

Sylvanus Doughty
Portland
LD 511

TRANSPORTATION RESOURCE FLEXIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE
In Opposition To LD 29, LD 30, and LD 211

Sylvanus Doughty, Portland, Maine
Original submission 18 May 2023
UPDATED and EXPANDED 04 March 2025

FUTURE VISION

There are finite locations for railroads - there are innumerable places for trails.

The language in LD 29, 30 and 511 only mentions “ remove state owned inactive existing railroad track “ along what amounts to 60 miles of rail lines. It does not define what ‘railroad track’ includes, what the estimated spending might be, and importantly, who pays for it. It does not allow for any economic cases to be made.

- It does not account for the substantial cost of the removed infrastructure originally purchased by the public.

- It does not account for cost of that track, ties and ballast removal.

- It does not account for cost of construction of trails.

- It does not account for cost of removal of trail beds to allow for restoration of track.

- In that context, we know that removal of rail would mean vastly increased costs, borne by the government, to rebuild rail infrastructure.* This note illustrates the method by which rebuilding on existing track and ballast is much less expensive than removing trail infrastructure and then constructing track from scratch.

it proposes all this spending to provide trails running largely through countryside, likely to see a low volume of users, and only to be used during 8 months of fair weather. Of course, large numbers of low volume recreational trails are already available. Numerous local trails all over the state already exist and are to be helped by the recently passed \$30 million bond issue. The Back Cove path around the entire cove in the middle of Portland has good seasonal usage, party attested to by the large number of vehicles adjacent to the path in the parking lot serving it.

Not all trails are the same. Twenty five years ago, the 6 mile Kennebec River Rail Trail was built adjacent to the Lower Road. It was funded in whole or in part by a grant from the federal government, obtained by the advocates who claimed that over 1,000 bicyclists would use the trail daily once built (it is in the original funding application).

This commenter, while living in Portland, for the past few years has had outside work in Gardiner and only travels there in good weather. In that time I decided to drive up its parallel road to see what kind of usage there is now, 25 years later. In the approximately 2 miles visible from the road, the results were anything from zero to six walkers. This is in the middle of a built up area of about 30 to 35,000 population. I recognize that this is only a snapshot but it certainly doesn't indicate a substantial usage after a quarter century. A similar density can be seen on the river trail in Brunswick as seen from the adjacent highway.

The split decisions (2023) in the RUAC Berlin Subdivision and these recommendations reflect the uncertainties that surround these proposals. It is not yet known whether society can continue to rely solely or substantially on individual units of movement (vehicles). The transition to electrification will require massive amounts of clean power and natural resources from throughout the world. It is currently problematic that it can be accomplished in the compressed time frames proposed or mandated.

Because of this uncertainty, the mandate to combat climate change, and the real increase in population in southern Maine, the ability to provide transportation in the future will likely require diverse options. Twenty year planning, as put forward by the

Transportation Department, should include a focus on being able to provide, or at the very least preserve the option for high volume transportation. Preserving these options was anticipated in the 1988 railroad preservation act. Public money was spent to acquire the railroad infrastructure and property on the Lower Road between Augusta and Brunswick, and other locations, for future railroad purposes, without the burden of trail infrastructure.

With the anticipated constrained availability of government funding going forward, low volume recreational uses should not be prioritized in transportation funding. In this context, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, all types of outdoor recreation, of which trails are only a small part, was estimated to make up 3.3 percent of Maine's economy in 2022 (Maine.gov website). Or at least those uses should be put in places ** that do not jeopardize the ready availability of rail infrastructure in the medium to long term. The above process should certainly be within the scope of a Twenty Year Plan.

In 1982, if I were asked if Amtrak would ever operate in Maine, I would have regarded that as irrational thinking. Yet, just less than twenty years later, Amtrak did just that.

The need for alternative transportation methods might come sooner than currently anticipated. And decision making, legal barriers, land use conflicts and construction inertia in the political and economic system slowing electrification may force transportation decisions different to those currently contemplated.

Keeping the above in mind, it should be pointed out for the record that the existing combined and in place rail network north and east of Portland and surrounded by a growing population base provides a route directly to within walking distance of the business district and waterfront of Portland, which continues to grow as a major commercial hub of southern Maine.

The upgraded Brunswick branch through Freeport connects with the Berlin Subdivision track from Auburn and Lewiston at Yarmouth Junction in Yarmouth, which then runs through Yarmouth, Cumberland and Falmouth. These lines combined form a Y shaped rail system. The RUAC summary did not recognize this linkage.

Thus, rail infrastructure running from both Brunswick and Lewiston, through Yarmouth, Cumberland and Falmouth to the city center and waterfront of Portland can serve economic growth in the Greater Portland area. Commuter trains *** could operate from both Brunswick and Lewiston through several villages, or further from Augusta and Rockland if future conditions demand, the lengths only limited by commute timing. The Berlin Sub track also passes near Pineland and adjacent to the now being constructed Roux Institute site in Portland. The RUAC summary did not recognize these linkages.

While not deemed a direct part of the corridor study, increased parking demand on the Portland peninsula is already problematic and without the ready possibility of alternative transportation will likely affect future development. The RUAC summary did not recognize this.

NOTES

*

<https://www.plasseramerican.com/en/machines-systems/track-renewal-and-track-laying/smd80> (the machine can run on existing rail and clean existing ballast)

** About potential uses for any proposed trail to include marathon races, there is already an alternative in southern Maine that could allow 26 mile marathon races, should those trail advocates entertain such use. The Eastern Trail from South Berwick to South Portland has substantial portions already in place and will, when completed, extend over 60 miles.

*** The notion, which is often claimed, that commuters between Portland and Lewiston-Auburn could use the CSX main track between those communities is problematic. Federal law requires freight railroads to allow Amtrak to operate over

their lines, thus the service from Portland to Boston was established under this mandate. It does not require that freight railroads allow any other passenger rail uses (except at any existing locations).

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.