

Route 113 Corridor Committee

August 19, 2009

2:30 – 5:00 PM

Standish Municipal Center

Meeting Notes

Committee Members: Tom Klinepeter (Fryeburg), Dave Knapp, Chair (Fryeburg); Marlene Livonia (Hiram); Phil Pomerleau (Standish); Marlee Turner (Brownfield).

Guests: Tony Donovan (Portland); Gordon Billington (Standish); Rep. Helen Rankin (Hiram); Jack Sutton (MRG, Inc.); Linda Walbridge (Western Maine Economic Development Council); Steve Wood (Baldwin)

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

I. Welcome and Introductions

A. Meeting Minutes of 07/08/09

Phil made a motion, seconded by Tom, to approve the minutes of 7/08/09. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Scenic Byway

A. Scenic Byway Corridor Advisory Committee

In preparation for the development of a Scenic Byway corridor management plan, we need to solicit membership for a Corridor Advisory Committee to guide the process. Each town has been tasked with coming up with four candidates to serve on the committee. At least one should be a currently appointed member of the Route 113 Corridor Committee.

The committee should be about 12-15 people total, 5 of whom will be appointed members of the Route 113 Corridor Committee. Julia said that if we do not have a separate committee that is broad and diverse, it will be difficult to pass the “straight face” test and get federal funds to improve the byway. Now that Stow has dropped out, we really have to step up. Volunteers may come from historical societies, environmental interests, chambers of commerce, and large landowners. Unless we have a plan, we will not get resources, but we will always be a byway.

Several people expressed the need for a letter from the committee stating the charge of the corridor advisory committee and the time commitment. The time commitment will be approximately one meeting a month for a year. The charge is to develop a comprehensive plan for the byway that includes, inventory, analysis, and priorities for investment

III. Mountain Division Rail Line

A. TIGER Grant Application

The Mountain Division will be submitted as a stand alone application for a federal TIGER grant. At this time, the State is looking to upgrade to Class II track for freight and excursion use. If the upgrade is to Class III for passenger rail, the State would have to have a source to cover operational costs and an environmental review would be required.

Tony stated that each state can receive a maximum of \$300 million. Maine's total projects so far add up to \$193 million.

Excursion service is an important component of the application. One source of passengers is the international ferry. Tony mentioned that the CAT from Nova Scotia to Portland offers packages which use the Clarion hotel, right next to the Portland Transportation Center where the Mountain Division will operate.

Linda reported that she met with an unnamed railroad that is interested in buying the Mountain Division, as long as they get into Portland and St. Johnsbury. They prefer to buy the Maine portion, not to lease the tracks, as they do not want to be held hostage to PanAm. The committee wondered whether their interest was contingent on MaineDOT improving the line to Class II track first.

Whatever the numbers say on economic viability, the Stimulus could be a windfall for the Mountain Division in the same way the Rockland Branch got their pot of gold. The committee discussed other questions:

- Does the TIGER grant include money to acquire the Westbrook to Portland section of the line? No.
- Will the Conway Scenic "allow" freight through Crawford Notch even though they do not own the tracks? Unknown.
- Where would the excursion train stop? For now, Portland and Fryeburg

Jack mentioned that the Conway section has been fixed up but sits idle. He submitted a letter to the DOT commissioner of New Hampshire to encourage them to apply for funding for the six miles of the Mountain Division from the state line to Conway. He was rebuffed by New Hampshire and received mixed message from MaineDOT. As we are already struggling to get New Hampshire to pay their fair share of the Downeaster, it might be a hard sell to convince Maine policymakers to support a service that sends tourists to tax-free New Hampshire. But if New Hampshire does not want to do it, Maine can not make it happen.

B. Public Outreach Plan

David, Caroline, and Julia met over the summer to discuss ways of rallying public support for the Mountain Division. Whether or not the TIGER grant is funded, the

Mountain Division needs the support of towns up and down the line. Ultimately, this should come as a resolution. Ten years ago, there was a coalition of 22 organizations that came together as the Mountain Division Alliance to support the preservation of the rail line and enhance it with a recreational trail. Where are these allies today? A draft letter to these organizations was distributed to the committee for review. Before we seek municipal resolutions, the idea is to gather support from residents of towns affiliated with these likely allies, e.g., land trusts, trail groups, snowmobile clubs, etc. That way, when we appear before a town council, there will be residents willing to speak up in favor of the original vision of the Mountain Division. Although MaineDOT has design standards for rails with trails, there still seems to be friction among groups for one or the other.

This public outreach could take place over a year's time. In the meantime, the Committee should also actively participate in other public processes:

- Sebago to the Sea coalition: They may seek funds for the Mountain Division trail from Westbrook to Windham.
- PACTS Bike/Ped Plan
- Portland Trails Active Transportation plan
- Gorham East West Corridor Study
- Maine State Rail Plan

The group considered whether we should court organizations individually or host a “come one, come all meeting” in Standish, as was done in 2006. Consensus emerged for a combined approach. Before we go ahead, we might want to put together the following:

- Same resolution or letter of support
- Compile DVD footage from previous events on www.youtube.com
- Develop talking points for rails with trails, especially on safety and compatibility
- Conduct a survey at the Fryeburg Fair to ground truth our ridership estimates
- Identify links between the Mountain Division Trail, the Pequawket Trail Scenic Byway, and the rail line

IV. New business

A. Other business

Linda asked for a representative from the Route 113 Committee to serve on a Fryeburg economic development committee that is creating a zone for industrial expansion.

Dave gave a brief update on the Gorham East West Corridor Study. They will be looking at the economic impact of transportation alternatives with the assistance of Charlie Colgan and Evan Richert.

B. Next meeting date

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 21 at a place to be determined.