

## Trail Bond Testimony

April 26, 2023

To: Honorable Chairs and Members of the Maine Appropriations Committee

From: John T. Sutton (Jack)

Subject: Amend LD 1156 to exempt key railroad corridors from trail conversion funding.

My name is Jack Sutton from Belgrade, Maine. I am past-president and a current board member of MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group). I respectfully urge that the trail bond proposal be amended to exclude bond funding for conversion to trails of the four key state-owned railroad corridors listed below, with some of the reasons to maintain or return each corridor for active railroad use.

### Angus King's Vision - 25 years later

U.S. Senator Angus King, some 25 years ago published his Transportation Policy for Maine as candidate for Maine Governor. It includes this:

*“Rail Maine. While Maine ports have reaped the rewards of investment, Maine’s railroads have realized the disappointments of disinvestment. I plan to develop a rail strategy that at first secures from loss the current rail network, then builds through public-private investment the capacity of that network to deliver top-quality freight service. On a longer-term basis, I hope to develop the passenger rail option by building upon the Boston to Portland Amtrak service, assuming the service proves to be cost effective. We should also test the use of self-propelled passenger cars for handling commuters from Portland to Augusta, Rockland and Lewiston-Auburn.”*

### **Save Railroad Corridors for Rail!**

Then Gubernatorial Candidate King’s vision for passenger rail service was realized with the advent of the Downeaster Boston – Portland Amtrak train and by its later extension to Brunswick. We regret the loss of the Calais and Madison Branches where foreseeable business was not enough to sustain rail operations. Now, it’s urged that certain key state-owned segments of Maine’s railroad corridors be preserved for rail by exempting them from trail funding under the proposed State trail fund bond. Once railroad infrastructure is removed and corridors are converted to trails, national examples and political logic suggest they will not be returned to rail use in the foreseeable future – however well-intended now. These are the corridors of concern and some of the reasons to exclude each from conversion to trail:

- **Brunswick-Augusta (Lower Road)**
  - Only feasible route to extend Downeaster through Maine State Capitol;
  - Passenger rail feasibility study requested;
  - Economic development;
  - Tourism;
- **Portland–Danville Jct. (Ex-St. Lawrence & Atlantic segment)**
  - Access to Portland seaport;
  - Links to Lewiston-Auburn westward and to Lower Road;

- Avoidance of passenger traffic on CSX line between L-A and Portland;
- Economic development;
- Tourism;
- **Westbrook-Fryeburg (Mountain Division)**
  - The Mountain Division served for many years as a rail link between Portland and Lake Ontario. Interests by New Hampshire and Vermont should be sought and respected before Maine unilaterally destroys its segment of the Mountain Division corridor by conversion to trail.
  - Decisions based on conversion vs. restoration costs may mislead, because economic and tourist development potentials are undervalued or overlooked;
  - The Mountain Division runs through some of the most scenic and attractive regions of northern New England. From the Atlantic Ocean at Portland and as Conway Scenic Railroad in New Hampshire the Mountain Division connects through St. Johnsbury, VT with active railroad through Vermont's Connecticut River valley to White River Junction (WRJ), VT. Portland and WRJ are active Amtrak-served stations, suggesting an Amtrak-connected tourist route between Portland and WRJ, served by local hotels, stop-over attractions, accommodations and transit. National tourism to the region can be attracted through Amtrak, state DOT's, tourism authorities and local transit interests. Environmental goals suggest broadening and building on Maine DOT's earlier concept of visiting Maine without personal cars.
  - Potential on-line freight business exists with return of suitable service.
- **Rockland Branch –(Brunswick-Rockland)**
  - Increased freight business is now realized for Dragon Cement Co. and others;
  - Midcoast (Finger Lakes Railway) now proposes passenger service between Brunswick with self-powered rail coaches.
  - Watch this development as a model for other uses of self-powered coaches in Maine.
- **General**
  - Broaden Maine's connection to the national railroad system
  - Keep existing railroad infrastructure in place pending technical and economical reviews of its viability to upgrade for future railroad purposes;
  - Trails are acceptable in parallel with railroads where recognized standards for safe separation, maintenance and costs are designed and practiced.
  - Extend Maine's successful working relationships with NNEPRA, Amtrak and others in operating and administering Downeaster passenger operations between Brunswick, Portland and Boston.

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