



August 30, 2024

Maine Department of Transportation
Attn: Commissioner Bruce A. Van Note
16 SHS, Augusta, ME 04333-0016

Dear Commissioner Van Note,

As a collective the City of Westbrook and Towns of Windham & Gorham, are petitioning the Commissioner of Transportation to establish a Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council (RUAC) to review our communities request to allow an interim regional recreational trail in the rail bed of remaining portion of the MDOT owned section of the Mountain Division Trail (MDT). The section we are requesting this review of for an interim trail status is from the southerly end of the Mountain Division Trail section recently granted such status in Standish, through Gorham & Windham to the southern end of the MDOT owned right of way in Westbrook, just south of Bridge St. Such status is clearly understood that it is trail until rail.

Westbrook and Windham in partnership with MDOT have undertaken the PDR process to design a recreational trail beside the rail bed along the 5-mile section of the MDT through our communities to extend the current multiuse trail southerly for the region to have access to the Sebago to the Sea Trail. With a final design now complete at cost of \$12.7 Million to undertake, the project team has deemed the current proposal to place the trail beside the rail to be cost prohibitive to proceed. We looked into federal trail grants, but it was determined the proposal would not be competitive due to its high price tag.

With the recent action taken on the northern portion of the Mountain Division Trail from Fryeburg to Standish to allow for an interim trail in the rail bed, MDOT and City staffers met to discuss the opportunity of the RUAC process and how this process would significantly reduce the construction costs of the project and make the recreational trail project viable. Preliminary cost estimates by the Engineer of Record have determined a revised cost of \$6.4 Million dollar for the interim trail project in the rail bed, plus a significant reduction in impacts to abutting property owners along the route. This represents almost a 50% reduction in the project costs to construct the trail in the rail bed. Additionally, existing bridges/crossings can be utilized in these efforts vs building new bridges/crossings which is a much more sustainable approach at this time. Wetland impacts are significantly reduced as well.

Also, in these discussions with MDOT staff on the RUAC process, MDOT staff supported the idea of including the Gorham section of the MDT in this petition as that section would be the only section of the MDT not included in this "interim designation" and would end up creating inconsistencies in maintenance of the Mountain Division Trail. Currently, there are issues on the Gorham section of the existing trail that the current setbacks from the rail bed are creating limitations on those maintenance issues from being addressed. Gorham supports this petition and will provide a separate letter to MDOT on this matter.

In summary, we hope you find our request warranted and look forward to the next steps in this process.

Respectfully,

David C. Morse
Acting Mayor
City of Westbrook

Barry Tibbetts
Town Manager
Town of Windham