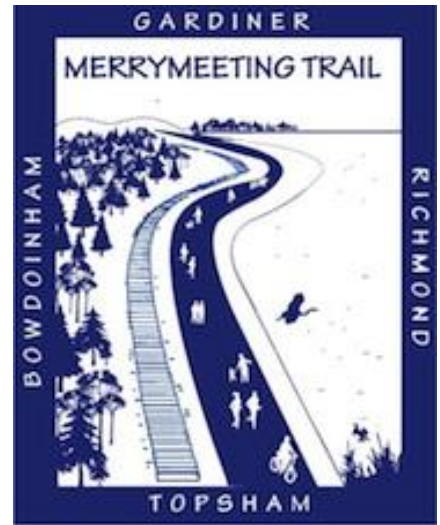


# Merrymeeting Trail Fact Sheet For LD 1141

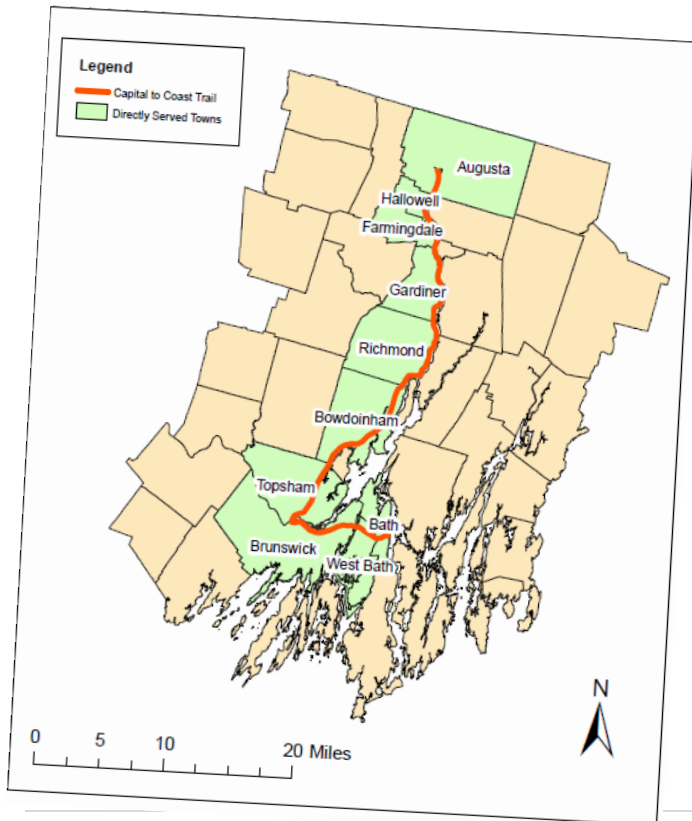
*Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation  
To Construct the Merrymeeting Trail  
from Topsham to Gardiner*

March 27, 2019



## What is the Merrymeeting Trail?

The Merrymeeting Trail is a proposed 25-mile walking and biking trail connecting Gardiner to Town of Topsham – and through adjacent trails, connecting Augusta to Brunswick and Bath. The Trail would be built on top of the existing railroad bed; if a feasible rail use came up in the future, the bed could be reclaimed for the rail use.



The Trail would link the very popular Kennebec River Rail Trail (Augusta-Hallowell-Farmingdale-Gardiner) through Richmond and Bowdoinham to Topsham. Ultimately, it will connect to the equally popular Androscoggin River Trail (Brunswick, West Bath, Bath). *This route has been designated a "trail of statewide significance" by the Maine Department of Transportation because of its unique qualities and assets.* In all, over 80,000 people live in the communities served by the proposed Trail.



## What would be the benefits?



**70%**  
**OF MAINE**

RESIDENTS PARTICIPATE  
IN OUTDOOR RECREATION  
EACH YEAR

Communities across Maine recognize that outdoor recreation supports health, contributes to a high quality of life and—perhaps most importantly—attracts and sustains employers and families. Investing in outdoor infrastructure attracts employers and active workforces, ensuring those communities thrive economically and socially.

1. *It will grow Maine's Outdoor Recreation industry.* A March 14, 2019 report on Maine Public Radio stated that “Rural Maine could be making \$5.6 billion in rural tourist dollars by 2030, if visitor experiences are improved. That’s according to a pair of studies conducted by global consulting firm FutureIQ. The studies found that a growing middle class in Asia, coupled with the popularity of nature-based travel and other factors, could significantly boost rural tourism over 12 years.” This trail is a leading example of the kind of investment the report is talking about.

2. *It will strengthen the downtowns and village centers of Augusta, Hallowell, Gardiner, Richmond, Bowdoinham, Topsham, Brunswick, and Bath* – by increasing foot and bicycle traffic from residents, commuters, and tourists.



3. *It will support better health in our communities.* Obesity rates among middle and high school students are high in Kennebec County. Exercise creates better health.
4. *It will showcase the Merrymeeting Bay.* Formed at the confluence of six rivers, Merrymeeting is the largest freshwater tidal bay in the northeast. It has a world-renowned natural habitat, and is a popular place for sailing, kayaking, swimming, walking, bird watching, fishing and duck hunting. Much of its shore lacks public access. The trail will provide a way for people to experience this hidden jewel.
5. *It will protect the rail corridor.* Unused rail infrastructure deteriorates over time. This section of rail has been largely unused for 30 years. Freezing and thaws, rain and wind, and vandalism, contribute to the erosion of railroad beds, the loosening of bolts, the rotting of ties, the rusting of steel. By covering the rails with stone dust (or removing them for replacement later as needed), by maintaining the bridges and trestles, the Trail will preserve the basic rail infrastructure.

### **What would be the cost?**

Vanesse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. estimated the cost of a stone dust trail over the tracks to be \$7.7 million in 2011. The Merrymeeting Trail can be paid for through incorporation into the regular Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) two-year work plan, which would be covered in part by federal matching funds.

In the case of the 87-mile Downeast Sunrise Trail in Washington County, MDOT chose to sell the rails and ties, which reduced the net cost to zero. How to handle the rails and ties in this case would be a decision for MDOT's rail experts.

### **How will it affect potential future rail use in the corridor?**

MDOT retains the right to reclaim the 87-mile Downeast Sunrise Trail at any time to resume railroad use. Similarly, MDOT allows the cities of Augusta and Hallowell to cover up the tracks and use the space for parking, with the right to reclaim the tracks for railroad use in the future. A similar arrangement would be put in place for the proposed Merrymeeting Trail.

Maine has owned this corridor for thirty years. For the first ten years, an occasional single freight car or excursion train used the tracks. For the last 20 years, there has been virtually no use. There is no short-term prospect for using the corridor for rail use in the coming decade.

*The potential for future freight use is low.* MDOT's Rail Plan (2014) and Integrated Freight Strategy (2017) identify six Maine railroad corridors as priorities for investment and expanded use; this corridor is not among them. The businesses which once supported the line, that sell high-volume low-cost goods, either no longer operate (Edwards Mill) or have moved away to the interstate (Pine State).

*The potential for passenger rail is also low.* The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority has identified Rockland and Lewiston as their next locations for expansion. When Augusta's turn for analysis comes up, the challenge will be the length of the ride. Using the Brunswick-Portland AMTRAK speed as a bellwether, an Augusta –Portland ride through Brunswick would take over an hour and a half. That's 20+ minutes longer than the existing Concord bus service (price \$16), and 30+ minutes longer than a car. Passenger rail service remains an important strategy, but where it makes most sense for Augusta is probably be along the I-95 or I-295 median strip, where high-speed service could be possible.

Regardless of these judgments, the corridor will remain available for train service when and if the occasion arises. On the other side of the coin, leaving this valuable corridor unused for another several decades would be wasting an important economic asset for the Kennebec Valley.

## **The Merrymeeting Trail Committee**

For the past ten years, a group of municipal and recreational interests have been meeting and planning this project. They have received funding and grants from the state and federal government, and from four area municipalities. The Trail has been endorsed by all the groups listed below.

### **Organizations and Groups Supporting the Merrymeeting Trail**

- Access Health – A Local Community Health Coalition
- Bicycle Coalition of Maine
- Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust
- Cathance River Education Alliance
- East Coast Greenway Alliance
- Friends of the Kennebec River Rail Trail
- Gardiner Main Street
- City of Gardiner Conservation Committee
- Greater Topsham Trail Alliance
- Healthy Communities of the Capital Area
- Kennebec Estuary Land Trust
- Kennebec River Rail Trail Board of Supervisors (Augusta, Hallowell, Farmingdale, & Gardiner)
- Kennebec Valley Council of Governments
- Maine Downtown Center
- Merrymeeting Arts Center
- Merrymeeting Trail Board of Supervisors (Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, & Gardiner)
- Merrymeeting Trailblazers
- Merrymeeting Wheelers Bicycle Club
- Mid Coast Hospital
- Midcoast Economic Development District
- Midcoast Public Health Council
- National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance
- Residents & Staff of Gardiner, Richmond, Bowdoinham, and Topsham
- Topsham Conservation Commission

### **Organizations That Have Provided Grants or Other Financial Support for the Trail**

- City of Gardiner
- Elmina B. Sewall Foundation
- Friends of Kennebec River Rail Trail
- Maine Department of Transportation
- Maine Municipal Planning Assistance Program
- Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund
- Topsham Development Incorporated
- Town of Bowdoinham
- Town of Richmond

**For more information see:**

<http://merrymeetingtrail.org/>