



April 12, 2023

Testimony in Opposition to LD 406, LD 860, LD 861, LD 880, LD 1170

Greetings distinguished members of the Committee on Transportation:

My name is Angela King, Advocacy Manager for the Bicycle Coalition of Maine (BCM). Our mission is to make Maine better and safer for bicycling and walking. On behalf of BCM, and aligned with the views of our more than 20,000 members and supporters, this testimony is submitted in OPPOSITION to LDs 406, 860, 861, 880 and 1170.

The BCM supports passenger rail as a transit solution where it is viable and cost-effective. We do not support spending money for feasibility studies on remote railroad lines that cannot sustain passenger rail. And we cannot support the MaineDOT planning to restore service on a line that was recently recommended for conversion into a trail.

The Coalition is largely agnostic on the notion of studying the feasibility of expanding passenger rail generally (LD 406, and LD 1170), as well as for rail links to Bangor (LD 860) or through Herman (LD 861). That said, we expect that these studies would only find that Maine cannot at this time support passenger rail. Passenger rail service decreased decades ago to the point where it was not feasible to keep trains running on most rail lines, and this has not changed according to current data. Amtrak Downeaster service continues to expand and has been a valuable transit option for southern coastal Maine.

The recent study done by the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) for their long-range transportation plan, Connect 2045, shows that the population growth in that area is not near the density to support passenger rail. If the most densely populated area in the state cannot support passenger rail, it is difficult to believe that regions beyond the Greater Portland area can.

Given this data, our opposition is based on concerns as to whether these feasibility dollars might be better spent on building actual transportation facilities. We also are concerned that these calls for more study or service restoration are really little

more than tactics to further delay the construction of trails on fallow railroad corridors.

Thus the BCM is strongly opposed to LD 880's call for the MaineDOT to plan to restore service between Portland and Auburn. This opposition would extend to any rail corridor between Portland and Bangor identified in LD 860 that is, or has been, the subject of a "Rail Use Advisory Council" (RUAC) process. While neither LD 860 nor LD 880 clearly identify which line is the focus of this feasibility study or "service development plan" immediately north of Portland, it is likely that both the Berlin Subdivision and the privately owned CSX line will be examined. Establishing passenger rail service on the CSX line would require complex negotiations with a private owner, leaving the Berlin Subdivision as the likely focus of these bills.

The Berlin Subdivision Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) concluded that the unused rail line between Portland and Lewiston-Auburn should be converted to an interim trail. The development of a service plan for this line will be used to slow down action on creating the trail that the majority of residents in the area would like to see built, and which the group dedicated to studying the issue recommended.

The BCM is supportive of any mode that reduces reliance on single occupant automobiles, and thus we in principle support rail. But we also believe that if there was a chance that the market economy could make a profit running trains in Maine, it would have happened already. We believe that if MaineDOT felt that the passenger rail was worth the huge public investment, it would have happened already. Conducting endless feasibility studies only postpones interim conversion of unused railroad corridors into trails, wastes money, thwarts the decision of legislatively-directed processes like the RUACs, and is simply bad policy.

Thus we recommend and request ONTP reports on LD 406, LD 860, LD 861, LD 880, and LD 1170.

Thank you for your time and service to the people of Maine.

Sincerely,

Angela King
Advocacy Manager
Bicycle Coalition of Maine