



**THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**



**Victoria F. Sheehan**  
**Commissioner**

**William Cass, P.E.**  
**Assistant Commissioner**

September 23, 2020

Town of Colebrook (via email: [info@colebrooknh.org](mailto:info@colebrooknh.org))  
Board of Selectmen  
17 Bridge Street  
Colebrook, NH 03576

Town of Columbia (via email: [towncolumbia@myfairpoint.net](mailto:towncolumbia@myfairpoint.net))  
Board of Selectmen  
PO Box 157  
Colebrook, NH 03576

Re: State-owned railroad & request for non-railroad access  
Columbia Bridge Road in Columbia to Simms Stream to NH Route 26/Bridge Street in Colebrook

Dear Boards of Selectmen,

The Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Natural & Cultural Resources (DNCR) are in receipt of your respective correspondences, which express an interest in exploring the use of portions of the out-of-service state-owned railroad corridor from Columbia Bridge Road in Columbia to Simms Stream to NH Route 26/Bridge Street in Colebrook, for uses other than railroad including hiking, walking, and OHRVs. The New Hampshire Central Railroad (NHCR) currently has the Federal operating rights for this trackage and this section is included in NHCR's Operating Agreement with the DOT. As such, DOT railroad staff conducted a field visit with NHCR to review the limits of the Towns' requested uses to determine if there was a likelihood of future railroad service in these areas.

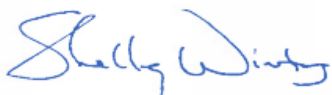
After conducting a field review, DOT staff conferred with DNCR staff to discuss the Towns' requests, DOT's recommendations, and develop a cooperative approach to move forward. Please accept the following status update and next steps:

- DOT and NHCR are in agreement that these sections are not needed in the near term for railroad services;
- DOT and NHCR would be receptive to availing these sections for non-railroad (interim recreational trail use);
- An entity other than NHDOT and NHCR would need to prepare (and pay all expenses & fees) and submit documentation to the U.S. Surface Transportation Board (STB) to seek NHCR's discontinuance of service and DOT's abandonment exemption, which is required to permit this recreational use;
- An entity other than DOT would need to pay for the design and construction of said recreational trail(s), including obtaining all permits and approvals;
- DOT would seek to transfer the management of these sections, and possibly the ownership, through the Governor and Executive Council process, to DNCR;
- DOT would retain a permanent right of reversion for future rail/transportation use consistent with RSA 228:60-a; and

- DNCR-Bureau of Trails will be the point of contact for the Towns if they wish to pursue use of the railroad corridor for recreational purposes.

If the towns are in agreement, DNCR would seek a partner(s) to assist in the funding and filing of the STB discontinuance and abandonment documents. This process can take a year from when it starts, provided all paperwork is filed correctly the first time. Please contact DOT and DNCR staff at your earliest convenience to initiate the process.

Sincerely,



Shelley Winters  
Administrator, Bureau of Rail & Transit (NH DOT)



Christopher Gamache  
Chief, Bureau of Trails (NH DNCR)

cc: Executive Councilor Michael Cryans  
Phil Beaulieu (DOT-District 1)  
Clint Savage (Trails Bureau-District 1)