

Mountain Division Alliance Mountain Division Trail Update – March 2024

Where are we now? LD404, sponsored by Sen. Rick Bennett, was signed into law by Governor Mills on 7/6/23 – authorizing removal of rails and construction of a trail.

How did we get here?

- *Approval by Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) 4/22/23* - MaineDOT Commissioner Van Note established a Mountain Division RUAC in 9/21 (as required by LD 21) with representatives from; all towns the rail-trail passed thru, state agencies, regional planning organizations, and the Portland Water District. They met 9 times and in their final meeting voted 11:1 to recommend the interim conversion of 31 miles of existing railroad track to an interim 10'-wide paved bicycle and pedestrian trail. The RUAC further recommended that snowmobiles should remain an allowable use, under annual agreement with MaineDOT, within the corridor. The RUAC did not support expanding allowable uses to include ATVs or other motorized recreational vehicles
- *Letters of Support* submitted to Maine Transportation Committee by all towns and various businesses along 31 miles of Mountain Division Rail line in western Maine
- *Over 200 testimony submissions* and dozens of in person testimony provided to support LD404
- *LD404 was passed* by the Transportation Committee, Senate, and House with super majorities and signed into law by Governor Mills

What is next for the Mountain Division Trail (MDT)?

- *LD 1450 Funding Mechanism* - bill sponsored by Sen. Rick Bennett, proposes a mechanism for funding trail construction. It was passed by the Transportation Committee and is in the Appropriations Committee queue,
- *Maine DOT* has publicly voiced support for construction of MDT
- *Feasibility Study* – MaineDOT hired HNTB, a deeply experienced consulting firm with a focus on transportation projects to do a Feasibility Study for the 31-mile segment of the MDT in western Maine. The project kick-off meeting was held on 1/30/24. A draft Feasibility Report is expected mid-June, 2024, and a final report expected in mid-July. The report is expected to contain a phased development plan and estimated costs of construction. Between now and July 2024, several public meetings are planned to give the towns and public the opportunity to provide input and comment on the analysis and findings, before the Feasibility Report is finalized. The dates for these public meetings will be set later this winter.
- *Economic benefits* expected to exceed the cost of the trail build out (tourism, job growth such as construction, and business growth)

What role do various entities play?

- *Maine DOT* – owns the rail bed, right of way and major funding source
- *Maine State Legislature* – serves as a key source/supporter for funding
- *Mountain Division Alliance* – all-volunteer non-profit who serve as advocates for MDT with the public, the legislature, the media, and other advocacy organizations
- *Towns along the trail route* – contribute to advocating, planning, maintaining, and enjoying the benefits of bike/pedestrian trails
- *Trail Use Advocacy Organizations* – Bicycle Coalition of Maine, Maine Trails Coalition, Casco Bay Trail Alliance, Portland Trails, and Snowmobile clubs. Coordinate efforts to promote active transportation and the MDT construction.

For more information, please email mountaindivisionalliance@gmail.com