

Joseph Leonard  
Bangor  
LD 30

Chairpersons and Committee Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today as a dedicated advocate for passenger and freight rail in Maine. I urge you to carefully consider the long-term economic and environmental implications of converting our state-owned rail corridors into bicycle and pedestrian trails.

First, I want to emphasize that the conversion proposal overlooks the critical role rail transportation plays in reducing our state's carbon footprint. Personal vehicles are responsible for approximately 50% of Maine's carbon emissions. In stark contrast, rail systems offer a much more sustainable and efficient transportation alternative. By investing in passenger and freight rail, we can reduce our dependence on personal vehicles, thereby mitigating environmental harm and contributing to our climate goals.

Moreover, the economic advantages of a robust rail network are clear. Rail transportation is sharply more cost-effective than continually expanding highways—a strategy currently employed in California that has led to increased traffic congestion and escalating maintenance costs. In Maine, our investment in rail infrastructure would not only create a cost-effective transportation option but also foster a more integrated, multimodal system. This system would provide citizens with flexible travel options—paralleling what is available in other civilized nations—and ultimately lead to a more vibrant, connected economy.

The benefits of such a multimodal system extend far beyond environmental and fiscal metrics. A revitalized rail network would stimulate economic activity, particularly in central and northern Maine, by improving access to markets and reducing transportation costs for local businesses. The development of efficient rail services can serve as a catalyst for growth in these regions, enhancing connectivity with Southern Maine and the broader New England area. The availability of reliable and efficient rail options can significantly improve quality of life by offering a safe, convenient, and modern transportation alternative for both personal and business travel.

In contrast, converting our historic rail corridors into bicycle paths would represent a shortsighted decision that restricts future transportation options. While bicycle and pedestrian trails serve an important role in community recreation and local mobility, they cannot replace the comprehensive benefits provided by rail systems. The irreversible loss of rail infrastructure would further isolate northern Maine from economic opportunities and disrupt the much-needed connectivity within our state.

I respectfully urge you to vote against this bill. Preserving and investing in our rail corridors is essential for ensuring that Maine remains competitive, sustainable, and united. Voting in favor of the proposed conversion 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 attention and commitment to Maine's future.

Joseph Leonard