

To: Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, Maine State Legislature.  
Senator Ben Chipman, Chair; Representative Lynn Williams, Chair.

From: Richard H. Rudolph, Ph.D., Chairman, Rail Users' Network; Maine Rail  
Group Director.

Re: In Support of LD 406

Date: April 12,  
2023

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Dear Senator Ben Chipman and Representative Lynn Williams and other Members  
of the Committee.

My name is Richard Rudolph. I am a Portland resident who has served as the chair  
of Amtrak's National Customer Advisory Committee, and currently serve on the  
Maine Rail Group's Board of Directors and chair the Rail Users Network which  
represents long distance, commuter and transit rail riders all across America. I  
also serve on the "Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Committee."

I am here today to ask you to support LD406. The enactment of this bill will  
provide time to consider the use of these state owned rail assets that were  
purchased by Maine taxpayers in the late 1980's for possible future passenger and  
freight rail services.

I strongly believe that a feasibility study needs to be completed before any state  
rail line can be converted to recreational use. The passage of LD 406 is an  
essential first step. The passage of the Governor's bill LD 2124 during the last  
days of the 130th legislation session repealed a section of the 2003 State Railroad  
Preservation and Assistance Act that provided that state-owned track may not be  
dismantled or changed until the Department of Transportation, in consultation with  
other agencies, determines that "it will not have a negative impact on a region or  
on future economic opportunities for that region". As far as I can tell that  
provision has been completely ignored. The same consultant hired to do a  
propensity study to determine possible ridership between the major cities in central  
Maine and Portland was engaged to provide an economic analysis to determine  
the potential economic benefits for establishing a recreational trail on the state  
owned rail line. Unbelievably, the consultants maintained that the state would  
benefit more economically from bicyclists or walkers than from train riders.

The passage of LD2124 has given the Maine State Commissioner of Transportation the discretion to appoint who serves on these committees resulting in a deck stacked in favor of converting the inactive state-owned rail corridors for recreational trail use. There was only one rail advocate appointed to each of these committees. Although I personally raised a point of order at the first "Lower Road" RUAC meeting stating that there is no representation from either Bangor or Waterville, no action has been taken on this matter. These central Maine communities should ultimately have a voice regarding which of the two lines should be used to restore passenger service to their communities.

The passage of LD406 will enable MEDOT through a competitive bid process and with the advice of the advisory committee established under section 4 the ability to evaluate the reasonable potential uses, benefits and costs of restoring the state owned rail corridors. It will also study where railroad stations could be built and how this could drive new economic activity.

There seems to be a mad rush to tear up the state-owned railways and convert them into bicycle / walking paths without first analyzing how restoring these lines could enhance the mobility of citizens in central Maine and support new economic development for Maine businesses.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.  
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Portland, Maine