

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

Our names are Liz Blackwell-Moore and Alexis Guy and we are testifying to offer information on behalf of the Cumberland County Public Health Department (CCPHD) neither for nor against LD 209, LD 404, and LD 1450. Respectively, these bills would allow the Maine Department of Transportation to permit an interim bicycle and pedestrian trail on 26.5 miles of the inactive Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor, while preserving the corridor for future rail, allow the Mountain Division corridor to become a trail, and provide funding for the construction of this trail.

At CCPHD, we envision a Cumberland County where communities are thriving; residents, organizations, and local governments connect and invest in collaborative actions; and every person has an equitable opportunity to live a healthy life. Part of our work is to provide the latest public health research to decision makers as they work to create policies and practices that impact the health of the state, the county, our communities and ultimately, individuals. Last year, we completed a 4-year Cumberland County Community Health Improvement Plan that provides a vision for improving the health of people and communities in Cumberland County and reducing health inequities. The plan used an intensely collaborative process, resulting in prioritized strategies that address health at the individual and community level. Improving transportation access was identified as a key goal.

Lack of transportation was named as a barrier that disproportionately impacts those in certain communities, including rural populations, older adults, immigrants, and people with low-income. For people who cannot drive or cannot afford a vehicle, safe routes for alternative transportation are essential for accessing opportunities and services, including healthcare, employment, education, child care, and recreation. Shared use trails are important component of this, connecting people to cities, towns, businesses, and outdoor spaces. Accessing unused state corridors for rail trails is a means of developing such infrastructure while leveraging existing resources.

Rail trails, and the increased opportunities for walking, biking, and wheeling they offer, are also important tools for reducing the environmental impact of the transportation system and increasing levels of physical activity. Physical activity can reduce risk of chronic diseases including heart disease, Type 2 Diabetes, obesity, and some cancers, support management of chronic conditions, and prevent premature death.<sup>1</sup> The federal Center of Disease Control and Prevention states “access to safe places to play and walk, such as parks, safe streets, trails, and greenways... helps increase physical activity and can provide better places to live.”<sup>2</sup>

State policies and practices are valuable tools for advancing public health priorities, including health equity and transportation access. Thank you for considering the impact of trail corridors on these priorities identified by communities across Cumberland County and our state.

Sincerely,

Liz Blackwell-Moore, MPH  
Director

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Healthy Eating, Active Living Team Lead

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/about-physical-activity/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/community-strategies/activity-friendly-routes-to-everyday-destinations.html>