

## Testimony RE: LD 209, **An Act to Authorize an Interim Use Trail on the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor**

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and Members of the Transportation Committee:

I write to encourage you to approve LD 209 and submit it to the full Legislature.

I believe in Active Transportation as a benefit for Maine residents and those who visit our state for recreation. Converting the otherwise-useless Berlin Subdivision Corridor to a trail will enhance active transportation for riders and walkers of all ages and abilities. It will be part of a larger network in the future, with links north, south, and west.

I am 81. I have been a cyclist (never a “biker”!) for 30 years or more. In the last few years I have had the pleasure of riding on many rail trails all over the Northeast, the Midwest, and as far south as Virginia. Some of have been only a few miles long. Others, like the mid-Cape Trail on Cape Cod are 30 miles or more. Still others, like the Great Allegheny Passage, was 150 miles long, so our tour group stopped overnight 4 times and boosted the local economies. Towns and cities, counties and states all across the country are establishing more and more rail trails, because they see the advantages of active transportation and are very happy for the benefits to their economies.

One of the great advantages of these trails is their relative flatness. Trains don’t like to climb steeply. When too much time in younger years spent on football fields, basketball courts, and ball diamonds finally caught up with my knees, riding on rail trails has helped me keep me on the bike and in good shape for the shape I’m in. Casual riders and walkers like flat.

Some train advocates oppose an interim trail because they want trains on every track in Maine, without regard to costs. I like trains. If this corridor were suitable for trains, I would support that. But it isn’t. It hasn’t been used since the bean factory closed down. Even then, there was only one train a week. Millions of dollars would be needed to put the track back in shape even for freight; passenger use would be much more demanding.

And after all that, there would be a track to nowhere. I’m sure you have seen the maps: the rail ends at the inlet to Back Cove. The swing bridge that used to carry it to the Peninsula would probably have to be replaced. Even if that happened, and tracks were restored around the base of the Eastern Prom, would the City of Portland want Commercial Street to be torn up again so that trains could get to – where? A depot on the waterfront – who will pay for that? Meanwhile, a track suitable for passenger trains runs from the Transportation Hub north to Lewiston/Auburn and north, if the economic obstacles to commuter rail can be overcome.

Finally, I ask you to consider the time and effort dozens of volunteers have spent over many years to bring this trail proposal this far. A few far-sighted folks built a network of volunteers in every town along the proposed trail. These folks in turn worked with their Town Councils to gather support. They took every step possible to convince the Department of Transportation to support this and other rail trail proposals. They connected with trail proponents in other areas to envision a loop of lined trails more than 80 miles long. They contributed more time and energy to the process the Legislature required MDOT to conduct to gauge citizen interest.

Several of these people realize they are old enough that they may not live to see the trail completed. Nevertheless, they have persevered because they are committed to a better future.

Please don’t let them down.

William Richards  
Yarmouth

# CASCO BAY TRAIL SYSTEM

MAP 1

