

Joseph Leonard
Bangor
LD 29

Chairpersons and Members of the Transportation Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. I am a long-time advocate for passenger and freight rail in Maine, and I have dedicated my career to preserving and restoring our state-owned rail corridors. These corridors are not merely remnants of a bygone era—they are vital arteries for modern, multimodal transportation that supports economic growth, environmental sustainability, and community connectivity.

Currently, proposals to convert key segments of our rail network, such as the Lower Road corridor, into bicycle and pedestrian trails are gaining momentum. While providing recreational opportunities is important, the proposed conversion overlooks the critical role that rail transportation plays in reducing Maine's reliance on personal vehicles—a sector responsible for 50% of our carbon emissions. Expanding and enhancing our rail system can help lower these emissions significantly by providing a sustainable alternative to the car-dependent transportation model.

Moreover, investing in rail is far more cost-effective than following California's example of expanding highways—a strategy that has led to worsening traffic congestion and escalating infrastructure costs. Rail offers a proven, efficient means to move both people and goods across our state, and it is a cornerstone of a balanced, multimodal transportation system. Such a system, which integrates rail, road, and bus services, is essential for economic development, particularly in central and northern Maine, where enhanced connectivity can drive business growth and regional prosperity.

Across the globe, every civilized nation recognizes the value of a comprehensive transportation network that includes rail. Our state stands at a crossroads: we can either continue to invest in forward-thinking infrastructure that meets the needs of the 21st century, or we can sacrifice our future by dismantling a valuable asset for a short-term, niche solution. Transitioning these rail corridors to interim bicycle paths not only undermines our long-term economic interests but also risks severing vital links between northern Maine, Southern Maine, and the broader New England region.

I urge you to carefully consider the broader implications of this bill. Preserving our rail infrastructure is critical for reducing carbon emissions, supporting economic vitality, and ensuring that all Mainers have access to reliable, cost-effective transportation. Voting in favor of this bill would irreversibly harm the people of northern Maine and continue to disconnect us from Southern Maine and the rest of New England.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Joseph Leonard