

Peter Hall
Falmouth
LD 209

I am speaking in support of LD 209, An Act to Authorize an Interim Use Trail on the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor. You will hear from many how this trail can stimulate economic activity, increase real estate value, provides safety for bicyclists and pedestrians to pursue healthy outdoor activity, repurpose a redundant and unused route, is far more cost effective than other options for its use and does not take away the State's rights to utilize this line for rail if it ever becomes economically viable. However I would like to address one aspect that may not be touched on by others and that is the concept of "Quality of Life." This phrase may seem fuzzy but is actually well researched and studied all over the world. And it is clear from multiple studies that access to open spaces, parks and trails such as the proposed Casco Bay Trail are an important contributor to wellbeing and quality of life by positively impacting mental, physical, and social well being as well.

Let me give just a bit of data from around the US to support this statement.

Trails located near where people live and work often are extremely popular. In Missoula County, Montana, 89 percent of residents had used city parks in the last year, 73 percent had used hiking trails, and 56 percent used paved commuter trails. Similar results of trail popularity were found in rural Nebraska and Iowa, where 74 percent of survey respondents said they used trails, and 68 percent believed trails had a positive impact on their communities.

Larger, urban areas such as Pinellas County, Florida (St. Petersburg) have identified walking and biking trails as a key transportation objective, as well as a way to not only hold down road and maintenance costs but is consistently cited by residents as a key reason to live there.

Trails and parks also can become part of a community's core identity. Bloomington, Indiana's Economic Development Corporation, for example, lists trails as the second most important quality for its city, right after its most famous asset: Indiana University.

Community safety is another important concern. Santa Cruz County, California, for example, promoted a new trail as a safe route to school, while also increasing recreation and public health.

Like the vast majority of us I chose to live in Maine because of its quality of life. And a big part of that is not only the character of its people we have here, but also the deep appreciation the vast majority of us have, whether conservative or liberal, for our open spaces and outdoor experiences.