



May 18, 2023

**Testimony in Support of
LD 209 “An Act to Authorize an Interim Use Trail on the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor”**

Greetings Chairs Chipman and Williams, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. I am Jean Sideris, Executive Director for the Bicycle Coalition of Maine. On behalf of our more than 20,000 members and supporters, I am submitting testimony in support of LD 209 “An Act to Authorize an Interim Use Trail on the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor”.

The Bicycle Coalition of Maine supports this bill, which directs the MaineDOT to follow the recommendation of its legislatively formulated Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) Process outlined in Title 23, Chapter 3, §75. Rail Use Advisory Councils are formed to assess the various possible uses of fallow railroad corridors, including restoring rail or creating multi-use trails.

The RUAC working on the Berlin Subdivision conducted a thorough assessment of the unused rail line with input from stakeholders, towns along the corridor, and public input. Its final recommendation issued a majority report in favor of an interim trail. The BCM supports immediate action to begin conversion to an interim trail as the best and most beneficial use of this public resource. A 26.5 mile trail along this corridor would provide a safe, off-road option for recreation and transportation for many of Maine’s largest cities and towns. The conversion of rail corridors to interim trail use is generally the least expensive option available to the state with enormous public health and active transportation benefits. The creation of multi-use paths is a proven economic and tourism driver, as demonstrated by the Eastern Trail and Downeast Sunrise Trail.

Building these trails would not only create miles of new recreational opportunities, it is a vital connector in Maine for active transportation. It would allow thousands of people to be able to safely choose biking or walking as means of transportation and spur additional investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. In particular, the section from Portland to Yarmouth should be prioritized because, according to the study conducted for the RUAC, the rail conditions on the Portland end are especially challenging to convert to quality passenger rail and this section is likely to support the largest number of commuter and active transportation users.

We urge the committee to honor the RUAC process, and to support the majority finding of the Berlin Subdivision RUAC by issuing an Ought to Pass report. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 209.

Jean Sideris

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean Sideris".

Executive Director

