

Frank O'Hara
Hallowell
LD 29

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, Members of the Transportation Committee

My name is Frank O'Hara. I am a resident of Hallowell. I am writing this letter in support of LD 29, "Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council."

Thirty years ago I was the head of the Friends of the Kennebec River Rail Trail, and worked hard to get funding to get the trail built. The trail was opposed strongly by a variety of people. But in the week after the trail opened, I bumped into a number of the opponents, and they smiled and waved to me as they rode by on their bicycles. This proposed extension will bring the same joy to people in Gardiner, Richmond, Bowdoinham, and Topsham.

The proposed extension is projected to cost \$34 million to build. As someone who struggled to raise the last few hundred thousand dollars for the Kennebec River Rail Trail, I know how tough a fundraising job that will be. But it is in the realm of the achievable. The alternative, a rail plus trail option, will cost around a half a billion dollars – including \$360 million to improve the tracks to accommodate passenger trains, and \$150 million to put a trail alongside, going over wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas. Realistically, it will never happen.

I urge you to approve LD 29 and allow the engineering and fundraising work to go forward.