



**New Hampshire State Rail Plan
Public Informational Meeting
April 6, 2011 6-8 pm
McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center, Concord**

NHDOT Staff

Christopher (Kit) Morgan
Lou Barker

Consultant Team

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

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

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: This was the first 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 6:00 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'Blenis.

Mr. O'Blenis 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 as well.

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 and 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. Ronald 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. Ronald 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: Can you provide an illustration of how New Hampshire rail would be competitive globally?

Mr. O'Blenis responded that that there is very little rail that originates and terminates in the State of New Hampshire and there is a lot of freight, including cars and coal for example, that are moved via rail throughout the entire country, from the east coast to the west coast. NH's ability tap into this network increases their ability to be competitively.

Presentation of Baseline Data Collected

Mr. Ronald 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. Pamela 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. Ronald 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; Amtrak Downeaster Ridership and Synopsis of Initial Interviews with Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Members.

Public Discussion

Mr. Ronald 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: With the aging population in New Hampshire, and the people driving in and out of Boston everyday, which is 400 people everyday, and the fact that buses are never on time, it seems to me that there is a market for rail. There is significant congestion to Boston. Why do people put up with this traffic? We need a train to traverse cities. I hate that younger people haven't even been on a train unless they have been to Europe. I think we should reinstall the rail system incrementally. We should start small and work up to expanded service.

Comment: Looking at these plans, I see a lot of north to south connections; I would like to see some plans for more east to west rail connections. A connection from Concord and Manchester to Pease Transportation Center would be ideal. Rail along Route 101 would be good too.

Comment: I would like to see a balanced transportation system, with things like vans from airports, and buses and trains going in and out of cities Including a bus to Concord from Portsmouth.

Question: I'm feeling a sense of cynicism that NH doesn't consider the regional aspects of their transportation, why is that apparently suggested?

Mr. Ronald O'Blenis responded that those comments came up in one-on-one interviews with TAC members and the comments touched on that people understand that there needs to be recognition of a greater economy statewide in order for NH to be regionally competitive economically.

Comment: I do not know if this plan will look into identifying funding streams, I see that you have identified population centers, but rail is so underfunded that it seems like a non-starter. We need to identify how to identify funds in order to invest in building rail infrastructure. Until we identify a funding source, this is not going to happen.

Comment: One way to pay for it is to continue to develop the freight side of the rail industry in the state. If we can build a viable freight rail system, it will support passenger service. Freight rail provides the capital and operational basis when it comes

to rail. We need to ask freight railroad users and/or truck users what makes them decide between modes.

Comment: If we invested in freight rail to move coal from Bow it would create revenue.

Comment: Finding out where the funding sources are going to come from needs to be a priority for this study. What are you looking at to identify ways to identify funding sources?

Ms. Pamela Yonkin responded that as part of the rail plan the Study Team will provide an inventory of the best practices of other states related to funding and that the Study Team will also look into some other potential innovative funding sources that NH can consider.

Comment: I think that identifying funding sources is the most important part of this plan. You need to prove that freight rail will support the passenger system and we need to have this study show irrefutably what the benefit is so people will be willing to put their personal finances towards its use. I think you should interview the people who have businesses on rail lines as to whether they would use freight rail in Nashua so you can show specifically that business would benefit. I know businesses that tell me that they won't ship by rail because the tracks are in poor shape and they need more reliable service.

Question: Do you have a copy of the Tuck Report?

Mr. Ronald O'Blenis responded that the Study Team did not, but they would follow up on getting it.

Comment: We need the government to subsidize railroads in the same way they subsidize roads.

Comment: On the freight side, New Hampshire is on the end of the distribution network, and that affects the price goods. Truckers have higher prices in New England, so rail is very important to freight. Rail, for many people, is a potential market expansion device. In New Hampshire costs are higher, labor costs more, energy costs more and we have higher taxes. A potential option for savings would benefit this region economically.

Comment: The population of New Hampshire is aging; we can agree that a balanced transportation system is going to be needed in this state. The state's hands have been tied and funds that could have gone to this have gone to auto travel. Funding is key. If the NHDOT does want a balanced transportation system, they should be leading a charge for the legislature to change funding going to cars rather than rail.

Comment: That would mean a change in the state constitution.

Comment: Truck sizes in this state are at the top end, this state has a very high weight limit. That leads me to believe that we have distorted the transportation market in this state. To return balance we have to address the weight limits to address the trucks that don't pay their own way.

Comment: The plan has to include specific information based on trucking; I would hope that you would include a section on intermodal connections. Locations such as the Port in Portsmouth could be a good connection for intermodal options. That would help NH open up to international markets.

Comment: We need to address the opportunity for piggyback service as well. If the trucks are too heavy, we could put those heavy loads on rail cars.

Comment: In order to provide more reliable freight service on rail, New Hampshire is going to have to invest in more infrastructure than we currently have. Things such as double tracks and passing lines are needed if you want to have freight and passenger rail work together. We need adequate right-of-way.

Question: Will the plan include ideas on legislation that might identify new funding sources?

Mr. O'Blenis responded that the study will make note of limitations and make comparisons of best practices across the country in order to work towards that end.

Mr. Morgan responded that the key challenge is to show public benefit and then quantify them, especially on freight investments, which are difficult to quantify, but that is the charge of this study. He also commented that the six states in New England and New York have signed a compact to work together on developing long-range rail projects and to support the overall rail program moving forward.

Comment: I haven't heard anything from the cities along the capital lines. It would be a different lifestyle to walk to a train like in New York and New Jersey. This would be an attraction for people to move here if there is plentiful housing near passenger rail lines.

Comment: Nashua unanimously supported a recent resolution to support passenger rail. Other communities like Merrimack, Concord, Manchester and Bedford have also passed resolutions for passenger rail for New Hampshire, so the communities are very supportive of recognizing the value of rail.

Closing Remarks

Mr. Ronald 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 few months.

Meeting adjourned at 7:34 pm.