

Michael Ramsey
Scarborough
LD 676

Good day to all whom may read my testimony towards LD 676

I am Michael Ramsey, a resident of Scarborough in Cumberland County Maine.

I am writing to oppose the outright removal of the rail infrastructure along Maine's section of the Maine Central Railroad Mountain Division.

I am a railfan and a descendent of many Maine Central Railroad employees.

I am aware that not all will be versed in the Mountain Division and railroading but I will do my best to articulate.

The rail line dates back to the reconstruction period after the Civil War when the Portland and Ogdensburg railroad built the line but ended up leasing the Maine and New Hampshire section in 1888 to the Maine Central Railroad. The line has been used for freight, passengers, supply and troop trains in both world wars and more.

The Mountain Division is historic and should be treated as such, it has earned its preservation and restoration to service for the people of Maine and all who wish to visit and see what our great state can offer for a visit or a lifetime.

It is my hope and recommendation that the state of Maine and MDOT will offer Conway Scenic Railroad of North Conway New Hampshire a fair deal to lease the Maine section of the Mountain division as Conway Scenic Railroad has been very passionate about vocalizing for and committed to preserving and rebuilding the Maine section as they have done with the section they lease from the state of New Hampshire and as what the Vermont Railway System is currently doing with reactivating the Vermont and northern New Hampshire sections of the Mountain division.

I have walked the Mountain Division trail beside the rail bed, and I believe that Both can co-exist and benefit from one another.

This would be achieved by allowing the Conway Scenic to lease the division and rebuild the line as well as stipulating that they would build some halts along the route (especially at parking lots for the trail) to offer rides to and from their vehicles if they tire or fear heat exhaustion for a nominal sum or flat rate. Another benefit would be having special water tanks and passenger cars on standby in case any brush or wildfires happen and using the line to assist the Fire departments with combating such cases. (Tank cars would have pumps to take water on from bodies of water and to supply Fire trucks so running tanker trucks will not be as urgent as well as transporting fire crews and volunteers)

Here would be a neat idea perhaps, start a Mountain Division challenge as an event for charity or to fund preservation projects throughout the state where people start in Portland and the end is Standish for runners (25 miles) or a bike race to Fryeburg (or at aforementioned halts) 49.8 mile climb through the Maine woods and have the Conway Scenic provide a train back to Portland for participants. those who complete each first, second and third will have a brick with their name added to crosswalks edges along the route.

With regards to Portland and a potential terminus for the services. I think that would be best achieved if trackage rights can be negotiated with CSX when and if the new Amtrak station is built on St Johns Street. Conway can lease or acquire the building to use. (for now, Westbrook or Sebago Lake would most likely be the best options)

The current Portland Transit hub will be a good spot for a terminus for excursion trains as buses can shuttle cruise goers from port or anyone who wished to ride for that matter to the station for boat trains to go from Portland to the scenic mountains and stop off at places such as Fryeburg, Sebago Lake or any town or business that wishes to see increased tourism traffic. This also would be the same for ski trains in the winter as Conway Scenic has snow removal equipment.

A larger note I would make would be chartering the Conway Scenic during the Fryeburg Fair week to run dedicated trains from Portland to the Welcome center in Fryeburg where people could walk or be bussed to the fair cutting down in traffic, vehicle emissions, and potential incidents both vehicular or not would be a good thing for Maine all around.

Leaning onto the tourism factor once more in the US there is a growing movement for railroad preservation and operations like heritage programs. (Union Pacific and CSX have heritage programs) these heritage programs are where railroad companies have historic railroad equipment (usually steam or early diesel locomotives) run excursion trains on a route to show how things used to be for those who never witnessed firsthand. Some lines even have arrangements to have visiting locomotives as well as their own. there are even groups who are building new steam locomotives in 2025 to revive long scrapped classes from the 1950s.

Conway scenic has two steam locomotives, one operational and one undergoing assessment for restoration. Downeast Scenic is home to the Maine Central 470, this steam locomotive hauled the final steam powered train from Portland to Bangor and back. With the Mountain Division revitalized it would be a good route to hold galas and have visiting locomotives such as the 470 from Ellsworth and from around the country. It would bring revenue to the state and local communities as these galas and excursions are quite popular and a great PR tool for both Maine and Conway Scenic.

Outside of tourism related uses, the Mountain Division can be utilized for freight operations for new and returning customers helping to revitalize towns along the route. (evidenced by the return of customers for CSX when they upgraded trackage and services to areas who now see rail as a better method than trucking to ship)

Restoring freight operations on the Mountain Division via Conway Scenic also would potentially mean better and faster shipping to and from Maine businesses between other states and Canada. Conway Scenic would use any profits made to upgrade the Mountain division and rolling stock for the Mountain Division even further to raise the speed limits.

In conclusion of my testimony for LD 676,

your vote today could mean the start of revitalization of southwestern Maine businesses and economies or cosign it to mediocrity to languish away from what it once was when the Mountain Division was in its prime.

Let the Conway Scenic Railroad Keep the Maine Central Railroads spirit alive by allowing the Pine Tree Route to serve the Pine Tree State once again.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Michael Ramsey