

Hank Walther
Rail Ventures / CVRTC
LD 404

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Silver Lake, NH
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Honorable members

I strongly urge you to not rip this rail line with the blind shortsightedness so many other rail trails have done!

Have you ever considered railbike tours? There are over 30 very profitable operations all over our great United States including 2 in New Hampshire and 2 already in your own state of Maine! I am in the process of starting my own railbike tour location right here in Silver Lake, NH and there are many sections along the Mountain Division that would benefit from such an operation and NO MONEY would need to be spent to utilize any part of the corridor for railbikes. There are at least 3 locations you could have railbike tours that would draw many tourists and tourist dollars in your area economy. Just do some research and look at the dollar numbers other railbike are generating!!

I am also a rail car hobbyist and personally bought a home in the area so I would have access to tracks both the Mountain Div in Maine and the few tracks we can ride here in Eastern NH.

The Mountain Division remains one of few places private railcar owners can ride our antique railcars, we have worked for years cooperatively with the State on clean up efforts and keeping the line open. Snowmobile, ATV, Bikes and walkers have THOUSANDS of miles of trail to use. While us tax paying and tourism dollar paying railcar owners only have 17 miles in New Hampshire and 28 miles in Maine. Our railcar groups, myself included come from out of state and when we visit with our machines to the ride the mountain division we buy rooms at your hotels, buy food in your restaurants and gas in your gas stations, all in these small towns. Bicycles do not bring in this revenue. People can ride bikes and walk at home. The now infamous "WoW trail" is a great example of the this failed economic pipe dream in Laconia I will personally testify even in the height of summer has no one on it in certain sections other than homeless and drug users. Tourists will not flock there to walk this. Us railcar users do because it is a unique and historic piece of railroad that we ride. It costs NOTHING to keep the rails, in Fryeburg and Westbrook the rail already coexists with the trail. There is NO reason to remove them, the rights of way are plenty wide enough to put a trail next to the tracks. You can easily make the few small bridges passable to both rail and bike traffic. We have been doing this without issue on the Wolfeboro line in New Hampshire for 30+ years. In fact we just did a TV segment on Channel 5 Boston about how successful this has been for all involved. Railcars aside, the mountain division serves as an important link for future railroad use. Railroads serve tax paying industry and a operator would not have to do much to get that line back inservice. In age of rising fuel costs and uncertain energy future we may certainly rue the day the legislature used such short term thinking that cost a viable corridor its economic and useful life. If the Covid pandemic showed quicker than anything its that economies based on tourism and retirees are quick to falter and fail. The mountain division should be kept for the very reason of helping spur economic development along that line and benefit the economic development for your citizens.