



Testimony in Support of LD 1156 An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development and Maintenance of Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Active Transportation

Kristine Keeney, Northern New England Manager, East Coast Greenway Alliance
Public Hearing: April 27, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, I am Kristine Keeney, from Greenwood, Maine, and the Northern New England Manager of the East Coast Greenway Alliance. I am testifying on behalf of the Alliance's 3,000 members and as a member of the Maine Trails Coalition Leadership Team to urge you to support LD 1156.

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The East Coast Greenway Alliance leads the development of a connected biking and walking route, 3,000 miles from Calais, Maine to Key West, Florida. The Greenway is designed to transform the communities it connects through healthy lifestyles, safe and sustainable transportation, community engagement, climate resilience, and tourism & economic development. The Greenway offers a safe place for bicyclists, walkers, runners, and more — of all ages and abilities — to commute, exercise, and visit new places.

During the difficult days of the pandemic, the Greenway and other trails were and continue to be sanctuaries of sanity and havens of health for Mainers, with usage of the multi-use Back Cove Trail in Portland tripling and the Loon Echo Land Trust recording a 40% growth in trail use on their property in Bridgton. Not only has use significantly increased in the last year, but trails and the outdoor recreation industry has long been key to the state's economy; generating \$3 billion annually, making up 3.6% of Maine's GDP, and ranking Maine as one of the top five states in the country in the value outdoor recreation adds to state GDP annually¹.

This industry is also an employment driver in Maine, accounting for 31,293 jobs, with manufacturing of outdoor recreation gear and equipment alone contributing \$348 million to Maine's economy in 2021, a 21% increase over 2020². Additional growth in the outdoor recreation (manufacturing, guiding, construction, trail building/maintenance, etc.) and tourism sectors is possible with trails attracting high-quality businesses, employees, and new residents—helping drive overall growth across all sectors of the Maine economy and increasing state revenue and local tax bases.

The Alliance is a strong supporter of LD 1156 for several reasons:

- 1) A meaningful investment in the development, construction, and maintenance of non-motorized, motorized, and multi-purpose trails will support Maine to become a top-tier trail and outdoor recreation state that contributes to our economy, environment, and quality of life. This investment will mean more jobs, and long-term sustainable economic growth for decades to come as supported by the statistics above.

¹ 2021 Bureau of Economic Analysis Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Department of Commerce, <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

² Ibid.



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- 2) Broad support from 3 out of 4 registered voters (74% total) saying they support a state bond to build and expand trails in Maine according to a statewide poll conducted by Critical Insights (2019). And 285 organizations, businesses, and municipalities have signed onto a support letter, including Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Maine Tourism Association, Maine Outdoor Brands, L.L. Bean, Kittery Trading Post, Sugarloaf Ski Area, Maine Snowmobile Association, sporting camps, dozens of conservation groups and land trusts from Downeast to the Western mountains, and municipalities like Calais, Caribou, Millinocket, Greenville, Rumford, and many more.
- 3) This funding would support the revitalization and diversification of economies, particularly in rural areas, that have long been dependent on natural resource extraction or other single industries as the basis of their economies.
- 4) Existing state, federal, and private funding is insufficient to fund the needed development and construction of long-planned trail projects that have significant public support in communities across the state.
- 5) Maine has a significant need among municipalities, non-profits, land trusts, ATV & snowmobile clubs, schools, and other trail managers to address the backlog of maintenance needs and build/upgrade trails that are accessible to individuals across a full range of abilities. Trail and land managers cannot “bake sale” their way to adequately build, maintain, and upgrade our outdoor recreation and active transportation facilities to be connected, safe, and ADA-accessible.
- 6) The economic impact from active transportation projects to the state and local communities will also be impactful. Based on a 2012 evaluation of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) found that sidewalks, bike lanes, and greenway projects created nearly 50% more jobs per million dollars spent, when compared with new highway construction, bridge replacement, road widening, and paving.
- 7) 54% of Maine’s greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation; active transportation can provide zero-emission travel options for Mainers, particularly along the major commuting corridors in the state. With the emergence of electric bicycles (e-bikes), bicycling is an even more viable transportation alternative for a wider range of people and trips. A statewide and regional multi-use trail network is complementary to expanding transit in Maine by providing critical first/last mile connections from where people live to transit, which will bolster ridership on existing core passenger service from Boston to Brunswick and increase the potential service area for future passenger rail expansion.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to support LD 1156 and vote for an “ought to pass” Committee Report and the Legislature to pass this bill and send it to the November ballot, so that the voters of Maine can decide whether to invest their money in the development, construction, and maintenance of active transportation and outdoor recreation infrastructure. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

