

Background to Pownal Straw Vote on the Unused Rail Corridor

The purpose of the June 26 straw vote is for the Town of Pownal to submit their position on a potential use for the unused rail corridor that goes from Portland's Ocean Gateway to Auburn. The corridor, referred to as the Berlin Subdivision, goes through parts of the towns of Portland, Falmouth, Cumberland, Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, Pownal, New Gloucester and Auburn.

Between April 2022 and January 2023, the MaineDOT convened a Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) that reviewed research and data on the three options: Rail only, Interim Trail (also known as trail until rail), and Rail with Trail.

The Rail option would establish passenger rail service on the corridor. Recent studies have found that the low population density from Portland to Lewiston makes it unlikely for federal funding to help pay for this option. The estimated cost to establish passenger rail service on the corridor would be over \$270 million plus over \$2 million a year for maintenance. And since the parallel CSX line to Lewiston remains active for freight, that corridor could also be used for passenger rail and this corridor for a trail.

The Interim Trail option would allow this state-owned land, maintained at taxpayer expense, to be accessible for public use. The trail would provide an off-road route for walking, biking, wheeling, skiing, and more. It would connect Pownal to other communities in a peaceful, environmentally friendly way. The estimated cost for the trail is approximately \$35.8 million (\$55 million if a bridge to the Eastern Prom is included), and multiple sources of funding could be used, such as federal grants, private funding, state funding, and more.

The Rail with Trail option would require a wider corridor which would have an environmental impact encroaching into wetlands and conservation lands, and be very expensive. The estimated cost is more than \$75 million (\$94.3 million with the bridge to the Eastern Prom), plus the \$270+ million cost for rail restoration.

Like each of the other 7 towns along the corridor, Pownal was asked to have a representative for the RUAC. Each of these stakeholders was asked to vote at the end of the process. Pownal abstained in order to get residents input, so it is now time for Pownal to vote for one of the 3 options.

The full study from the RUAC process can be found here:

https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/docs/parac/2023/230208_Berlin-Sub%20Final%20Report_Final.pdf

The Casco Bay Trail Alliance website for more details on the trail vision: cascobaytrail.org

Research and Data on the Rail Corridor

A report of the RUAC recommendation, can be found here:

<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/docs/parac/2023/Portland%20to%20Auburn%20Rail%20Use%20Advisory%20Council%20Summary%20and%20Recommendations%20Final%202.1.23.pdf>

The full study from the RUAC process can be found here:

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The study assessing the economic feasibility of any passenger rail from Portland to Lewiston is here:

https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/larailplan/_assets/docs/L-A%20Memo%20and%20Study%20April%202023.pdf

Please see the Casco Bay Trail Alliance website for more details on the proposed interim trail, cascobaytrail.org