

Maine Joint Standing Committee on Transportation:

Please record my firm opposition to legislative initiatives LD 29, LD 30 and LD 511 as drafted. I am an economist by education, businessman by profession, and railroad executive by specialty, familiar with transportation regulatory requirements, infrastructure suitability, and operative governing policy in Oklahoma, New York, and more recently Maine.

I was instrumental in initiating (with Maine Department of Transportation in 2019) subsequent reactivation of the 57-mile Rockland Branch in 2023 under the auspices of Midcoast Railservice. It was a special-purpose subsidiary of New York-based Finger Lakes Railway, of which I am a founding director. The Maine initiative regrettably was sabotaged by the unexpected closure of dominant customer Dragon Products, which accounted for 92% of its most recent freight traffic.

The extraordinarily scenic rail corridor paralleling coastal highway US 1 was an engineering marvel of its time and has multi-use potential in whole or part – for trail, utility line, and prospective rail freight and/or passenger service. I can appreciate trail advocates' desire for more venues throughout the state for hiking and snowmobiling; however, they should realize that once rail infrastructure is removed, so is the opportunity for diversified public value beyond salvage proceeds (net of considerable removal, disposal and remediation costs).

Coexistence of rail and trail where feasible has proven successful in Augusta and Hallowell and merits consideration elsewhere. Safety fears are unreasonably overblown when branch-line freight operations typically are conducted over short distances at about 15 miles per hour, performed relatively infrequently by local train crews familiar with the situation, and operate only one or two weekly round trips. The railroad does not have to be viewed illogically as a danger or nuisance.

The economy of Maine must be based in part on hope – hope that reasons will emerge for broader use of its land area to make, move and distribute things to support and diversify its tenuous rural economy. In my view, the enactment of any of the three proposed railroad bills would represent an irrational stoop to special interests at the potential expense of the greater statewide community and economics. Once options are foreclosed and these lines become memories, they preclude a full range of vision to advance Maine's future.

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