

Merrymeeting Trail/Lower Road Corridor Fact Sheet

Costs ([source](#))

- Costs to build an interim trail are projected to range from \$34 million for a stone dust surface to \$43 million for a paved surface.
- To build a trail alongside the current dormant rail line, costs are projected to range from \$146 to \$152 million. New construction would have to cross three rivers, seven perennial streams, and numerous wetlands.
- Upgrading the line to a Class 3 track (60 mph) for passenger service between Brunswick and Augusta is projected to cost \$363 million – bringing the total to build the trail alongside the rail line *and* restore rail viability to over half a billion dollars.

Benefits ([source](#))

- Visitors from out of state who come to use the trail are projected to spend between \$1.7 million and \$2.6 million per year at local businesses.
- Increased physical activity by residents along the Lower Road Rail Corridor “could translate to an annual savings of \$287,331 from reduced spending on health-related expenditures.”
- Area realtors reported that proximity to a trail, as a locational amenity, could shorten the average number of days a listed house spends on the market, and could increase the home values by 2.5 to 5 percent.

Rail is not viable on the Lower Road

- The [2023 Bangor Transit Propensity study](#) prepared for the Legislature concluded: “Given the relatively low transit demand, low population densities, high capital and operating costs, low climate and equity benefits, and extensive transportation needs statewide, MaineDOT has determined that it would be imprudent to continue the study of extending passenger rail to Bangor at this time.”
- The same study estimated the ticket price for a one-way train ride between Bangor and Brunswick to be \$116 (assuming an annual taxpayer-funded \$9.3 million subsidy) and found the line “will not meet minimum thresholds for ridership or corridor density needed to qualify and successfully compete for Federal...funding.”
- The population density needed to support light rail is [generally considered to be between 8,000 to 10,000 people per square mile](#). Kennebec County has about 143 people per square mile, and Sagadahoc County approximately 145 per square mile.
- [The Maine State Rail Plan](#) (2023) projects no growth for most of Maine in the coming decades: “Maine’s population is projected to hover just below 1.4 million by 2030... By 2050, the population is expected to drop back to current population levels (1.36 million).”
- The Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS) [recently concluded that](#) “the significant capital costs associated with the rail alternative appears to outweigh the benefits and conflicts with our goal of maintaining fiscal responsibility for transportation investments in the greater Bangor region. Alternatively, BACTS would support MaineDOT investing in enhancements to the existing intercity bus services and local services in the study area.”

Maine transportation should include a mix of rails and trails – rail where it makes sense, and interim trails in places, like the Lower Road, where it does not. The choice we face on the Lower Road is not between trail and rail, but between trail and more decades of nothing at all. This languishing public asset could be delivering enormous community benefits as the Merrymeeting Trail. Let’s make it happen!

History

Passenger service on the Lower Road ceased in 1960. In the 1980's, Guilford Transportation consolidated its freight operations to the Back Road through Lewiston/Auburn, discontinuing freight on the Lower Road. Guilford filed for abandonment of the Lower Road, but the state acquired the line before that process was completed. Since the state acquired the line, other than three short-line operators, no commercial carrier has expressed serious interest in the Lower Road for either freight or passengers.

Year	Accomplishment
2008	Representatives from Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, and Gardiner sign a Memorandum of Agreement supporting a regional trail system. A work plan is developed and planning begins.
2009	Planning grants and organizational assistance are provided by municipalities, state and regional entities.
2011	First Merrymeeting Trail feasibility and planning study is completed.
2014	The Capital to Coast Trail, of which Merrymeeting Trail is a central piece, is declared a "Trail of Statewide Significance" by MaineDOT.
2015	MaineDOT approves interim trail route; on-road bike signs are put up.
2016	Merrymeeting Trail Board of Supervisors is created via Interlocal Agreement between Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, and Gardiner.
2017	MaineDOT removes Richmond rail bridge due to repeated vehicle collisions.
2018	Merrymeeting Trail convenes statewide trail gathering that becomes the Maine Trails Coalition.
2019	LD 1141, a Resolve Directing the Maine Department of Transportation to Construct the Merrymeeting Trail, is introduced and discussed in the Legislature.
2021	Maine Legislature establishes the Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) process in statute.
2022	Merrymeeting Trail Board of Supervisors and all four towns formally request MaineDOT launch a RUAC for the Lower Road. The 14-member RUAC first meets in November.
2023	The Lower Road RUAC meets monthly, gathers information and incorporates robust public comment, developing a report and ultimately recommending to the Commissioner of Transportation that the Lower Road be repurposed as a trail on an interim basis.
2024	Merrymeeting Trailblazers hold community conversation workshops in Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, and Gardiner, engaging more than 180 community members to share their hopes, aspirations and visions for the trail. Information collected will inform future planning efforts.
2025	MaineDOT submits LD 29, the Merrymeeting Trail Bill! All four towns endorse it, as do 472 Mainers who sign a letter of support.