

PRESS RELEASE

Concord, NH
November 14, 2009

NH Rail Trail Meeting: “Making Connections”

The New Hampshire Rail Trail Alliance held its annual meeting with theme “Making Connections” Saturday November 14 in Concord. The Alliance consists of citizen action groups and local officials involved with constructing and maintaining rail trails in New Hampshire.

Twenty one Rail Trail organizations represented by thirty rail trail enthusiasts attended the meeting, along with representatives from the New Hampshire Bureau of Rail and Transit and Bureau of Trails. The meeting focused on presentations from Rail Trail organizations on trail status and plans, centering on the key relationships between the trail groups and state agencies who represent users, owners, and key stakeholders of the many miles of trails. Hosted by Charles Martin of the Friends of the Northern Rail Trail and author of the acclaimed *New Hampshire Rail Trails* guide, Martin stated, “We need to make three types of connections: Connect town trail segments to form longer trails; connect trail groups so we can help each other; and connect citizens groups with town and state officials.”

This meeting announced the concept of an ambitious project to create the “Granite State Rail Trail” from Lebanon to the Massachusetts border in Salem. Dick Lemieux, head of the Concord Bicycle Committee, described the overall concept for this 107-mile trail. Lemieux stated, “This vision will result in a trail that will bring a tremendous recreational and economic benefit to the state and compete with some of the most popular trails in the country.” He was followed by eight rail trail organization leaders who described various sections of this trail. Alex Bernhard of the Friends of the Northern Rail Trail and Cindy Heath of Lebanon Parks and Recreation described the 60-mile Northern Rail Trail with 35 miles already completed.

The last section, using the Londonderry, Derry, Windham, and Salem rail trails along the abandoned Manchester & Lawrence Railroad right of way, is being worked by four town-specific trail groups. Mark Samsel described the recent completion of a paved 3.5-mile section of the Windham Rail Trail and the planned renovation of the Windham Depot and Freight buildings. Samsel also mentioned recent completion of about a mile of trail south of downtown Derry by the Derry Rail Trail Alliance, and the anticipated Spring 2010 completion of two additional miles in Derry that will connect to Windham. Samsel said, “With the Derry connection and Depot projects completed, you will see a tremendous transformation of the trail and community.”

In between, these northern and southern sections, there are some routing issues and considerable work required to connect Concord with Manchester. Much of this may follow scenic stretches of the Merrimack River, perhaps following alongside the active rail corridor. Greg Bakos described the status in Manchester, a major hub of the state’s

rail trails with North/South, East/West and urban trail connections providing bicycle transportation and walking options. “Developing trails in the city brings budget and engineering challenges, however the benefits are huge,” mentioned Bakos.

Another major trail concept presented at the meeting is the Winnepesaukee Trail from Franklin through Belmont, Laconia, and Meredith going through the scenic Hobo Railroad route along the Winnepesaukee River and Lake Winnepesaukee using a rail-with-trail approach. Rick Silverberg described lessons learned from his trail development effort starting in Franklin, including negotiation of easements and special use agreements required prior to construction. Diane Hanley then added an update on the WOW Trail (Winnepesaukee, Opechee, Winnisquam) plans and construction. She encountered major issues with rail-with-trail, and has been actively supporting the SB203 bill to limit railroad operator liability.

As part of the “Connections” theme, the Bureau of Rail and Transit in the Department of Transportation and the Bureau of Trails in the Department of Resources and Economic Development participated in the event. Kit Morgan, head of the Bureau of Rail and Transit, is responsible for management of both active railroad corridors in the state and 300 miles of abandoned state-owned railroad rights of way. Mr. Morgan described how his department supports trail groups through the Bike Ped Coordinator and grant opportunities with Federal Transportation Enhancement (TE) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) programs. He explained the responsibilities of his department including maintenance efforts on trails managed by DOT. He stressed DOT’s need to partner with local towns and citizens’ groups in order to make progress during a challenging budget period. Mr. Morgan also offered advice for “rail-with-trails” (along active railroad lines) efforts, needed for the Winnepesaukee Trail, Northern Rail Trail to White River Junction, and the Concord-Manchester link..

The Bureau of Trails, represented by Jennifer Codispoti, presented a history of the Bureau and its responsibilities for managing many miles of motorized and non-motorized recreational trails within New Hampshire. The Bureau’s works with trail organizations on their development and maintenance efforts. It provides financial help with the Grant in Aid and Recreational Trails Grant programs. Jennifer also presented the inventory of trails that the Bureau of Trails and Department of Rail and Transit manage and their working relationship.

The New Hampshire Rail Trail Alliance assists local rail trail groups and takes a leadership role on statewide issues involving rail trails. It is affiliated with the Bike-Walk Alliance of New Hampshire.

For further information contact:

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