

Edward Suslovic  
Portland  
LD 209

Chairs and Members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Ed Suslovic and am a resident of Portland and urge your support of the proposed amendment to LD209 empowering the MDOT to create a multipurpose trail between Portland and Lewiston-Auburn.

I am a former legislator and Mayor and City Councilor. I am a Past President of the Greater Portland Council of Governments(GPCOG) and currently represent Portland on the Downeaster Station Committee. I also chaired the Portland Jetport Master Planning Committee and have been a member of the Greater Portland Transit District(METRO) for over 12 years and was President during the BREEZ Service expansion to Yarmouth, Freeport and Brunswick as well as the Husky Line expansion through Westbrook to Gorham. When I first joined the METRO Board there were only two member communities,Portland and Westbrook. Since then, Falmouth, Yarmouth, Freeport, and Brunswick have joined and Gorham will be the next town to officially become a member. METRO is on the move!

I am also a founding member of the Casco Bay Trail Alliance which is the only organization that I am speaking on behalf today. I listed some of my public service positions from the past 25 years to show that I have an extensive background in regional transportation planning and am morally agnostic. Planes, trains, automobiles, and trails ALL have a role to play in serving the residents and visitors to our region and state. Your role as stewards of our public resources is to determine the most appropriate AND cost effective solutions to our transportation challenges.

I urge you to support the proposed amendment to LD209 for the following reasons. First, demand for trails has exploded nationally as well as here in Maine even before the pandemic but especially over the past 3 years. People of all ages, abilities, and incomes want to be able to SAFELY walk, bike, ski, snowshoe rollerblade, etc. away from speeding cars on roads that frequently have no sidewalks or even shoulders. Trails are more than just recreation venues, they are critical links in our active transportation network and are used as commuting routes year round.

Second, the currently abandoned St Lawrence & Atlantic corridor is a public asset currently serving no public purpose. You might hear from some abutters who would like to keep it that way but trails have proven that they are good neighbors. Just ask any town officials from throughout Maine who have trails in their towns. They will tell you that there are very few complaints from landowners alongside trails except those abutters often want to gain access once the trails are built! A multi use trail on this corridor ensures that the public values this important public asset.

Finally, there is no other viable use for this corridor. Many studies have been done over the years analyzing the potential rail use of this corridor and they all come to the same conclusion as you have recently heard from MDOT. Current and future transit needs along this route are best served by bus as a far more cost effective and flexible solution. In the unlikely and far distant scenario where the population density has grown explosively to the point that passenger rail service makes sense, service could easily be accomplished on the lightly used CSX line between Portland, LA, Waterville, and Bangor or even Montreal just as the current Downeaster service operates on the Brunswick to Haverhill portion of the line to Boston. CSX has proven to be a very good partner for NNEPRA.

It is for these reasons that I urge you to join the majority of the RUAC that was established by MDOT per state law in supporting the proposed amendment to LD 209 that allows the Commissioner of MDOT to transform this moldering public asset into a high performing link in our regional transportation network.

Thank you for your time and service.