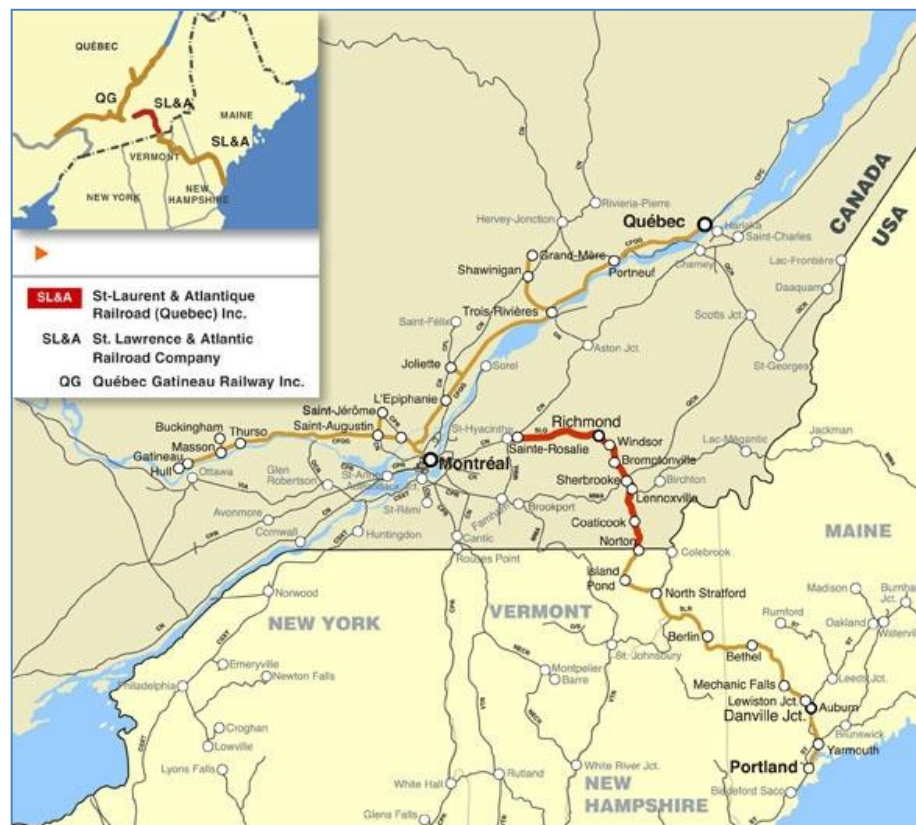
A Report & Action Plan

Presented by the Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce

And

The Maine Rail Transit Coalition

10/31/2011



The “Sept. 14, 2011 Northern New England Rally for Rail” A Report & Action Plan¹

Over the past year the Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce sub-committee on Transportation has held a series of meetings related to the restoration of passenger rail to the northern border region of Maine and NH. The Maine Department of Transportation had been conducting a feasibility analysis of the subject of passenger rail to this region, and the turnout at the public sessions created the momentum for a grass-roots advocacy to assure a plan was developed – and implemented. Chamber Committee members represent businesses, public services, individuals and transportation providers from around the region, including cross border interests into New Hampshire.

The Committee’s goal is to raise the level of interest in some action that will lead to the ultimate goal of passenger rail service on the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railway (SLR). The region served by the (SLR) possesses a substantial rail infrastructure that does not currently employ passenger rail service. This region needs to connect to passenger rail operators to the south and to the north in Canada to create jobs through sustainable economic development.

On September 14, 2011, the Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Maine Rail Transit Coalition, Grow Smart Maine and partially funded by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation Tillotson Fund, hosted the “Northern New England Rally for Rail” in Bethel, Maine. This event brought interested parties together to focus on this questions: ***“What are the dynamic and evolving questions, ideas, considerations that arise in considering bringing passenger rail to western Maine, Bethel and beyond to northern New Hampshire and Montreal?”***

One of the key unanswered questions of the day was who, what entities, would be responsible and have the resources to carry out this mission to its conclusion. This report reviews the day’s notes, interviews with attendees and the on-going discussions about passenger rail service on the SLR. Action plans are detailed and parties are assigned roles.

Over seventy individuals, representing geographic, business and economic interests from a large area of Northern New England, participated in an Open Space Technology (OST)² session to collectively create an agenda on topics of importance to those present. The approach set the stage for the meeting’s participants in breakout sessions to create the working agenda. as Individuals posted their issues, and then later, notes were compiled into a proceedings document for distribution to all participants.

¹ Based on the “Northern New England Rally for Rail, Summary Notes”. Wednesday, September 14, 2011, The Bethel Inn Resort, Bethel, Maine
Prepared by Leigh Tillman of Good Group Decisions

² **Open Space Technology (OST)** is an approach for hosting meetings, conferences, corporate-style retreats, and community summit events, focused on a specific and important purpose or task—but *beginning* without any formal agenda, beyond the overall purpose or theme.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology

The following “report” from the conference serves as an action plan to assign priorities and to identify what actions should be taken next to establish investments in capital and operations for passenger rail service in this region.

The Open Space Technology (OST) session settled on five (5) topics to further discuss.

1. Ancillary Services
2. Economic Development
3. Political Will
4. Funding
5. Passenger Demand

1. Ancillary Services are those services necessary to support the passenger rail at the terminal sites. Most arrivals would not have access to vehicles and the train station, for example in Bethel would not be their final destination. In addition, people departing from the terminal would also need certain services to assist in moving baggage. Local and regional transit systems would need to be in place given the obligations of rail operations for transporting people to and from the terminals in an interconnected system. Local and longer distance bus operations would need to be established in a consistent and affordable manner. Local businesses might consider shuttle vans for their customers. Taxis should be available and rental car companies should either have a presence at the terminal site or connections that could serve users in an expedited manner. Terminal locations as in Bethel will have traffic issues and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plans would need to be developed.

A good bicycle and pedestrian system should be designed by local planners that gets people to their destinations and offers a healthy and recreational mode of travel. Even Segways equipped with snow tires, would be effective. Train platforms would need to be modified or enhanced in a manner that provides for support services. Bus turnoffs, taxi stands, baggage shelters and bike racks are some examples for improvements.

Stations would have to change or adapt to new types of uses. Bethel was sited as an example of a destination for activities year-round, rather than just for winter sports. For example would passenger rail service entice summer camp users to travel by rail? Might rail service to this region attract new camping enterprises?

Vehicular parking and circulation would need to be carefully integrated into the design. Proximity of the terminal to highway routes must be considered. Parking in transit-oriented developments provides critical connections between design characteristics and transportation behavior. Careful design of both parking supply and policy is the key to improving the outcomes of each individual project. There is a need to inventory land ownership in the area of the terminals in order to determine availability for eventual expansion of parking needs.³

³ **Parking Management:** For Transit Oriented Development (TOD) design, parking minimums are avoided, parking maximums are encouraged, and parking costs are charged to users. Parking requirements are reduced from those of standard development to account for and encourage more transit and walking and take advantage of shared parking opportunities. Structured parking, satellite parking, underground parking, and parking with street-facing office or retail uses are among the techniques employed to enable clear walking paths providing visibility of the transit station.

Ancillary Services: Action Statement, Next Steps:

Regional planners, municipal staffers and business leaders will develop a plan for business activity and transportation demand management at sites to be identified as potential terminal stops along the SLA Railway Corridor.

- State, local and regional transportation agencies, particularly the Maine Department of Transportation and Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, need to stay current in communications, meetings and reports with the groups and individuals that are advocating for this rail service. Comments from the MDOT and AVCOG on this report should be solicited by the Bethel Chamber transportation committee.
- E-mail contacts should be shared.
- Comprehensive community planning for the terminal sites should be on local government agendas within the next six months. Resolutions to that effect should be drafted by the working group, or volunteers from those in attendance.
- Business and services should be identified that will support and prosper at the terminal sites.

2. Economic Development is defined as the qualitative measure of progress in our economy,. Economic development usually refers to the adoption of new technologies, transition from agriculture-based to industry-based economy, and general improvement in living standards. The transition from highway-based transportation to modern, efficient rail offers the alternative for those who do not choose to drive or take a bus. Rail enhances opportunities for tourism-based economies for a younger generation and to meet the travel needs of our aging population. Concentration of business around terminal stops mitigates suburban sprawl, improves the qualities of place, revitalizes town centers and provides direct access to areas of importance to the regions economy.

There will be opportunities for business, both in attracting new businesses and for expanding and enhancing the established businesses in the area. Passenger rail sites attract residential developments and businesses may develop around these new populations. Local municipal governments, with the aid of regional and state planning agencies should begin the process of review and adaptation of local land use ordinances for business development. In general, starting a business is easy, but continuing guidance, particularly on how the business will operate with the transit operations needs to be considered early in the planning.

Investments in railway transportation pay off. Across America, and specifically right along the railway corridor serving Maine to Massachusetts, investments in passenger rail is putting local, state and federal dollars to work. Successful public/private partnerships are generating thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in private investments.

The 2008 report to the Northern New England Rail Authority AMTRAK DOWNEASTER: Overview of Economic Impacts⁴, projects a cumulative impact of over \$7 billion dollars in new construction, business and jobs directly attributed to the investment in this passenger rail system.

Rail is about to extend to Brunswick where a \$25 million dollar mixed use development is almost complete. Connecting the towns along the route between Portland, Lewiston and New Hampshire with the potential for connection to the markets of Montreal is an opportunity to revitalize the livelihood of the entire Northern Border region.

At the time this report is being written, a \$65 million dollar four-season casino resort is being constructed in the corridor, 4 minutes from a potential terminal site on the rail at Oxford regional airport. Rail will not only bring visitors from Maine to the resort, but there are historical connections to Montreal that will be revitalized by this and other Maine attractions accessible by rail. In addition, the border towns of Berlin and Gorham New Hampshire will realize new four-season visitors, and rail can provide a transportation system for the employees needed for the new employment centers in Berlin. Passenger rail not only encourages economic development, but it reduces the burdens of our dependence on foreign oil and associated environmental impacts.

Economic Development: Action Statement, Next Steps:

A Plan for Passenger rail along the SLR Railway Corridor must be developed. This should be started soon and sources for funding the work should be identified. The Bethel Chamber Transportation sub-committee will devise an action plan for getting commitments advocating for passenger rail. This opportunity should not be delayed, nor should it be implemented incrementally. The reports are complete, the support is evident and the current economic conditions require that there be no delay in moving this forward.

- Of greatest importance, contact the railroads to better understand their issues, what can be expected for operating agreements and if these private companies will participate or oppose this effort. Obviously the Genesee & Wyoming railroad is number one for bringing into the discussions, but connections to Portland might include PanAm and in Canada the VIA Rail system; Canadian National will need to participate. In Maine some of the rail proposed for connection is owned by the State. This is a high-level requirement and Congressional delegations in Maine and New Hampshire should be contacted as soon as possible. At the Rail Rally Chip Morrison and Don Provincer volunteered to do this. A report back should be requested ASAP.
- Start a campaign of developing relationships all along the corridor.
- Arrange for informational meetings with representatives of the different interests in communities along the corridor that have a potential for hosting terminal sites.
- Create a data base that connects primary contacts in every town and city on the railway. (AVCOG).
- Present Chambers of Commerce, Rotaries and other local business information and background on the types of business development that would be attracted to these sites, and to discuss any obstacles and/or advantages of passenger rail.

⁴ AMTRAK DOWNEASTER: Overview of Economic Impacts, 2008, by the Center for Neighborhood Technology,

- Identify locations for terminal stops and surrounding land uses that benefit from rail service by meeting with Maine and New Hampshire municipal leaders, elected officials and town staff.
- There is a need to Meet with interests in Montreal, be it rail, business, government or a citizen group.
- Enlist the Northern Border Regional Commission with AVCOG in creating a three-state (Vt., NH, & ME) policy development and support organization. This organization could get word out to the larger region on events of importance and in keeping Federal officials, Congress, FTA, FRA, state DOT's etc., in the loop of progress.
- Review the historic impacts of passenger rail and economic development in this northern region to understand the impacts and effects. Rally attendee (Peggy ?) volunteered to get folks from Bates College in Lewiston involved. Don Christi will work on this as well. Don and Peggy should send a follow-up message to the committee stating their work plan.
- Research examples of passenger rail and its ties to tourism in a remote region, e.g., Alaska. Volunteer needed to provide us with information on this system. (Note Robert Elder of the Maine DOT has info on this).

3. **Political Will** refers to the desire and determination of our politicians to introduce as well as embark on reforms that will bring significant and persistent changes in transportation funding to this northern region of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Political will is the steering that is needed to turn the wheels of change. Three states, the Federal government and International interests need to prevail. The business community will also need to be engaged and to demand passenger rail service. As referenced earlier in this report, the local and regional Chambers of Commerce and economic development agencies will play an important role in messaging.

In addition to the numerous completed state-funded studies on restoring passenger rail, there are hundreds of examples of the benefits of passenger rail from around the world. Passenger rail will create jobs and if the business community will help to form and relay this message, legislators will listen. Public relations programs, media campaigns and more Rail Rallies such as the Sept. 14 event will be needed. Easy to comprehend fact sheets should be available for the public, legislators, other decision makers and the media.

The MDOT should be approached about organizing a legislative train ride. This is done by blueberry companies Downeast and the legislative bus tours of businesses around the state offer a similar example of how to share information on differing regions of the state with lawmakers. As the railway is privately owned by a multi-national corporation, having the Governor's office organize this may be required. Ideally a train ride carrying passengers from Portland to Berlin N.H could end with a rally in Berlin.

There is a need to identify key individuals whose knowledge, creativity, inspiration, reputation, and/or skills are critical to the viability of this proposal. Some individuals were in attendance at the Rally for Rail. Others, who have an interest or influence also need to be identified.

Political Will: Action Statement, Next Steps:

State representatives will enlist colleagues and MDOT decision-makers to undertake a trial passenger rail excursion on the St. Lawrence and Atlantic railway. Those present at the Rail Rally will be contacted and a meeting will be arranged with key individuals in order to plan for and take this initiative. Feedback for this idea should be requested from Congressmen Michaud.

- Arrange for a passenger rail car traveling from Portland to Berlin that would be done over a series of days allowing various advocates to participate at different times and in different places.
- Contact the NH North Country Economic Development Council about the Berlin segment of this action.
- Identify key individuals as advocates, those present and those not present and in the towns along the corridor.
- Find funding for promotional campaign
- Create a Working group of businesses, private citizens, state and public representatives, non-profits, educational institutions.
 - Rail enhancement of bus transportation for college students could be huge
- Form a rail caucus, starting with the legislature, but to include all grass roots advocates.
- Contact Federal representatives to approve high-speed rail designation all the way up to New Hampshire border.
- Request response to this report from the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Transportation.

4. Funding of the planning, engineering, capital investment and eventual operations of a passenger rail service is an important part of the discussion, but it should not impose limitations on the ability of the program to move forward. Maine's rural economies will benefit from passenger rail; this has been proven in study after study and examples from around the world. Economic development cannot occur without the aforementioned political will to fund this critical need. The current global economic crisis demands that we not hesitate, or implement this incrementally.

The economics of transportation funding need to be carefully considered in regards to the returns that have been identified. Hundreds of millions of local, state and federal dollars are being spent annually on transportation, primarily on roads and airports. How government funds transportation needs a radical change. Consumers, business and governments continuing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and pavement-based transport is not sustainable.

We spend massive monies on highway funding but never talk about the real cost of highways - ongoing expenses for maintenance and support that people haven't considered as part of the public budget. If we look at true costs we may be able to shift funding to rail because in some areas rail is less expensive with a higher return on investment.

Capital funding for railway improvements are usually easier to find than funding for operations. This is most often true as the railway corridors are considered important for business in the movement of freight. Private rail operations are paid for through traditional business transactions and the infrastructure is supported by direct government investment or tax policies that encourage the private carriers to maintain the track infrastructure.

Passenger rail operations are expected to be paid by the user, e.g., passenger ticket fares. They seldom do, particularly when rail transit sales competes directly with gasoline sales for cars. Gasoline is grossly underpriced; the federal tax has not been raised in 18 years and is now a much smaller percentage of the total price. The current price does not reflect the military spending incurred to protect our access to cheap energy, the damage to the environment or the long-term implications of future supply disruptions.

Government subsidies need to be applied to operations, a very difficult proposition in the current political climate (a very difficult proposal at any time since the Interstate highway system caused the decline of passenger rail in this country). But who, or what, source is going to pay for passenger rail?

There are sustainable solutions. Business models used in Europe, similar to those used by private rail companies; include having the railroad invest in real estate ownership at terminal locations generating income for rail transit authorities. The role of Maine's passenger rail authority should be reviewed with an eye for sustainability. In Maine some tax policy has been implemented to fund the Amtrak Downeaster, such as taxes collected on rental cars. The legislature recently passed a tax Increment financing rule (TIF) for transit that allows incremental tax collections to be used at the local level for operations of passenger rail. The legislature also completed a report in 2007 that indentified a number of options to fund passenger rail⁵.

This report to the legislature recommended a mix of sales tax, property tax, gas tax and the auto rental tax. Although the word "tax" is very unpopular, transportation professionals consider the word "subsidize" as not being an accurate description of public investments either. New and innovative options need to be researched and explained to people. We need to move beyond criticizing so-called subsidies and consider the real returns found in passenger rail investments.

Rail is important for rural areas. Passenger rail can re-invigorate small service centers. An improvement in railways for passenger rail improves critical freight transportation and will attract new business – and jobs. We need to consider each area at a time and have all areas working together. It is critical that we educate the electorate on the value of rail. And it is equally important that voters understand the true costs of all forms of transportation, particularly paved roadways.

⁵ **Task Force on Passenger Rail Funding Findings and Recommendations** 1st Session of the 123rd legislature Joint Standing committee on transportation; Jan 2007

Funding: Action Statement, Next Steps:

Every town government in the SLR railway corridor region will write a letter to their state government administration in support of restoration of passenger rail between Portland and Berlin, NH. A group representative of this region will form as a caucus to lobby for the service. The message will be the same; economic development, jobs and the creation of wealth is a fair return for public dollar investment in passenger rail, and rural communities need it.

- A full review all of the transportation bonds and legislative documents that are currently under consideration by the Maine and NH legislatures that would, if passed, support the restoration of passenger rail.
- Attend all public hearings and other meetings that concern the restoration of rail to speak in favor.
- Update the Vision statement from the 9/14 Rail rally for the purpose of writing a resolution.
- Get the message out to the electorate that economic development is bipartisan: good transportation has to be funded in order to achieve it.
- Introduce a plan to reviews Maine's passenger rail authority with an eye to sustainability.
- Ask the governor for a direct answer to whether this administration will favor the expansion of passenger rail. Draft an action statement in response to his position.

5. Passenger Demand for rail transportation will be influenced by various factors. Planners need to identify cost-effective schemes affected by fares, service quality, incomes, car ownership, land use, population, employment and wider transport policies on public transit demand.

No site should be considered the end of the line. The corridor under consideration extends from Boston to Montreal. Think of this as Portland to Auburn to Bethel and beyond. Ask yourself; "Why do we have roads?" The answer is basic; to move from point A to Point B. When you put people at one point you increase economic activity. There is a real need to link the power of the rail with urban mobility. People in rural centers linked to urban centers – these people will become the movers and shakers. These people are paying taxes. This should not be about how to pay for it but about the economic activity that results. Then there is the Canadian connection. Many people of Canadian decent live in Lewiston/Auburn, and the Northeast US is the Canadian's seacoast. Think Montreal to Old Orchard Beach.

The users themselves can determine demand. Open-source technology in transportation planning refers to having the initial transit management project released to the community and then to have it be scrutinized by users and professionals who highlight potential flaws and glitches, which are then fed back into the community to advance the growth of the whole system. If taxpayer dollars build the networks, or buy equipment, or create the data, it seems imperative to build in openness so that these investments invite participation, facilitate collaboration, and enable evolution of the technology and its uses. Open networks would make unused excess capacity available to whoever might find it useful.

The concept of “Car-Free” travel in Maine has been part of the DOT rail planning. Now technology offers a manner of linking users and communities to provide viable alternatives to automotive dependency in low-density/rural areas like Maine through a combination of applied technological development and the building of local partnerships. The Car-Free.org mission seeks to find *immediate solutions* for our transportation needs. Technology has made some of this possible. A network is necessary that is based on tourists who are familiar with open source technology. These new technologies place an equal emphasis on building local partnerships and on technology development- new ways to get to the train, new ways to find out when the bus is coming.

Maine has a built-in constituency that is advocating for, and will be the basis of, passenger demand. The original plan for what is now the Downeaster rail service between Portland and Boston called for service to Montreal. The route has been reduced in scope for Boston to Auburn. Advocates, including businesses and towns along the rail corridor should be supporting proclamations for this service in order to show policy-makers that towns are interested all along the way to N. H..

Media involvement needs to let people know what is going on. The Portland-Boston service happened due to intense lobbying by those who recognized the need, and the fact that demand was higher than models used were projecting. The demand should come from legislators also. It is important that those elected to represent this region be part of the work to get this on the people’s agenda in state Capitals.

The proposed Auburn multi-modal facility at the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal airport should bring together travelers on bus, air, highway and residents of the L/A urban center just 5 miles away.

Passenger Demand: Action Statement, Next Steps:

Rally attendees will use whatever resource at their disposal; personal, political and business connections, to broadcast the message that there is a constituency for rail and that it is from all quarters, including businesses, small towns, large cities and from Canada. The media will broadcast the message that our own region wants passenger rail for mobility and economic reasons. Tourism is dependant on a successful rail system, and new technologies will attract new users. We will build on the advocacy that is evident throughout the SLR railway corridor region.

- Designate the Androscoggin Transportation Resource Center (ATRC), the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Lewiston, Auburn, Lisbon and Sabattus, to reach out to these towns to endorse the project.
- Designate Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG), the regional planning agency serving the Western Maine communities of Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties, to reach out to the towns in these counties to endorse the project.
- Designate the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) is to advocate for this passenger rail system to help address the community and economic development needs of the most severely distressed portions of the Northern border region.
- Get New Hampshire, particularly the northern border region towns of Berlin and Gorham involved.

- Designate CarFree Maine to assemble a team of people who understand how to connect state and local officials, including an advocate in Concord, NH.
- Designate the Mayor of Auburn or a designee to reach out to talk to Ford Rieche about the potential of this project.
- Designate the Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce to contact interests in Canada to begin a continuing dialogue and will to bring together transportation providers about getting people to and from terminal sites.

Closing Comments

The “Northern Region Rail Rally” achieved its mission of engaging public and private interests on the subject of investing in a passenger rail service to the northern regions of Maine and New Hampshire. The Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce partnership with the Maine Rail Transit Coalition and Grow Smart Maine brought the interested parties together around the focus question; *“What are the dynamic and evolving questions, ideas, considerations that arise in considering bringing passenger rail to western Maine, Bethel and beyond to northern New Hampshire and Montreal?”*

The group spent the last portion of the day making final comments, reiterating key points, and responding to the presentations.

Attendees did not consider it was too speculative to think that the international Winter Olympics could be held in Western Maine. The Vancouver Olympics were partly successful due to that regions’ advanced rail transit system. The concept of rail in the northern border region has to be thought of as a “system”.

As Maine government is by home rule, and there are at least two states involved, not every town will have a station. Local municipal governments need to collaborate.. An important next step will be to draft a resolution of support to bring to towns along the corridor. The resolution should be a clear statement of what the real benefit is for the state, and once the local support is established the resolution needs to go before the respective states. This needs to go back to Portland so Portland understands the importance of this project.

The strategy from here out should be a two-pronged approach. At the local level, towns, Chambers of Commerce and economic development groups and at the state level the legislature should assemble a rail caucus. The caucus meetings will provide a forum for face to face meetings, which in the case of the Portland to Boston passenger rail saved years of letter writing. Chambers of Commerce in the region will be given one-page fact sheets, developed by staff at AVCOG that will be prime topics for brown-bag lunches. After finding out who does not want to have their e-mail address disseminated, the attendees list can be developed into a informative group e-mail list.

The Amtrak Downeaster service between Boston and Portland continues to rely upon Congressional continuing resolutions under the Federal Transportation Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) program. Established with a five-year authorization level of \$6 billion, the CMAQ program was conceived to support surface transportation projects and other related efforts that contribute air quality improvements and provide congestion relief. Maine is one of a few states that are provided the flexibility to use CMAQ funds for passenger rail service, and beyond the contract authority of 4 years. Now entering its 10th year of operating on this life-line, Maine had originally committed to fully fund the service when it began in 2001. To date no Maine Governor has kept this commitment and every year the residents of this region are asked to contact Congress for an extension of the funding.

The Boston- Portland link is the key to expansion of passenger rail north. The time has come for other sources of operational funding in addition to federal transportation support. A robust regional commuter and passenger rail can provide the base support needed for funding the Downeaster and the entire proposed system. Conversations with New Hampshire must take place. A review of the rail authorities in Maine and New Hampshire might provide the basis for an expansion of their respective roles in funding of operations. Private operators should be considered for the service. Revenue sources for transportation need to be fairly distributed for an integrated system of rail, bus, auto, air, bike and pedestrian that saves money, while increasing returns in economic activity.

It was wonderful to have all these people under the same roof, like so many pieces of the puzzle. All of the congressional delegation had representatives here. The media was here. Business was here, next to grass-root supporters. The bond has been established. Next up – a tri-state promotional/feasibility train ride.

A final note referenced timing, e.g., “we have to hurry up as there is a threat of the rail going to Bangor”, (or Freyberg or Augusta). But the real threat is the rail going nowhere while policy continues to fund pavement expansion around the region. The best thing that could happen is to have other groups in other parts of the region demanding investments in rail. In the meantime, there will be a plan. And rail advocates in other parts of the state can only help in the transformation from single-occupancy automobile to an advanced efficient, economical and environmentally successful rail system in Northern New England.

Thank you for coming

October 30, 2011

End

Northern New England Rally for Rail

Summary Notes

**Wednesday, September 14, 2011, The Bethel Inn Resort,
Bethel, Maine**

Prepared by Leigh Tillman of Good Group Decisions

Purpose of the Session

The intention of this session is to bring interested parties together around the focus question, “What are the dynamic and evolving questions, ideas, considerations that arise for you in considering bringing rail to western Maine, Bethel, and beyond to northern New Hampshire and eventually to Montreal?” The group used Open Space Technology to collectively create an agenda of breakout sessions on topics of importance to those present.

Breakout Group Sessions

The group chose the following five topics to discuss in self-led breakout sessions. Individuals were invited to move between sessions and plug in where they felt inclined.

1. Ancillary Services

- Local services that rail into Bethel could require
 - Moving luggage
 - Van/taxi
 - Traffic issues: traffic light
- Station itself will have to change
- What do we have other than winter activities?
 - Kids going to camp coming in on the train
- Construction
 - Changes in platform
- Opportunities for new businesses
 - Collaborating with existing
 - New populations
- Local transport
 - Car rental, shuttles, Segways with snow tires
- Location of the station is an issue
 - Proximity to Rte. 2
 - Only room for 100 cars to park: may be enough to get started
 - Need to look at landownership in the area for expansion
- Need to start soon
- Need to keep in touch with D.O.T.

- Want to ensure the Bethel transportation agency stays in contact with DOT and AVCOG
 - Sharing of email lists (let us know if you do not want yours shared)
 - Local ordinances
 - Starting a small business is generally pretty easy but having guidance for new businesses
2. Economic Development
- Tourism—people who do not want to drive or take the bus
 - Older folks
 - Younger folks
 - Special interest: foliage, skiing
 - Easy business connection between Montreal and Maine
 - Easy communication between businesses
 - Spin-off effect of station stops
 - Concentrates areas of business around stops versus sprawl
 - Quality of place: makes it easier to get to an area and see it
 - Keep and attract younger people to this area
 - Boston in 3 hours, Montreal in 5
 - Casino
 - Historical connection between Maine and Montreal

Next Steps

- Field trip to Montreal
- Need to talk to people all along the line to get them into it
- A campaign of developing relationships all along the corridor
- 3-state policy support/interest group: way to get the word out when things come up: contacting representatives—(Check with the Northern Border Regional Commission to see if they would like to help coordinate this)
- Working with the business community
 - Potential involved
- Contacting the railroads to better understand their issues
 - Operating agreements
 - Genesee & Wyoming people (Chip and Don volunteered to do this)
- Look back historically to see impacts and effects (Peggy volunteered to get Bates folks involved, Don Christi will work on this as well)
 - Look at Alaskan example

3. Political Will

- Multifaceted
 - Three states
 - Federal
 - International
- We need to have businesses to demand rail
 - How do we get them to talk to each other?
 - Use the chambers

- How do we convince legislature that rail create jobs?
 - Businesses will convince people
 - PR
 - More rallies
 - Fact sheets
 - Educate the public—all medias
 - Take the legislators on a train ride
 - Blueberry companies do this Downeast
 - Portland to Berlin and have a rally in Berlin
 - Need to identify key individuals as advocates
 - Those present and those not present

Next Steps

- Find funding for promotion
- Promotional campaign
- Working group
 - Businesses, private citizens, state and public representatives, non-profits, educational institutions
- Bus transportation for college students—rail could be huge
- I.D. appropriate players
 - In towns
- Form rail caucus
- Federal representatives approve high speed rail designation all the way up to New Hampshire border

3. Funding

- Money is important
 - Good to talk about
- Economic development can't happen until we find the funding
- There are so many examples and studies for what rail has done for rural areas
 - We have the proof
- Easier to find the money for capital than ongoing operations
- Rail does not pay for itself through passenger tickets
- We need to include subsidies in this
- We need to be ready to get the capital costs

We spend massive monies on highway funding but never talk about the real cost of highways—ongoing that people haven't looked at until recently. If we look at true costs we may be able to shift that funding to rail because in some areas it is less expensive

- Find sustainable subsidies
 - Need to be able to explain how this will work to people
- State and regional funding
- If we believe rail is important in rural areas then we need to help one area at a time—work together

- Sales tax, property tax, gas tax, car rental tax
 - Very unpopular to use the word “tax”
 - Who is going to pay for this?
 - Public benefit
- Educating our electorate on value of rail

Next Steps

- Every town write a letter to the administration
- All need to lobby in support of rail
- All public hearings
- We have bonds sitting in Augusta
 - Come to meetings on this and support it
- Vision statement needs to be updated for resolution
- Econ development is bipartisan: we have to pay for it
- Ask the governor
 - Find out his favor
- 4. Passenger Demand
- We don't want to talk about Bethel as the end of the line
 - Boston/Portland to Montreal
- There are a lot of folks of Canadian decent in Lewiston/Auburn
- Montreal to Old Orchard Beach
- Park n Ride for folks to be able to drive in from surrounding areas
- Open Source technology
 - carfreemaine.org
 - Build a network based on tourists who are familiar with open source technology
 - New technologies—new ways to get to the train, new ways to find out when the bus is coming
- Advocacy for rail
 - Original rail route Boston to Montreal
 - Reduced to Boston to Auburn
 - Request proclamations from towns along the way
 - Shows that all the towns are interested
 - Gets press to tell people what is going on
 - Boston to Portland happened because of lobbying
 - Work with legislators to get rail on their plate
 - Auburn Multi mobile

Next Steps

- Towns to endorse project
- Get Berlin and Gorham involved
- CarFree Maine needs help from people who understand how to connect state and local officials
 - Linda
- Need an advocate in Concord
 - Chuck
- We want to talk to Ford Rieche

- Create interest in Canada
- Bring together transportation providers and getting people to and from

Closing Comments

The group spent the last portion of the day making final comments, reiterating key points, and responding to the presentations.

- Winter Olympics in western Maine
- Resolution to take to towns along the route
- CMAQ funding being withdrawn
- Thinking in terms of a “system”
- Boston-Portland is the key piece
- Two prong
 - Local chambers working together
 - Rail caucus
- Maine government is by home rule: since not everyone will have a station we need to involve local municipal governments to promote collaboration
- Face to face with government officials saved 7 years of letter writing
- It is wonderful to have all these people under the same roof, like so many pieces of the puzzle, thank you for coming
- Is the media here—yes
- Clear statement of what the real benefit is for the state
- If we lose CMAQ funding then it’s all off—we need to act
- Look to New Hampshire for help on CMAQ
- Email group
 - Find out who wants their email disseminated
 - CMAQ action reminder
- All of the congressional delegation had representatives here—we have a bond
- Who is going to write the wording for the resolution?
 - _____ offered to share one that he wrote
 - Once passed locally need to send copies to state
- List of potential members of a rail caucus: Peggy
- Bringing this back to Portland so Portland understands importance
- Oxford County—prime topic for brown bag lunches
- Ray Burton from NH Governor’s Council is pro-rail
 - Don will be reporting back to him
- Feasibility train—tri-state
 - Promotional ride
- Studies are dense: we need a one-page fact sheet
 - Joan and Jennifer will work on this
- Timing: we have to hurry up, threat of the rail going to Bangor