

Experts' Solution for Rail Service:

Throw B&M Out of County

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The state of New Hampshire has a bargain on its hands, but doesn't seem inclined to snap it up.

Unless the state acts soon to acquire one abandoned railroad line and another that it might already own, rail service to Cheshire County is doomed.

A four member panel of railroad experts assembled by the transportation committee of the Greater Keene Chamber of

Commerce agreed Wednesday night that there is enough potential rail-freight business in Cheshire County to support an efficient short-line railroad.

But they also agreed that unless the Boston & Maine Railroad is thrown out of the county and its lines taken over by state government, rail service in the county will end permanently in no more than five years.

The longer the B&M prevents the state from acquiring the

Cheshire, Ashuelot and Peterborough Branches, said Herbert E. Bixler, the closer area rail lines get to their death.

Bixler, a transportation consultant from Jaffrey, said he believes the state already owns the Ashuelot Branch, which ties Keene with the B&M main line at East Northfield, Mass.

That line is the only branch in the county which is still operated by the railroad, he said, and at its present rate of decay can remain in operation no more than five years.

If that branch is allowed to die, Bixler added, it could be impossible to resurrect rail service in the county.

Joining Bixler on the panel were Andrew Jennings of Trans-Action Associates, a rail consulting and operating firm; Keene City Attorney Charles H. Morang, and Vincent Murphy, general manager of the N.H. Shippers Cooperative.

An interested party to the rail discussion Wednesday night was Robert W. Nimke, president of

the Green Mountain Railroad in Vermont.

Nimke said his company would be happy to operate the Monadnock lines if the state bought the rails and leased them to Green Mountain.

Nimke agreed with Bixler that any short-line operator would have to control all traffic in and out of Keene to make the Monadnock lines profitable.

"There's not enough business there for two lines," he said.

If he could run trains on the Monadnock lines, Nimke said,

the most likely plan would be to cut the Ashuelot Branch at its southern end and route all traffic into Vermont via the Cheshire Branch line from Keene to Bellows Falls, Vt.

The B&M has offered to sell the Monadnock lines to the state, but only at a price Bixler considers outrageous.

Bixler said the state has always owned the right-of-way for the Ashuelot Branch, and its lease to the B&M expired in 1950. The value of the rail remaining on the branch, he said, is exactly

equal to the amount it would cost to remove it, indicating the state should merely "seize" the line.

The Cheshire and Peterborough Branches have already been abandoned by the B&M, and Biler said the state should be able to purchase them fairly cheaply.

Acquisition of the Monadnock lines should cost the state virtually nothing, he said, because income it would get from leasing the lines to a short-line operator

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