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To: Maine Legislature Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs
From: Maine Rail Transit Coalition, Tony Donovan, Managing Director
Date: May 25, 2023
Re: **In Support of LD 1957 General Fund Bond Issue to Invest in Maine's Railroad Infrastructure.**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Esteemed member of the Appropriations Committee

My name is Tony Donovan, I am a Portland resident and founding Member of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC). The Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC) lobbies for federal, state, and local policies that promote equitable funding of transit services for all. MRTC's vision is a comprehensive transit design connecting passenger rail service with local transit systems to promote economic and environmental sustainability.

The MRTC is here entirely in support of LD 1957 General Fund Bond Issue to Invest in Maine's Railroad Infrastructure.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about the best use of Maine-owned railroads. Rail advocacy organizations have submitted Bond bills every one of the last 4 or 5 sessions. Whether it was Bethel, or Bangor, Lewiston/Auburn, Westbrook or Portland, there were rail projects being discussed. We always were passed aside for road bonds.

This session you have heard a lot about Maine's Railroads. At least I hope you have. Between using them for train transportation and using them for recreational trails, I believe there may be 15 bills.

Certainly, this is a state policy and investment issue that is of great importance to local economies and return on investments to any state resources. This is Certainly not a time to be rushing into design and engineering for ripping railroads up.

Maine is at a great advantage right now in terms of transportation infrastructure investing. We expect the special purpose general fund bonding of \$400 million this session, matching \$1 billion in federal funding. Along with the previous \$500 million in federal pandemic subsidies for roads and bridges MeDOT does not need to Bond.

There is enough bonding capacity for funding alternatives, like trails. And, like rails. **In fact, if done right it can fund rails with trails.** Passenger train expansion projects that include funding and design for trails, have been done before in other locations around the nation. **These are Greenways;** Corridors for transportation using all modes possible, including passenger rail. Specifically, passenger rail. Rails with Trails projects are eligible for Federal Transit Administration Capital Infrastructure Grant funding (FTA CIG) funding.

The fastest growing business in Maine's economy is the services industry. The entire Portland working waterfront hosts thousands of new services jobs. Service businesses from schools to hospitals to high tech benefit town centers everywhere. People need to get to these places.

* Please consider the environment before printing this message.



Maine owns 125 miles of railroad infrastructure, in four transportation corridors connecting over 25 village centers on these corridors. Twenty-five locations where the service industry can locate, or provide housing, services, education and, yes, Recreation.

For example, a design for a Greenbelt between the Portland downtown waterfront 30 miles to Auburn connects the town centers of Falmouth and Yarmouth, the Downeaster at Yarmouth Junction, Cumberland, Pownal at Pineland, the Auburn-Lewiston municipal airport. A good design would also get you 6 miles into Lewiston, soon followed by the route north through Bethel to Montreal.

All for the want of a of a nail.

I want to make a proposal. Let's do both. Trails and Rails. Combining both bonds into one reasonable amount. Let's work together to make the nicest Greenbelt in the Northeast, and fund outdoor trails throughout the state. At least let us discuss this along with the debates concerning the best use of the state-owned railroads.

Our coalition of rail advocates recommends the Appropriations Committee carry this both LD 1957 and LD 1156 over to 2024 when a clear understanding, perhaps even a compromise, will bring the rails and trails folks to the table.

I think we can all agree that we need to address Climate Change. The future of Maine, much less the entire globe requires thinking big. The Governors Climate Council set big goals. This plan for a bond to fund alternative transportation can help achieve that goal.

MRTC Speaks entirely in support of LD 1857 General Fund Bond Issue to Invest in Maine's Railroad Infrastructure. We also respectfully request that this bill and the Trails Bond bill be carried over.

Anthony J. Donovan, Director
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Train Time