



**New Hampshire State Rail Plan
Public Meeting
April 7, 2011 6-8 pm
Littleton Community Center, Littleton**

NHDOT Staff

Christopher (Kit) Morgan
Lou Barker

Consultant Team

Ronald O'Brien, HDR
Pamela Yonkin, HDR
Carol Morris, Morris Communications
Ben Ettelman, Morris Communications

HANDOUTS: Map of NH's Current Rail Network, Agenda, Overview of State Rail Plan

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: This was the second of four public meetings for the New Hampshire Rail Plan. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the public to the Study Team, and to outline the vision and goals for the study as well as obtain input from the public.

The meeting began at 6:10 pm.

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Morgan, Administrator of the Bureau of Rail and Transit at NHDOT, welcomed the audience to the first public meeting for New Hampshire Rail Plan. Mr. Morgan explained that this is the first new rail plan for the State of New Hampshire in ten years and that the Study Team needs the public's input while putting the new rail plan together. He noted that HDR Engineering Inc. had been contracted to assist with the development of the State Rail Plan. Mr. Morgan introduced Mr. Lou Barker of NHDOT and HDR project manager, Mr. Ronald O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien, Project Manager for the HDR Consultant team, welcomed the attendees and thanked them for coming to the meeting. He introduced Pam Yonkin from HDR and Carol Morris and Ben Ettelman from Morris Communications. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to share with the public what the study intends to

accomplish, the study vision and goals, the data that the Study Team had compiled to date. He explained that in addition to sharing this information the Study Team was looking for public input and feedback.

Mr. O'Blenis explained that in addition to public meetings, the study is garnering public input through individual interviews with passenger and freight stakeholders. In addition, meetings are being held with the study's Technical Advisory Committee comprised of regional planning entities, regional economic development entities, and rail users from throughout the State of New Hampshire. He presented the items of the following Meeting Agenda.

Meeting Agenda

- Purpose of Public Meetings an Q&A
- Review of draft Vision, Goals and Objectives
- Findings-to-date
 - Summary of data
 - Synopsis of initial interviews

Overview of NH State Rail Plan

- Objective of NH State Rail Plan Study
 - Update 2001 NH Rail Plan
 - Incorporate new PRIIA expectations
 - Enable NH to apply for federal funding
- Public Meeting #1
 - Present overview of NH Rail Plan and schedule
 - Solicit comments on general understanding and interest in rail transportation in NH
 - Public Meeting #2 will present our preliminary findings

Vision Statement for NH State Rail Plan

Mr. O'Blenis presented the NH State Rail Plan Vision Statement and asked the public to provide feedback on the statement:

“Provides an efficiently utilized and well-maintained railroad system, expanded as appropriate to accommodate increases in freight and passenger demand for rail services.

It is a system that is fully integrated with the national, regional and statewide transportation system, connecting the state's urban and rural communities, maximizing the opportunities for economic growth, promoting energy efficiency, and providing safe, secure and reliable transportation of people and goods.”

Members of the audience provided no feedback on the Rail Plan Vision Statement.

NH State Rail Plan Goals

Mr. O'Blenis presented the general goals for NH State Rail Plan and asked the public to provide feedback on the goals:

1. Maintain the NH rail system in a state of good repair
2. Provide a rail system that is financially stable and sustainable
3. Expand the rail system and its capacity to promote growth in freight and passenger demand
4. Provide a rail system that is environmentally supportive and sustainable
5. Facilitate the ability of NH railroads to be competitive regionally, nationally, and globally
6. Support economic initiatives
7. Realize public benefits for public investments
8. Encourage public-private partnerships related to rail services
9. Educate NH residents and businesses on the rail system in NH

Question: Are you going to look at the question of where funding streams are coming from? No matter how viable the program is I don't think it is fair to raise taxes. It is also unfair to get the federal government to pay for it, as that is taxes as well. The state will have to come up with money anyway because the federal government will not cover the whole program.

Mr. O'Blenis commented that one of the things that would have to happen is private investment. Certainly, the study will identify funding mechanisms for these programs, as well as provide an inventory of best practices across the country for funding sources, but the Study Team has identified the need for private-public partnerships as a necessary part of the equation and they will look to identify strategies to encourage these partnerships.

Mr. Lou Barker commented that one of the key elements is the cost benefit analysis that will be included in the study. He mentioned that when the interstate program was put in place, USDOT did a cost benefit analysis of the project to the United States economy. He said we are looking to identify what the direct economic benefits of passenger and freight rail are to the State of New Hampshire.

Comment: My goal is to see the east-west line in the Gorham area be part of the passenger rail initiative from Montreal down to Portland. My thought was to try to make that more financially viable by getting the mail back on the rail.

Presentation of Baseline Data Collected

Mr. O'Blenis made a presentation that covered the topics of Population in New Hampshire; New Hampshire Railroads; Miles of Rail by Operator Size and Miles of Railroad by Carrier.

Ms. Yonkin made a presentation that covered the topics of Modal Share by Weight 2007; Value Modal Share 2007; Rail Shipments by Direction; Trade with Canada: Modal Share by Weight; New Hampshire Top Five Originating Commodities by Weight and Value; New Hampshire Top Five Terminating Commodities by Weight and Value and Total Carloads Carried via Rail: Origin, Destination and Through Traffic.

Mr. O'Blenis made a presentation that covered the topics of Regional High Speed & Intercity Passenger Rail; Amtrak Boardings & Alightings in NH FY 2010; Amtrak Downeaster and Amtrak Downeaster Ridership.

Public Discussion

Mr. O'Blenis presented the following questions for discussion to attendees in the audience:

1. How do you view the importance of transportation relative to the NH economy?
2. How important is freight rail to transportation in NH?
3. How important is passenger rail to transportation in NH?
4. What are the benefits of investment in freight and passenger rail?

Members of the audience provided the following feedback, input and questions:

Comment: Freight rail works for heavier items such as large amounts of chemicals, lumber, coal, warehousing, steel (scrap and finished products), oil, ethanol, grain and gravel into Boston. When you have smaller items, it is not as cost effective on rail, but it cost-effective for larger items.

Comment: With limited access to freight rail, the cost of doing business goes up by being less competitive and having fewer transportation options. Rail lowers transportation costs and increases competition, which creates more options and more savings for people doing business in the state.

Comment: Having to deal with Guilford and Pan Am has hurt the rail industry. People are not getting their product because freight is sitting and this leads to trucks stealing freight business.

Comment: A lot of the paper industry went overseas because it is being produced much more inexpensively.

Comment: I think there needs to be a way to lobby for the interests of passenger and freight rail in the legislature and the state needs to do additional marketing and promotion of the rail initiatives in order for them to be successful.

Comment: For the past six months I have been working for Swift Transportation, which is a large trucking company. I have been all over the US, and I have observed that truck freight rates are low, costs are high and that trucking companies are fighting with each other for business. I don't think that government intervention is the answer here and it has to be corrected naturally through market forces. You are talking about public investment and I haven't been able to find any evidence that these investments would create one job, or save the taxpayer one dollar.

Mr. O'Brien responded that there needs to be a rationale for public investment and there needs to be a quantifiable public benefit, and that is a large part of what they are trying to identify in this rail plan.

Mr. O'Brien asked the audience member if he had any interface with freight rail?

Comment: Everybody talks about the partnership with JB Hunt and rail, but they are close to bankruptcy because they bet on rail and there is only so much freight out there – as a result they have laid off one-third of their workforce. Things are rough in the truck freight industry. You need to find a balance between freight rail and trucking.

Question: Why is the chart you show for freight in New Hampshire declining? Is it due to lack of maintenance, lack of connectivity? What besides grain, oil and ethanol are you going to ship by rail? What other goods make sense? If freight service is a problem, what are we going to do about it?

Mr. Morgan responded that you can't assume that the decline in freight is from lack of infrastructure investment, or the condition of the rail system. It is more a result of the paper mills closing. He said that as we get further on in the study we will learn more about the trends and what their causes are.

Mr. O'Brien responded that at the preliminary stages of this study we have only baseline data but as the study progresses we will be addressing all of the questions that have been raised.

Comment: The downward slope in freight has been steeper in New Hampshire than nationally.

Comment: Vermont has a Rail Council, which is an effective tool to deal with train issues. Vermont and Maine have two things that New Hampshire does not, sales and income tax.

Question: Will the report talk about politics, or what could be an efficient way to administer how to revive rail?

Mr. O'Blenis responded that the study will look into that to some degree and that there is no expectation that this report is going to change legislation but it will serve as an education tool and it will document and provide a basis of education for those that make decisions.

Question: Will you be asking the surrounding state shippers who do not use rail what they would do if we had certain rail services?

Mr. O'Blenis responded that they are not creating a list of everyone who is potentially available to use freight rail, but they are talking to enough people directly to understand if there is a demand.

Comment: Is it fair to say that if we cannot subsidize rail, we could at least help market and promote it?

Mr. O'Blenis responded that if you talk to the Downeaster operators, they will say that New Hampshire is where a lot of the revenue comes from, so the state may not subsidize rail but there is certainly support from the state's population.

Comment: Maybe you should talk to the conductors of the existing lines in New Hampshire, they know better than anyone what rail needs to be successful.

Comment: There needs to be a level passenger loading dock so you don't have to climb up to get into coach. That seems to be a requirement for Amtrak.

Question: When you get all of this data together, can it be presented to the legislative body to educate them?

Mr. Morgan commented that the rail plan is a tool that NHDOT will use for education, and that the Bureau of Rail and Transit does brief the transportation and public works committee on all transportation issues, including rail. He said NHDOT would offer the rail plan to them.

Comment: I believe that the education piece is the biggest challenge that we face.

Comment: There is a bill in Maine that is going to establish an economic development/rail task force, and that is something that people in New Hampshire should consider.

Closing Remarks

Mr. O'Blenis thanked the audience for coming and for their participation and input. He explained that there will be another set of public meetings coming in the summer and that he hoped to see everyone in a couple of months.

Meeting adjourned at 7:44 pm.