

Daniel A. Hester
1539 Pequawket Trail
Hiram, Maine 04041
207-256-2449, danmore1972@gmail.com

April 1, 2025

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

I am writing this letter to express my strong support for the passage of LD 676, "An Act to Fund the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council."

I am a long time resident of Hiram, having grown up in our town since 1950, been away for education and other career pursuits, then returning to Hiram to raise a family and to work here for almost 40 years as a teacher of science and mathematics at the Sacopee Valley High School.

I live within sight of the Mountain Division RR, and I remember... as a child... welcoming visitors to Hiram when they arrived by train in the 1950s, and growing up with Maine Central RR freight traffic here until the last trains ran in 1983.

I have relatives across our nation, and my favorite means of travel is by Amtrak. I would be in support of restoring rail use on the Mountain Division if that was feasible. Since 1983, commercial rail traffic has not run on this rail line. The expense of restoring this RR cannot be justified by any opportunities of tourist rail traffic and/or rail freight needs. Multiple studies have shown no adequate economic justification to enable rail traffic here, and no future justification seems likely. However, if the rails are removed for the development of a public use trail, then MDOT is also committed to remove the trail and redevelop the RR, if that ever becomes economically feasible.

I strongly recommend the development of the Mountain Division Trail:

- During 2021-2022, I served as one of the town representatives on MDOT's Rail Use Advisory Council for the Mountain Division. After months of study and hearing of extensive testimony, we voted 11-to-1 in favor of removing the rails and developing an interim, multi-use, ten-foot-wide trail in the 31 miles of the Corridor from Windham to Fryeburg.
- Developing this trail will bring substantial economic development to all the communities along and near this rail-trail. This is a proven experience of places around the world. Leaving the rails in place will simply sustain a continuation of the last 40 years of aging deterioration.
- I am also a board member and/or officer of the Francis Small Heritage Land Trust, the Hiram Conservation Committee, the Saco River Corridor Commission and the Hiram Cultural Center. Most members of all these organizations strongly support development of this trail.
- In 2023 the strongly-supported passage of LD 404 enabled by law the recommendations of the RUAC to develop this 31 miles of the Mountain Division Trail.
- The passage of LD 676 will enable MDOT to spend federal grant funds for the development of this trail, which... when completed... will provide an active transportation route from Portland to NH.

I sincerely thank the committee for their work and strongly urge to vote "Ought to Pass."

Sincerely,

