



PORTLAND
Regional Chamber
of Commerce

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**Testimony in Opposition to LD 860-An Act to Identify the Railroad Lines from Portland
to Bangor as a Major Corridor and to Fund a Feasibility Study**

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

April 12, 2023

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams and members of the Committee on Transportation,

My name is Eamonn Dundon, and I am the Director of Advocacy of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce, representing 1,300 businesses in our region that employ over 65,000 Mainers. I am submitting this testimony today to express our organization's opposition to LD 860.

Our organization highly values a frequent, reliable, and sustainable public transportation system. In fact, public transportation is one of our top three policy priorities. I spend much of my time in our region working with municipal, agency, and non-profit partners through the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) to advance this goal. However, we believe that the proposal before you today is a costly solution to an ill-defined problem that will weaken our existing transportation systems, while providing little material benefit to the vast majority of Mainers.

The Bangor Transit Propensity Study¹ completed by VHB for Maine DOT in January of this year, provides all the evidence we need to conclude that funding future studies of this corridor for rail is throwing good money after bad. The report demonstrated, through multiple methodologies, that in 2040, the highest projected demand for rail trips on this corridor comes out to 88,000 trips annually. Additionally, to achieve that ridership, the lowest-end cost to build out rail on the corridor would be \$628MM. Comparing that ridership to the Downeaster,

¹ [Bangor Transit Propensity Study](#)



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we see that at its' pre-pandemic height, the Downeaster transported nearly 575,000 riders in 2019. This means that to achieve the vision contemplated by this legislation, we would need to spend over \$600MM to achieve peak ridership that is just 15% of the Downeaster at its peak.

The folly of this proposal becomes more apparent if we consider the alternatives we could spend even a fraction of that contemplated cost on. For instance, you heard from urban bus providers just a few weeks ago about the benefits that would be realized with additional state operating subsidy of just \$6.8MM annually for those operators. You could provide that subsidy for decades at the cost of this rail proposal, benefiting operators like Greater Portland METRO, which had 2.1MM trips in 2019², 23 times that of this Portland to Bangor rail proposal.

Applicable to this bill and others before you today on the expansion of rail service, even in our densest areas, Maine does not even approach the density per acre needed to support future investments in heavy rail expansions. According to most research, in order to support heavy rail investments areas need a density of at least 11,500 people per square kilometer, while Portland, the densest municipality on our state averages about 1,200 people per square kilometer.

We thank you for your time and commitment to all Mainers. We ask that this committee vote Ought Not to Pass on this important legislation.

² [METRO Ridership Topped 2.1 Million in 2019](#)