STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
BUREAU OF RAIL AND TRANSIT

***DRAFT* FIELD REVIEW REPORT**

DATE OF FIELD REVIEW: October 31, 2013 and September 24, 2014

LOCATION OF REVIEW: Conway, NH

Near Dinsmore Road, looking east, Pictured Left to Right: Chris Meier, Larry Garland, Sally McMurdo, Ralph Cronin, Rob Adair, Cort Hansen, Peter Minnich, Steve Swenson, Tom Eastman

OCTOBER 31, 2013 PARTICIPANTS:

MWV Rec Path Committee: Sally McMurdo, Larry Garland, Steve Swenson, Rob Adair, Ralph Cronin Chris Meier and Mike Weeks
Town of Conway Town Manager Earl Sires,
Town of Conway Planning Board Tom Irving
Town of Conway Town Engineer Paul Degliangeli
Mount Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce Director Janice Crawford
MWV Ski Touring Association Cort Hansen
Mountain Meadow Riders Snowmobile Club Chip Henry and Colin Preece
Mountain Division Alliance (Maine) David Kinsman
Mt. Cycle Guide Service Peter Minnich
Conway Daily Sun, Tom Eastman,
DRED State Trails Bureau District 2 Supervisor Mike Weeks and NHDOT's Larry Keniston

SEPTEMBER 24, 2014 PARTICIPANTS:

Harry Mann- MWV Bicycling Club and NEMBA

Erik Paddleford - NHDOT
Sally McMurdo - MWV Trails Association
Larry Keniston - NHDOT
Colin Preece - MT. Meadow Riders
Steve Swenson - MWV Trails Association
Joe Berry - MWV Trails Association
Earl Sires - Town of Conway
Brian Lombard - NHDOT

SUBJECT: Field review of Proposed Mount Washington Rail with Trail (Link here) along the rail corridor to inspect and become familiar with the challenges and opportunities of the vision.

Notes on Review: On October 31, 2014, stakeholders met at the Whittaker Meeting House for a brief discussion. Participants viewed the corridor west (near Bartlett Town Line) to east (Fryeburg Town Line), beginning from the Intervale Cross Road area.

Above: Looking west across Intervale Cross Road, the Mount Washington Valley Ski Touring and Snowshoe Foundation (http://mwvskitouring.org/) share use of the Mountain Division Corridor. Participants envision a trail with rail for summer use to the south of the tracks in this area.

Looking east along the Mountain Division. The Mount Washington Valley Ski Touring and Snowshoe Foundation uses this area of the tracks between Dinsmore Road is open by license to cross country skiing but summer uses along the corridor are not authorized. However, the flat and open areas within the corridor adjacent to the tracks would be relatively easy to develop rail with trail for year round use.

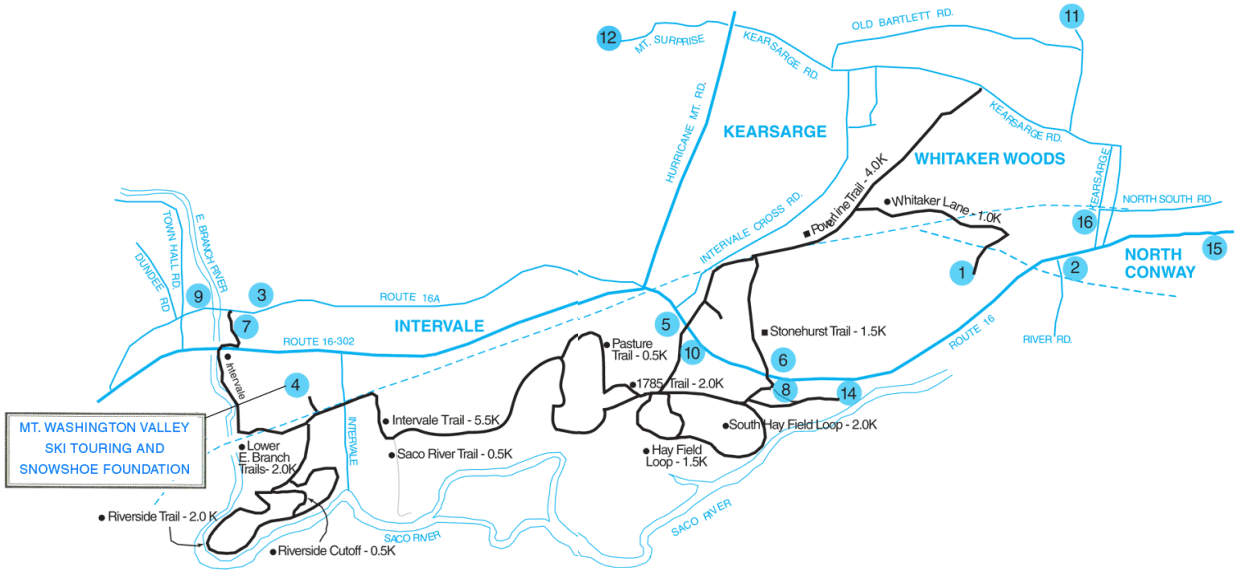
Looking south: The Conway Scenic Branch leaves off to the east (right, in the picture above) of the main line Mountain Division RR. Participants suggested that this area south/east of the tracks would provide the easiest location between Intervale Cross Road and the Power Line to construct a rail with trail. Unauthorized users in the summer already routinely tramp along this large flat open area.

The proposed trail with rail would cross the west/north side of the tracks at a new crossing at the power line. A power pole can be seen in the picture above where the proposed trail would leave the corridor to the north. Between the Power Line Trail and the Whitaker Woods, the proposed trail would follow cross-country ski trails just outside the north side of the Mountain Division right of way for 3,000 feet. This strategy avoids any involvement with the Conway Scenic Railroad Branch or its right of way.

An authorized cross country ski trail crossing of the tracks exists about half way between Intervale Cross Road and the Power Line trail. From this crossing, cross-country skiers currently use the north side of the tracks to connect to the Power Line trail. From this crossing, cross-country skiers can continue west for 200 feet along the south side of the tracks to access Dinsmore Road. The railroad crossing also connects directly to the Stonehurst Trail, which heads west from the south side of the tracks. Both the Stonehurst Trail and the trail that runs across Dinsmore Road lead to an extensive system of cross country ski trails that run for several miles on the west side of NH 16 in Bartlett.

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation's Bureau of Rail and Transit licenses the trails shown on the maps (see page 4) across and along the tracks. The trails provide access for cross-country skiers and snowshoe sports patrons. Summer use of the corridor would need similar authorization.

Above, detailed map of Whitaker Woods trails from http://mwvskitouring.org/villmap-lg.html . The long dashed line is the Mountain Division Railroad and the dashed line branch off it is the Conway Scenic Railroad line. The map shows 3 authorized winter Cross Country ski trail crossings of the Mountain Division Railroad. Only the Fuller Trail (easterly crossing) is an authorized crossing for year-round public use. Between the Powerline Trail and the Fuller Trail, the non-motorized trail with rail would be outside the railroad corridor along the Whitaker Lane trail.



The maps on Page 4 can be found at: http://mwvskitouring.org/nomap-lg.html & http://mwvskitouring.org/midmap-lg.html and http://www.mwvskitouring.org/fullmap.html

Above, this sign post near the power line crossing just east of the Mountain Division Railroad indicates the extensive development of the cross-country and snowshoe trail system in Conway and Bartlett.

Above: This authorized all-season trail crossing of the Mountain Division Railroad leads to Pine Street and the Whitaker House. This is the John Fuller trail crossing. Participants felt that the Mountain Division Trail need not cross here, but the Trail could remain off the corridor on the east side of the tracks and connect with Oak Street, follow Oak Street to Mechanic Street, then cross the tracks with Mechanic Street, which would connect to the North South Local Road.

Given the obvious physical and right of way limitations of the railroad corridor to support a trail with rail along the North-South Local Road, this review did not review in detail the corridor between Mechanic Street and Depot Road. In this half mile of the railroad corridor, the North-South Road has already co-opted the typical minimum railroad corridor space that a rail with trail might otherwise appropriate. The North South Road, moreover, includes a sidewalk and adequate shoulders for bicycles in this half mile, so the need for a separated non-motorized trail between Mechanic Street and Depot Street is less urgent.

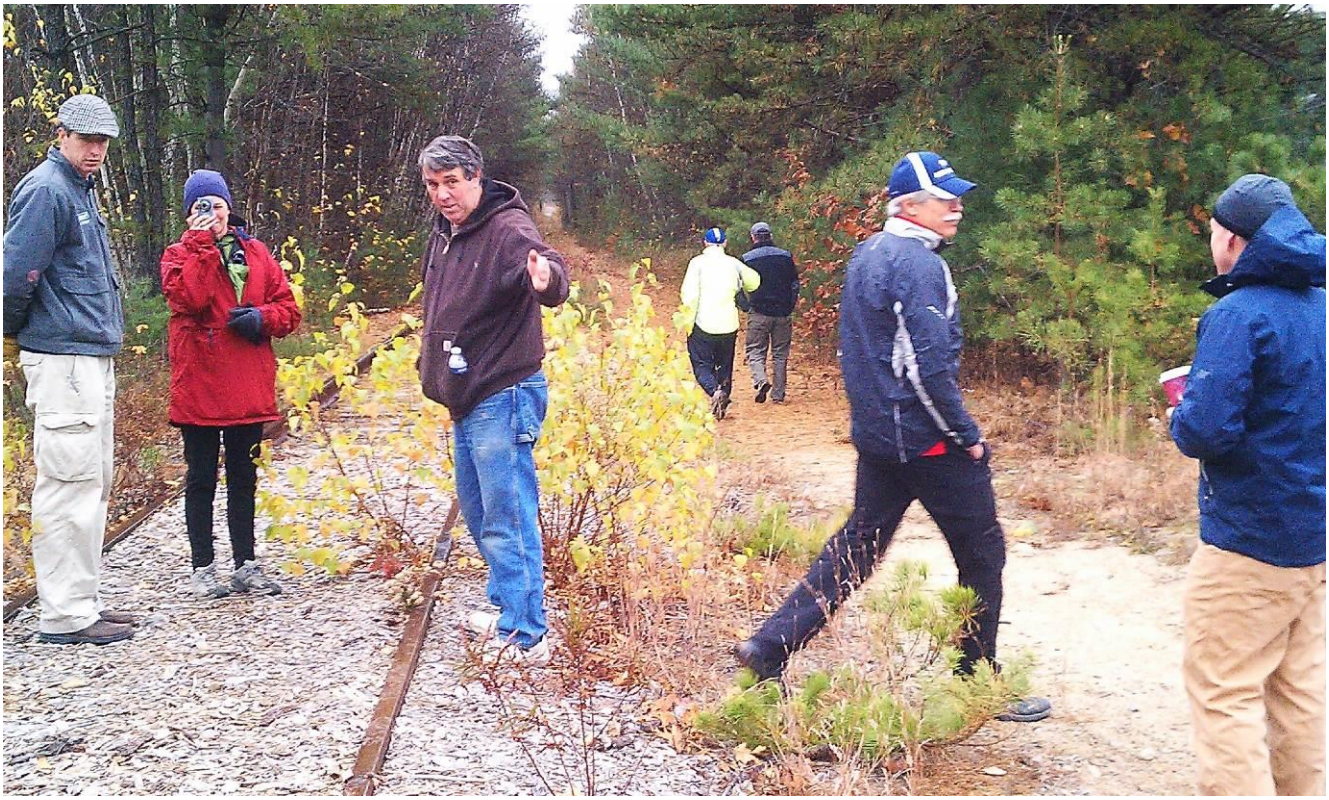
Between Depot Street and Pudding Pond, the North-South Road has again appropriated the typical space that might otherwise be available for rail with trail. This 1-mile stretch of railroad includes a bridge over Kearsarge Brook, over which spans a railroad bridge with only enough room for the set of railroad tracks that occupy it. The adjacent railroad embankment is only wide enough for the tracks. This 1-mile segment also includes a similar railroad bridge over Artist Falls Road. Neither the Kearsarge Brook bridge nor the Artist Falls Road bridge include any provision for expansion in order to accommodate a rail with trail. While the North-South Road does not include sidewalks in the corresponding segment of highway, there are four-foot shoulders marked as bicycle lanes and construction of a sidewalk along the highway appears to be feasible.

Along the rail corridor just east of Artist Falls Road, the railroad follows past Pudding Pond for a half mile. The railroad embankment is only wide enough to support the tracks. The area at Pudding Pond is subject to intermittent beaver activity and any rail with trail would require substantial wetland impact.

South of Pudding Pond, participants returned to the Corridor between the Settler's Green Outlets area and Redstone. The picture above looks west toward Pudding Pond from the old Airport. From the same location, the picture below shows the railroad corridor looking east toward Redstone, where the relatively easy development of a rail with trail appears feasible.

Above: From the old Airport location, east Toward Redstone and beyond to the East Conway Road (pictured below, looking east), the section of the corridor is about 1.5 miles. This section corridor is relatively capable of handling a rail with trail that meets the required specifications.

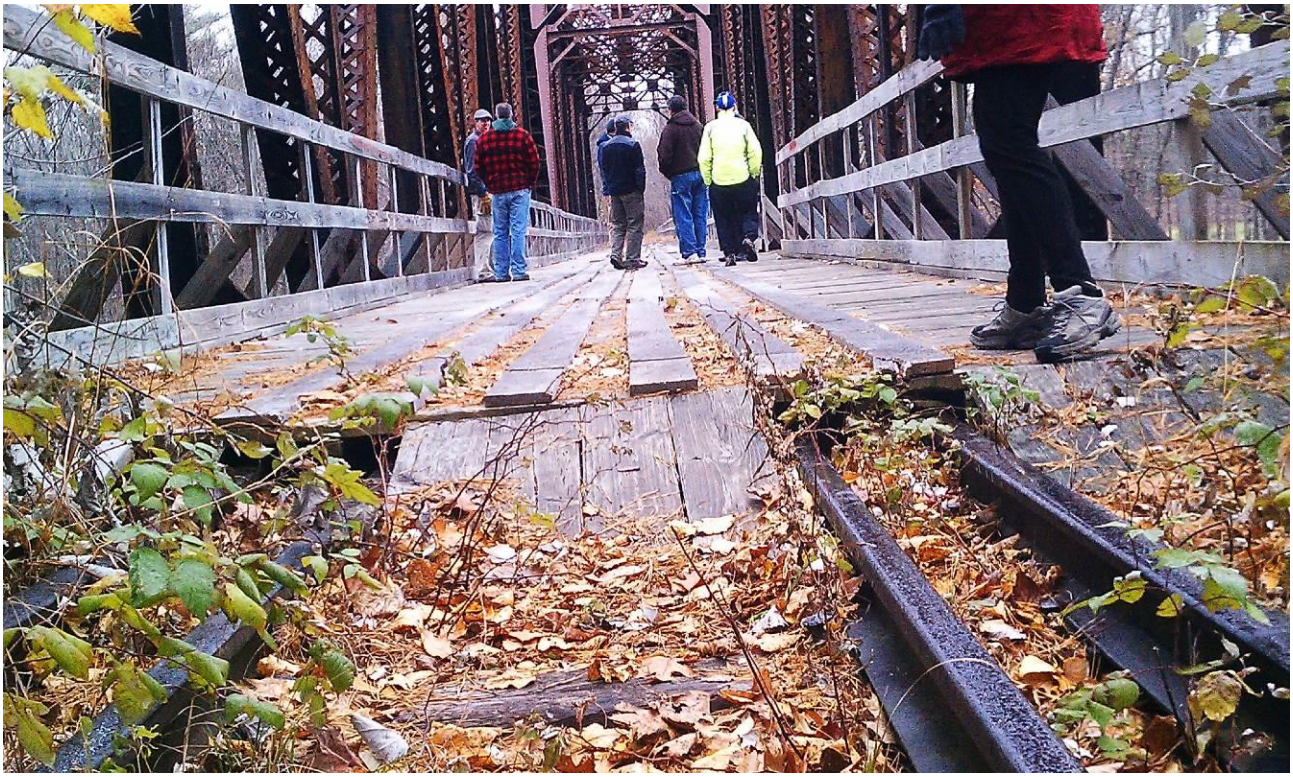
Above: Tracks looking east across East Conway Road toward the Saco River Bridge.



Above, Colin Preece of the Mountain Meadow Riders Snowmobile Club guided participants along the corridor from East Conway Road to Robinwood Road. In cooperation with DRED, the snowmobile

club has a license with the Bureau of Rail and Transit to use the corridor at this location and the club contributes many hours maintaining this section of the corridor for winter snowmobile use.

Looking east approaching the Saco River Bridge, an embankment begins to support the tracks. This embankment would be a challenge for the development of a rail with trail. Between East Conway Road and the Saco River Bridge, participants noted some challenges with just maintaining the railroad corridor. For example, heavy impermeable surface runoff from a nearby commercial development appears to be exacerbating ditch erosion on the north side of the railroad embankment.



Above, Looking east at the existing Saco River Bridge. Through agreements and licenses, DRED and the Mountain Meadow Riders Snowmobile Club cooperate with NHDOT toward the authorization and maintenance of the boardwalk over the tracks.

Above, Looking west from the beginning of the Saco River trestle.

Snowmobile trail junction along the railroad corridor east of the Saco River bridge. Colin Preece noted that the volunteers from the Mountain Meadow Riders Snowmobile Club have entered into agreements with NHDOT toward developing additional connecting trails to the south and west along the existing portions of the "Conway Bypass" corridor that were purchased by the Department of Transportation. Conway tax maps showing the right of way purchased by NHDOT (and currently shelved) are referenced in Appendix D.

View west from Robinwood Rd. (10/31/13)

The tracks remain in place but the highway surface has filled over the tracks. While further research should determine the status of a drive crossing for specified uses at this location, the complete surface covering of the tracks at this location may not have been authorized by the Department. The railroad bed cross section is relatively level in this section and rail with trail would be relatively easy to build.

The September 24, 2014 portion of the field review continued on from Robinwood Road where the October 31, 2013 review left off to the east toward the Maine border. Participants met at the Conway Town Hall to review plans, discuss the rail corridor and the days planned review route. After the brief review and discussion the group met at the Robinwood Road crossing, the starting point for the review.

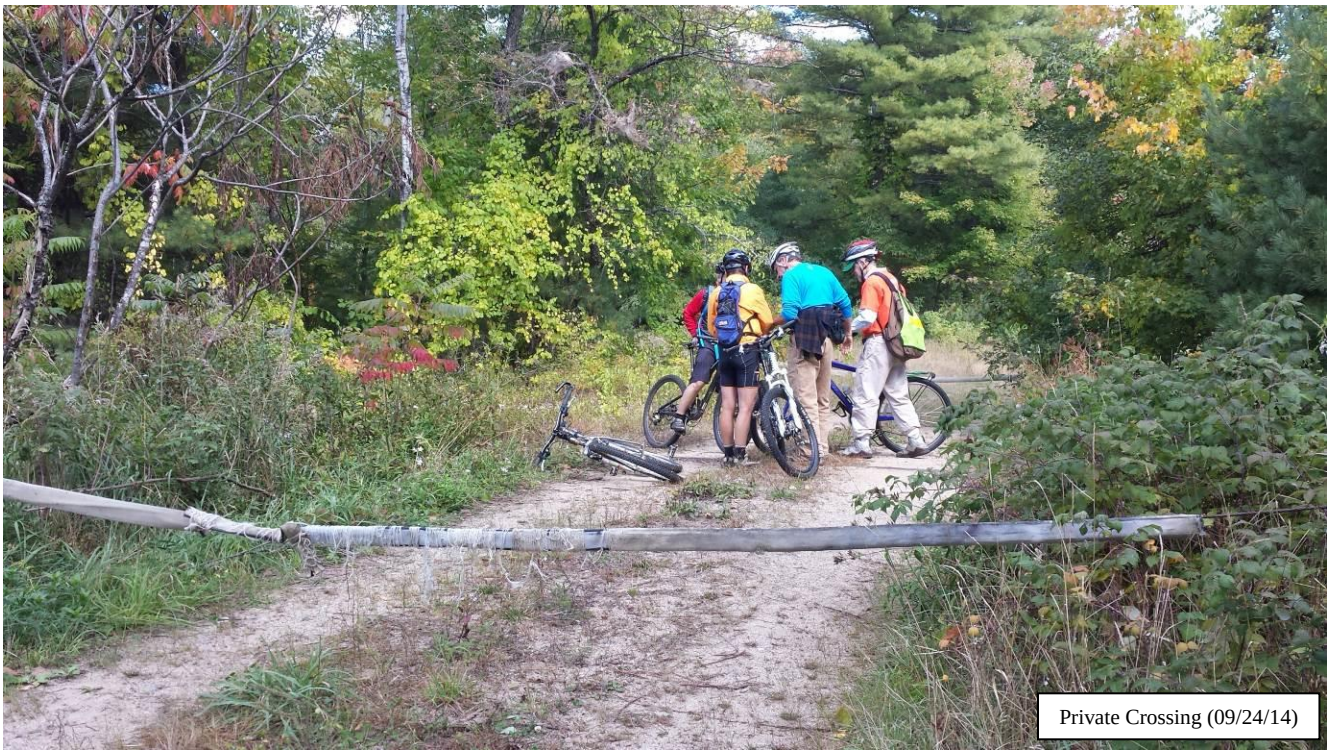
View from Robinwood Rd looking east (09/24/14)

The group continued through this section of rail corridor for 1/3 mile toward the Burbank Road rail crossing. The group traveled past a side trail to Frye's Store, a local convenient store. The store is a convenient destination for snowmobilers in the winter months. A rail trail could bring added year round economic benefit to this store and other local businesses in the area by providing destinations for future rail trail users.

Side trail to Frye's Store on East Main St. (09/24/14)

Burbank Road Crossing (09/24/14)

The Burbank Road crossing is gravel and has covered the tracks.



Private Crossing (09/24/14)

East of the Burbank road crossing is a private crossing providing access to various agricultural fields to the north adjacent to the Saco River. Two gravel roads branch off at this crossing with one heading north and the other heading east adjacent to the rail corridor. Some members of the group continued on the gravel road heading east to one of the fields and bicycled along the edge of the field next to the rail corridor. This alternate route provided an easier ride since the corridor remains overgrown making

cycling difficult. This gravel road and field may be a suitable location for the future rail trail to be located off the corridor. Other group members stayed on the rail corridor and continued east.

Dirt road adjacent to rail corridor (09/24/14)

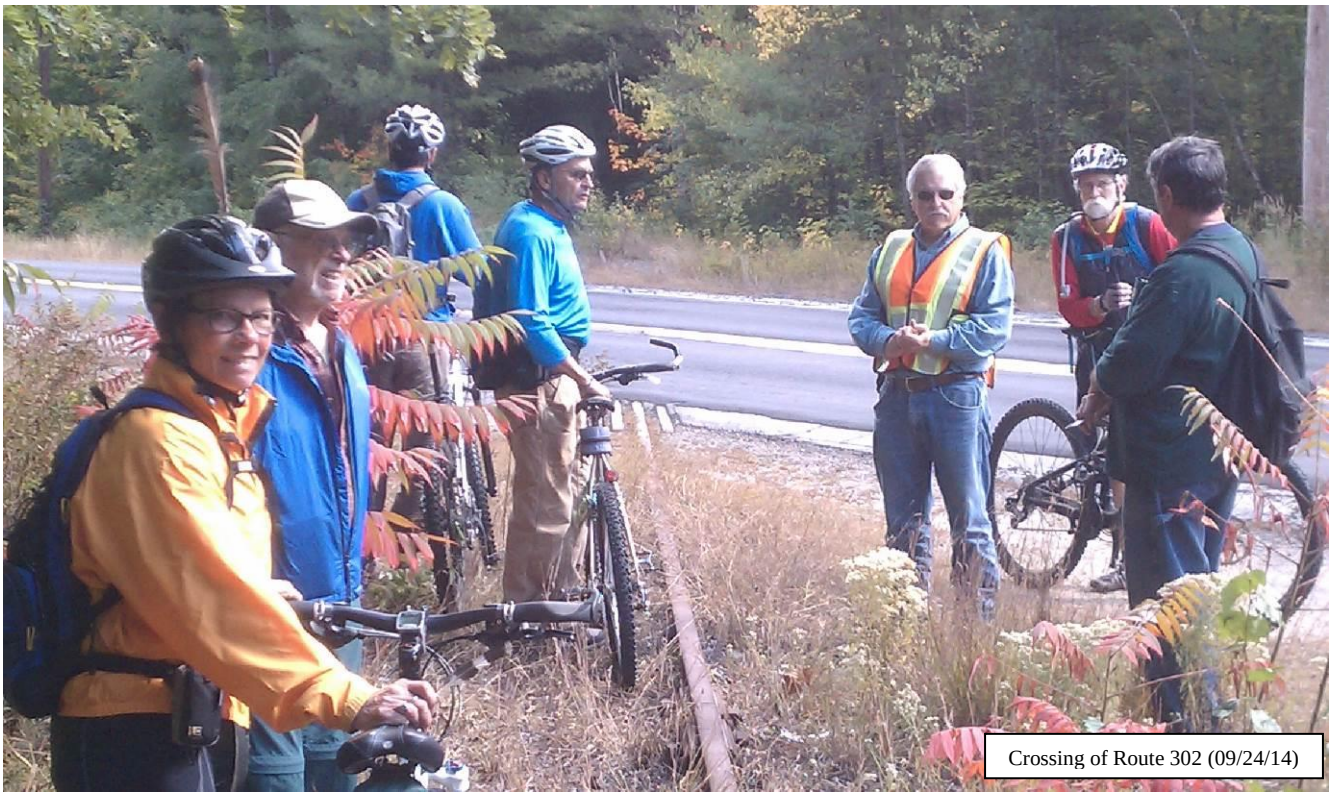
Both groups reunited on the rail corridor and continued east toward the stone arch bridge over Snow Brook. This bridge is located approximately 1 mile from Robinwood Road. No photos of the bridge were taken on the day of the field review; however, a photo of the bridge taken during construction work in 2012 is included. This will be a difficult area for a rail with trail to be built given the steep embankments and brook crossing that would have to be made.

Snow Brook stone arch bridge, taken during construction work in 2012

Continuing east, residential housing became visible on the north side of the rail corridor approximately 1/3 mile from Snow Brook where Rebecca Lane roughly parallels the rail corridor.

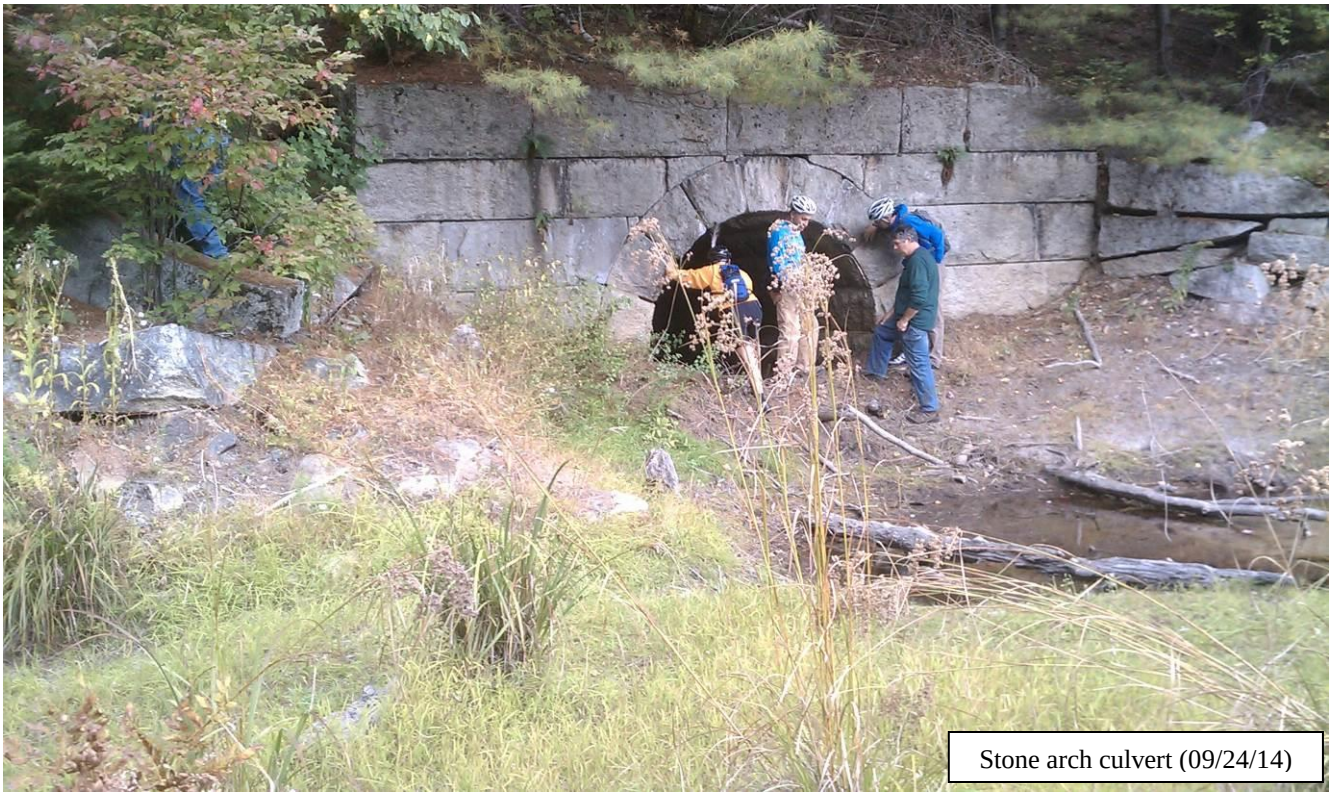
East of Snow Brook (09/24/14)

The group convened at the route 302 crossing.



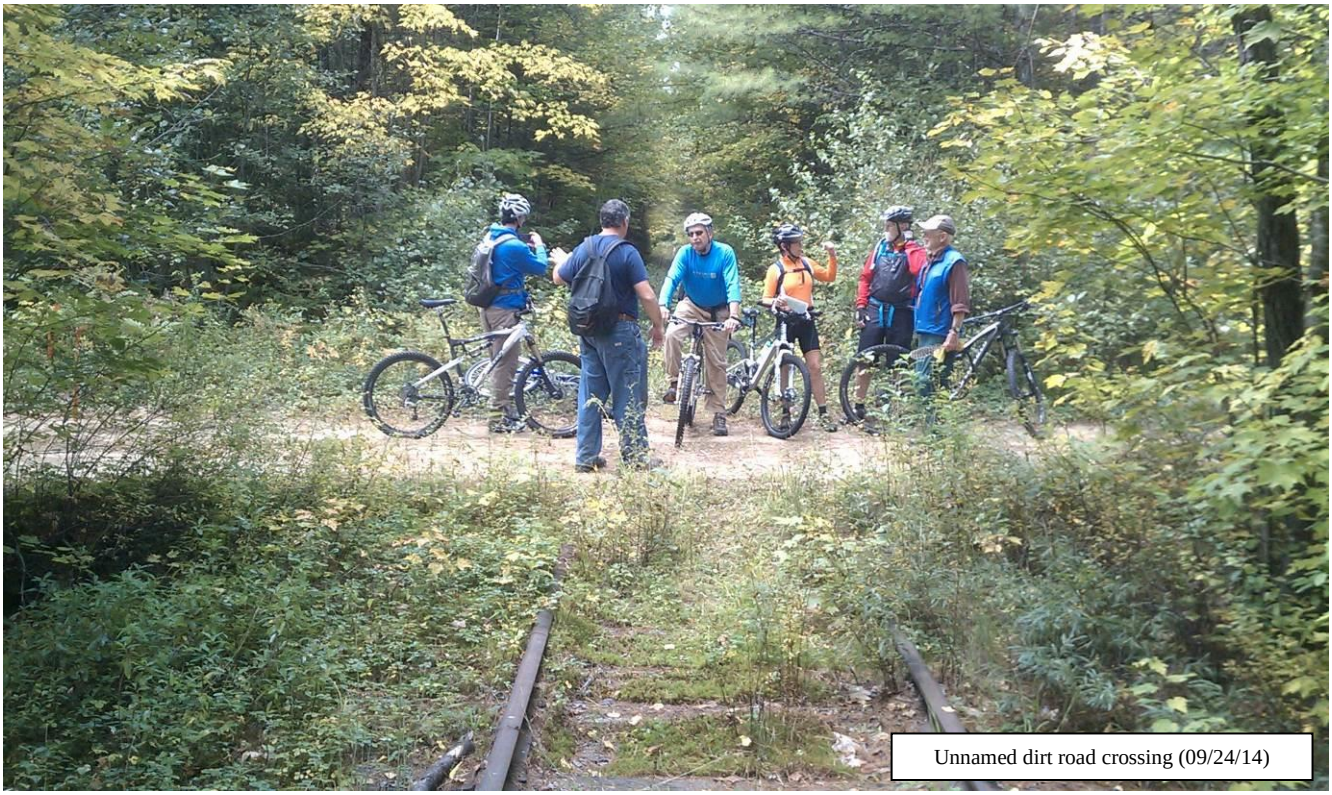
Crossing of Route 302 (09/24/14)

Approximately ¾ mile from the Route 302 crossing is another crossing of an unnamed dirt road that connects to route 302 to the north.



Stone arch culvert (09/24/14)

Approximately 1/3 mile from the Route 302 crossing is a relatively small stone arch culvert. This culvert has been obstructed in the past by a beaver dam. Remnants of an old dam on the downstream side of the culvert was visible on the day of the review. Flooding in this area could be a problem and signs of a past higher water level were observed. Rail with trail would also be difficult in this section due to steep banks on either side of the railroad.



Unnamed dirt road crossing (09/24/14)

Unnamed dirt road crossing

Entrance and rail crossing to Twin Mountain Conservation Area Trail Network

Another rail crossing located approximately ¼ mile west of the NH/ Maine border is used to access a non-motorized trail network on Tin Mountain Conservation area land that is popular with mountain bikers. A small gravel parking area off of Route 302 provides easy access to the area. The group continued on to the NH border

NH/ ME Border Looking East (09/24/14)

NH Border looking east to Maine.

NH/ ME border Looking West (0924/14)

Looking west back to NH.

Looking east in Fryeburg, Maine. (10/31/13)

This section of paved trail begins at the Visitor Center on Route 302 just east of the NH State line (see http://goo.gl/maps/kPuZi). This recently completed segment runs 4.1 miles east to Route 5/113 (see http://goo.gl/maps/ZtkqU) and is part of a larger trail vision that has completed several other small segments between Fryeburg and Portland, Maine. The Maine vision is to connect Fryeburg to Portland along the Mountain Division Railroad Corridor in Maine. The Mountain Division Railroad corridor that runs through Conway from the Maine border to Bartlett totals 10.5 miles. Participants suggest that this transportation corridor resource is currently underutilized within the Town.

Conway participants envision a non-motorized trail connecting the trail at the Fryeburg, Maine border to the Bartlett Town line. The trail would utilize the rail corridor as a trail with rail, where practicable, and run on road or otherwise off-corridor where necessary.

Like the Maine Department of Transportation, NHDOT does not foresee removing the existing inactive tracks between Portland and Redstone. Therefore any summer-use trail must be a rail with trail conforming to the Department's specifications for constructing trail with rail. These specifications are shown in Appendix A.

With one notable exception, any trail constructed within the Mountain Division Corridor must be rail with trail from the outset. The exception would be that the trail would be allowed to access the existing boardwalk above the tracks at the Saco River bridge and trestle. If and when rail activity returns to the rail corridor, the boardwalk must be removed. At that time, the trail must find an alternative way across the Saco River. The existing boardwalk was constructed in cooperation with the Department of Resources and Economic Development in order to provide for temporary winter use-only of the rail corridor. Because winter snows generally cover the tracks, winter use only is allowed directly over the tracks. The installation of the Boardwalk did not require removal of the tracks and therefore has been subject to the Surface Transportation Board railroad abandonment process.

NHDOT leases the active tracks from Redstone to the west. While the existing lease expires in December of 2014, NHDOT is mandated to ensure that any new lease maximizes the use of the

corridor for rail to the extent practicable. If the lease is renewed or otherwise extended to another operator, the feasibility of any rail with trail will not be affected.

NHDOT will cooperate with the development of a rail with trail along Mountain Division Railroad Corridor provided that such an additional facility will not place undue risk to the development of rail business along the corridor. There will be places along the corridor where the offset standards cannot be met, meaning that segments of the trail will need to be located off of the Corridor. In order to realize the rail with trail vision, the Town of Conway must take the lead on the project and enter into a rail trail agreement with the NHDOT Bureau of Rail and Transit for use and occupancy of the corridor.

The Department recognizes that the corridor would see new life for transportation and tourism if the Town develops the trail with rail. The Department recognizes that the objective of creating a permanent bicycle–pedestrian corridor within the Mount Washington Valley will, with its popular use, promote healthy lifestyles, reduce traffic congestion and inspire the appreciation and enjoyment of the natural beauty that surrounds the Mount Washington Valley. The additional use of the corridor as a popular non-motorized transportation corridor would mobilize new local partners in shared stewardship toward protecting the corridor from encroachment, physical deterioration and natural decay.

Appendices Links

A. NHDOT Rail with Trail standards
B. Typical Rail with Trail cross section
C. Typical Rail with Trail cross section
D. Mount Washington Valley Bike Path Committee
E. Mountain Division Trail in Maine brochure
F. Sample rail trail agreement with a New Hampshire municipality
G. Sample Temporary Use Agreement
H. Slide Show contrasting Corridor condition in Conway and Fryeburg
I. (Conway tax maps along the Mountain Division Railroad corridor west to east)
   Map 202 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/202.pdf
   Map 215 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/215.pdf
   Map 218 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/218.pdf
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   Map 256 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/256.pdf
J. (Conway tax maps along the “Conway Bypass” corridor north to south)
   Map 215 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/215.pdf
   Map 214 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/214.pdf
   Map 219 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/219.pdf
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Map 279 http://www.conwaynh.org/assets/pdf/Tax%20Maps/279.pdf

K. Google map link showing trail with rail vision based on the October 31 field review

Submitted by
\s\ Larry Keniston
Intermodal Facilities Engineer

cc: (email link to Report): Participants, S. Winters, B. Lombard

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