

Mayor and Council Offices

Mark Dion

Mayor

February 28, 2025



Testimony of the City of Portland

In Support Of

LD 511 – Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council

Dear Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation:

On behalf of the City of Portland, I am submitting testimony in support of LD 511 at the direction of the Portland City Council’s Legislative-Nominating Committee. The City of Portland supports the Maine Department of Transportation’s effort, subject to available funding, resources, permitting and municipal agreements, to remove state-owned inactive existing railroad track along the section known as the Berlin Subdivision between the City of Portland and the City of Auburn and to replace the track with an interim bicycle and pedestrian trail surfaced with pavement or gravel or stone dust on the existing rail bed.

In 2021, the Portland City Council adopted Resolution 1-21/22 which expressed support for creating “a Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council to consider future use of the Casco Bay SLA Corridor as a multi-use ‘trail-until-rail’.”

I appreciate the extensive work done by the Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) in the intervening years to evaluate the opportunities and tradeoffs related to different trail and rail use cases. Portland concurs with the council’s majority opinion that an interim trail on the Saint Lawrence & Atlantic (SLR) corridor represents the highest and best use of this now abandoned rail corridor. An interim trail from Portland to Auburn will be a recreational amenity for residents and visitors that adds value to our communities. It will also function as a legitimate transportation corridor with connections to public transit, connecting trails, and employment centers. At a price tag we can afford, this is a realistic direction that sets us on a path to build usable transportation infrastructure in the short-term.

As we look forward to the opportunity of having a regional multi-use pathway on the SLR, we recognize this project does not foreclose the potential to expand passenger rail service in the

future. In fact, the Pan Am Railroad (PAR) corridor, not the SLR corridor, is the stronger candidate for future passenger rail service as demonstrated by MaineDOT's Lewiston-Auburn Passenger Rail Service Plan (2019) study. In the event future conditions justify the cost of new passenger rail service, the PAR corridor provides the best opportunity to maximize what will be a very large investment.

Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 511. Let's move forward on a transportation amenity that has a fair chance of securing funding and getting built within a few years.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Dion", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Dion
Mayor
City of Portland, Maine