

Good afternoon, my name is Laura Ward, I'm from Plainfield, NH, and I oppose LD 675 for the following reasons. I oppose this portion of the bill and the overall efforts to remove the rails on the Mountain Division line for a trail because it will prohibit economic growth for the state. For an area of the North Country, which has been known for high unemployment, we can't allow the rails to be torn up and used for a nature trail. The Conway Scenic Railroad wants to use the tracks for both freight and passenger excursions on the line. If the tracks are gone there will be no way that the Conway Scenic Railroad can move freight or passengers to western Maine forever, thus severing the region off from economic growth and prosperity. Other interested parties would like to move freight on these tracks and the Conway Scenic wants to provide this service. It's so much more than just a tourist train but will directly serve the local businesses whose only option for transportation is trucking. Aren't the highways crowded enough? By using rail service it would make sense and help businesses wanting to save money by having another environmentally friendly option of transportation accessible. Conway Scenic isn't supplying freight service but they and others would soon follow if the rail line exists. The Conway Scenic fixed the tracks to reinstitute service in the Crawford Notch on the Mountain Division in 1994. This line is in use now and Conway Scenic has included excursions during the winter. This does demonstrate that the railroad can be responsible for the upkeep of the tracks for the Mountain Division. Furthermore, currently there are parts of the rail that already have trails on the lines. In Fryeburg there are trails alongside the rail line. If freight and passenger rail ran next to each other this would mean that a nature trail and rail line could compliment and reap rewards for both industry, and exercise.

I would like to thank the committee members and urge them to vote, "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 676. "