

**New Hampshire State Rail Plan  
Public Informational Meeting  
March 5, 2012 6-8 pm  
Nashua City Hall Auditorium, Nashua**

NHDOT Staff

Mike Pillsbury  
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Consultant Team

Ronald O'Blenis, HDR  
Dick Flynn, CTC Group  
Ben Ettelman, Morris Communications

Number of Public Attending: 68 individuals signed in; it is estimated that about 80 were in attendance

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: This was the second of three spring 2012 public meetings held throughout New Hampshire. The purpose of the meeting was to share the findings and draft recommendations of the New Hampshire State Rail Plan and solicit comments regarding the findings and recommendations from the public.

*Meeting began at 6:01 pm.*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Kit Morgan, Administrator of the Bureau of Rail and Transit at NHDOT, welcomed the audience and thanked the audience members for attending the second of three public meetings for the New Hampshire State Rail Plan. Mr. Morgan explained that the Rail Plan Study Team will provide a presentation of the study findings and recommendations and there will be a Q&A session after the presentation. Mr. Morgan introduced Mr. Ronald O'Blenis, project manager for the HDR Consultant Team.

Mr. Ronald O'Blenis, Project Manager for the HDR Consultant Team welcomed the audience and thanked them for coming to the meeting. Mr. O'Blenis introduced the Study Team and explained that the purpose of the meeting is to share the study findings and recommendations, as well as solicit comments and questions from the public.

Presentation of Study Findings for Freight and Passenger Rail

*Mr. O'Blenis provided an overview of Freight and Passenger Rail Findings, including: NH Rail Lines are part of the Regional Network; Primary Branch Lines that carry significant volumes; Secondary Branch Lines serve many NH businesses; A Regional Vision for Passenger Rail; Mainlines carry most are critical to system viability; New Hampshire*

*Freight Rail Trends; New Hampshire freight rail volumes are comparable to most New England states; New Hampshire Freight Traffic Reflects Industry Trends; Management of NH Freight Rail System; New Hampshire has two Amtrak Routes; New England Rail System: Improvements Planned and Underway; NH Passenger Rail Ridership is Growing; Management of Passenger Rail System; Freight Rail Supports the NH Economy; Passenger Rail Provides Mobility Options; Passenger Rail Benefits Economic Development; Rail Can Support Future Transportation Needs.*

*Mr. O'Blenis made a presentation regarding Freight Rail Issues: Highway Congestion will increase dramatically by 2040; Changing National Economy Affects NH; Support for Railroad Mainlines; Increasing Carload Weights Enhances Rail Efficiency; Rail Intermodal is Fastest Growing Freight Sector; NH Railroad Branch Lines Serve NH Shippers and Branch Line Issues.*

*Mr. Dick Flynn of CTC Group made a presentation regarding Branch Line Traffic Originating/Terminating in NH.*

*Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT presented the Study Draft Recommendations for Freight Rail including: Recommendations for Network Maintenance on Mainlines, Branch Lines as well as recommendations for System-wide Support.*

*Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT made a presentation regarding Passenger Rail Issues, including: Recommended NH Passenger Rail Priorities; Benefits of Shared Freight/Passenger Corridors, Tourist/Excursion Service; Station area development as a rail service component; Regional Support is Needed to Continue Amtrak Services as well as recommendations regarding the Continuance of Existing Services and the Expansion of the Existing System.*

*Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT presented the Study Draft Recommendations for Passenger Rail, including Continuing Existing Services and System Expansion.*

*Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT shared the following Study Conclusions:*

- *Rail is an important Component of the New Hampshire and Regional Transportation Network.*
- *Rail Services (freight and passenger) provide multiple benefits for the state, including:*
  - *Economic*
  - *Environmental*
  - *Mobility*
- *Freight Rail services provide economic benefits to NH businesses*
- *Passenger Rail services improve mobility to New Hampshire Residents*
- ***Passenger and Freight together, as the NH Railroad System, is an important resource for the State of New Hampshire***

### Public Discussion

Comment: My name is Donnalee Lozeau, Mayor of Nashua and I would like to commend those in the audience for attending today as we have close to 60 people in the audience. This information gives us the ability to talk about rail in a more educated fashion and the city of Nashua appreciates this effort. There are people from all walks of life from elected officials to members of the NHRTA, chamber of commerce as well as business and other interests throughout our community and it is good to see the support for rail showing. We look forward to supporting NHDOT in any way that we can with regard to advancing rail in Nashua and New Hampshire.

Comment: About six years ago we had a symposium regarding rail in Goffstown and everyone was excited about the NH Capitol Corridor service. I thought we should look at getting the Lowell to Nashua service in place first. About a year ago it disappeared and now we are talking about more engineering studies. Rail has been studied to death. Where did all the data go for these previous studies? We need to get a passenger train to Nashua, and then we can get them north where there is a lot less demand than in Nashua.

Comment: The thing to remember regarding passenger rail and the reason that we keep starting over is elections. Each election rail is less of a priority. By limiting our economic engine, we can't bring a big industry here if we don't have freight, boat and airplane transportation. Additionally, hospitality is a very important aspect of our economy and I believe that tying in the Hobo Railroad and other tourist railroads to the airport and into seacoast will bolster our tourism economy. Nashua is an economic engine for the region and it is important that we work towards intermodal transportation and we need to do it now.

Comment: The first objection that people raise to rail is the cost to the taxpayer. Have any statistics been compiled that compare the cost to the taxpayer of vehicle transportation compared to train transportation per mile? That should be looked into.

Comment: All you have to do is read the Manchester Union Leader. Any time an article about rail comes up the conversation inevitably steers towards the subsidies. We can have all of the engineering studies we want but unless you have done the sales job to overcome the preconceived notion that this is a taxpayer sinkhole, it will not go anywhere. People think the gas tax pays for highways but that is not true, there are subsidies for highways as well. This has to be sold to the taxpayers.

Question: What are the current and future relationships between the passenger service and the freight rail providers? Historically there has been a pushback from freight to passenger. I would love to see passenger rail come to Nashua.

Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT commented that this issue is always a concern to developing new passenger service on a freight railroad, and it is true that freight providers are generally not enthusiastic about passenger service as it creates potential liability. Mr. Morgan explained that these concerns will be addressed in the final Rail Plan and explained that there is a successful relationship in Maine between NNEPRA and the host railroad and NHDOT expects to continue to develop positive relationships moving forward.

Comment: I know the people that own PanAm and they have no intention of having passenger service on their line. The owners do not want to have to pay the cost to make their lines safe for passenger rail and they only want to work with freight. I believe that passenger rail should be here but I am very skeptical about the reality of passenger rail ever coming to Nashua.

Comment: I think it is important to continue to pursue freight as well as passenger rail as new industry is reliant on freight rail. It is important to pursue the entire NH Capitol Corridor for passenger service and connect the airport. Right now, even from Nashua, it is easier to fly out of Logan rather than Manchester Airport. Rail can help make Manchester Airport successful. Federal, state and municipal roads are subsidized by taxpayer money. Passenger rail would get people off the road so the roads are not as congested and so that those that don't use the connections available on the NH Capitol Corridor line will spend less time on the road and create less maintenance costs for roads like I-93.

Question: What is the current relationship with the company that owns the line between Nashua and Lowell and how much capital asset would be needed to get that rail going between Lowell, Nashua and beyond?

Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT responded that there is no formal relationship but that there is history between the two organizations, as NHDOT has worked with the company that owns the line in the past and that NHDOT would expect to work with them closely as this process moves forward. Mr. Morgan explained that a number of years ago there was a preliminary engineering study for the extension from Lowell to Nashua and quite a bit of that work supported applications for grants and federal funding, but that the project did not receive any matching state funds so the project could not move forward. Mr. Morgan explained that NHDOT is now proposing to look at the broader corridor and that NHDOT will not have to go and redo the work that was already completed. Mr. Morgan explained that in order to compete for federal funds, the State Rail Plan is a step that has to be taken. Mr. Morgan explained there is an agreement between MBTA and PanAm to provide access to Concord, so MBTA has the rights to provide passenger service along the NH Capitol Corridor and that was a very important step in the process for passenger rail.

Comment: I understand the importance of the balance of passenger and freight rail, but most of the towns in New Hampshire don't have a tax base to support freight. When you talk about shipping, what is being shipped? In terms of passenger, how many people would take a train north of Concord?

Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT commented that NHDOT is not looking at passenger service in the North Country, except for quite a ways in the future. Mr. Morgan explained that the point of showing those freight improvements and some of the track improvements was to show the types of things that can be done to get the freight system to work more efficiently, because if it is more cost effective, it will attract more shippers. Mr. Morgan explained that there are other companies that could use freight rail.

Question: A lot of the rail lines are being turned into trails, what happens with those?

Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT commented that the Rail Plan is recommending that those rail corridors be kept intact; recommendations for rail improvements are being made for the active lines.

Comment: I think we understand that freight pays the bill and passenger service is the dessert. We all want dessert. The freight portion of rail is going to be a long and difficult road to hoe because we don't have a large industrial base. We need to improve the rail system in order to attract industry.

Comment: My name is Chris Williams, president of the Nashua Chamber of Commerce. I am going to focus my comments on the passenger side, but wanted to comment that the Chamber of Commerce supports the recommendations for freight rail. In terms of passenger service, this is the single largest economic opportunity for Nashua. That message needs to be carried to Concord by the citizens of Nashua. I want to talk about the final vote to release the state funds for the NH Capitol Corridor Study that is being taken by the Executive Committee in Concord in two days. We need the citizens of Nashua to go to Concord and remind the executive councilors that the private sector raised the money that allowed those funds to be available in the first place. When the NHRTA was created, they came to the Chamber of Commerce and asked the private sector to raise the money that was needed in order to qualify for the grants that the state applied for. We said yes, we did so on good faith that the state would follow through on their commitment. The state needs to follow through and vote to release these funds on Wednesday. Out of five councilors, we have two that support the study and two that are opposed to releasing the funds. I ask that every person in this room call or send an email to the remaining councilor who has not publicly decided, Councilor Dan St. Hilaire, and let him know how important this study is to the City of Nashua.

Comment: I would like to thank the work the NHRTA has done for passenger rail in New Hampshire. I would like to take an informal showing of hands from those in the room that support passenger rail in Nashua.

*The vast majority of the members of the audience raised their hands in support of passenger rail in Nashua.*

Comment: There are certain things that Nashua really wants and a study of the NH Capitol Corridor is at the top of the list. Please call and write your elected officials in order to let them know how we feel.

Comment: I support these comments with one addition; don't just call Mr. St. Hilaire, keep in mind that we have an election this fall. Speak to all the candidates regarding this subject and let the legislature know loud and clear how we feel about rail.

Comment: I work for a real estate development company and I am from Nashua. We are looking to redevelop 26 acres along the Nashua and Merrimack River and it would be walking distance to a rail station. This is the single biggest opportunity that this city has. I believe that you can take the worst part of a city and make it the most economically viable by having rail access.

Comment: I grew up in Nashua when we did have commuter rail and it was a wonderful thing. It was viable then, why can't we make it viable now?

Question: Why is the Executive Council abandoning the NH Capitol Corridor Study?

Comment: Rail has been a struggle for this state for some years. There are economic interests that don't want passenger rail. People want to see us spend billions of dollars to finish widening I-93. Bus companies see passenger rail as competition. Those who have a voice in favor of rail need to exercise that voice. I would like to point out that this rail plan is superbly conservative in making the case for passenger rail. If those of you in the audience want passenger rail, take these arguments and make those calls to elected officials in Concord.

Comment: I have talked to one councilor who originally supported the NH Capitol Corridor Study until the price of the study was released in reference to the deal that was made between MBTA and PanAm, which is contingent on MBTA being the operator and the tracks being rebuilt. The bill to rebuild the tracks was \$300 million, which is way exorbitant. This is an inflated estimate. The councilor I spoke with supported this until he saw that figure. PanAm is the problem as they have no interest in passenger rail and the only reason they have service to Portland is because the track was rebuilt for them. The federal government is never going to agree to pay \$300 million for a sixty mile stretch of track, and the only hope that passenger rail has is to pry the rail from PanAm.

Comment: My name is Julie Chen and I represent the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission in Manchester. SNHPC is an active participant in the TAC that participated in the update of the plan. SNHPC supports the recommendations made in this plan and

strongly feels that a multi-modal transportation system is the key not only to the economic development for New Hampshire, but for the entire New England region.

Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT commented that people can comment through the NHDOT website and view the presentation from the evening's meeting.

Comment: I have been an advocate for the revitalization of railroads for many years. We have not addressed that, in the early 1990s, President Clinton designated the corridor from Boston to Montreal through Nashua as a high-speed rail corridor. That was approved in Vermont, Massachusetts looked at it as well and both states found it to be viable. New Hampshire at the time did not utilize the money that was made available for this line, and did not perform an analysis of the viability of the corridor. That has sat on the back burner for the last two decades. Rail will help the economy and New Hampshire would benefit from passenger rail both in New Hampshire and along the Seacoast.

Comment: It is important to remember that when you contact the councilors that you remind them that this is simply a contract to provide an analysis and it in no way commits the state to implement anything and spend any money. The NH Capitol Corridor Study is very important; as it will provide us with real data, cost benefit and economic development information in order to make educated decisions for the future of rail, rather than basing decisions on speculation alone.

Comment: I have been to these meetings for the last thirty years and this was the best turnout that we have ever seen and I thank every last one of you for being here this evening.

Comment: I think that some very powerful people in Massachusetts and New Hampshire oppose passenger rail here. I think growth in the more highly densified regions of New Hampshire is being stunted by the lack of rail. I believe that rail is an important component to the future of New Hampshire and I believe that rail should be an issue in future campaigns in New Hampshire.

#### Closing Remarks

Mr. Kit Morgan of NHDOT thanked the members of the audience for attending the meeting, listening to the recommendation and for providing their input and support.

*Meeting adjourned at 8:04 pm.*