

To whom it may concern,

Hello! I am writing to oppose LD 676, the proposed removal of the former “Mountain Division” stretch of railroad between Portland and N. Conway, N.H. First, I feel I should share a little bit about myself. My name is Sawyer Pedersen, and I am currently attending Penn State, majoring in Rail Transportation Engineering. While central Pennsylvania may seem like a million miles away from Mountain Division, this area is like home to me. I live and grew up in Nottingham, New Hampshire. In my childhood, I took probably hundreds of trips to both ends of these tracks. As evident by my major, I hope to dedicate my life to the railroad industry. I want to see a future of strengthening America’s rail network, hand in hand with growing the national economy. I strongly feel that railroads as a whole are underutilized in this country, and this is confirmed each time I drive to or from school and see the sheer number of trucks on the highways, all of which could be replaced by a handful of trains. I love my home of New England, and to be able to see expansion and revival of railroads in this region would be incredible for me, as that is exactly what I plan to make my life’s work be.

I can recall many times when I was younger, driving with my dad next to these tracks. He would look over and tell me how he is surprised that the tracks weren’t used anymore, and how he, even as someone not interested in trains at all, felt it would be a smart line to return rail service to. The obvious example of this is passenger service in the form of tourism. Conway Scenic Railroad recently announced a partnership with cruise lines that dock in Portland, which seemed to my dad and I the first hint of the possible resurgence of the line. The program takes ship passengers to North Conway via bus, to then explore the town and take a train ride. Reactivating this line would make that journey much more enjoyable for passengers, as well as allow the railroad and cruise lines to benefit directly, skipping the middleman of the bus. However, this isn’t the only opportunity for passenger success. North Conway, and the surrounding areas such as the rail-served Attitash Mountain, are known for their skiing. CSRR already runs ski train shuttles between North Conway and Attitash, but returning service to the Mountain Division could expand this service greatly. This was an idea envisioned both by the B&M Railroad and my father, independently. A day trip via train to ski in the White Mountains without the hassle of driving would be a great attraction for Portland residents and vacationers alike. Not a skier myself, I can only imagine the drive home can be rough after an exhausting day

on the slopes, and the train would allow that to be a non-issue. There are other tourist attractions that the line could bring passengers to, the biggest of which being Sebago Lake. The tracks skirt right along its south shores, making the perfect spot for a station area. Even just scenic rides, as is the premise of Conway Scenic, would be perfect for this entire route. One final passenger benefit is for commuter service. While this line is more suited for the aforementioned tourist business, there is the potential for those who live in Westbrook, Gorham, or other further out areas to use the line to commute into Portland for work, which would ease road congestion and help the environment by reducing emissions.

Freight also has potential on this line. Very recently, Vermont Rail System announced intentions to restore the other end of the Mountain Division from St. Johnsbury, V.T. to Whitefield, N.H., following their acquisition of the New Hampshire Central Railroad. This would allow their line to have direct connection to the rest of their system, rather than relying on sending traffic to Montreal via SLR and back down to Newport, V.T. on CP. If the eastern half of the Mountain Division saw restoration, the story would be exceedingly bigger, and not just in the railroad community. It would connect Portland, Northern New Hampshire, and Vermont directly through rail, making shipping a dream. This alleviates the aforementioned international route, or the current alternative of bringing freight all the way to western Massachusetts before heading northward into Vermont. This cuts cost and shipping times drastically for any customers shipping between this region of New England, as well as keeps fuels the local economy as middleman railroads are no longer involved. Having this link would likely inspire more customers to switch to rail traffic, dramatically cutting down on truck traffic in this area, which can get congested, or require trucks to navigate dangerous and difficult backroads. I have heard rumblings over there already being interested customers who would ship via the railroad should it return, but being at college and away from home has kept me out of the loop on things of the sort so I am unsure of the validity of that. Returning this line would be a huge step towards strengthening New England's rail network, something that I am very passionate about and, as mentioned, hope to work on for my career.

One final thought I wish to mention is the alternative to this restoration. This track could be ripped up, the roadbed beautified, and turned into a long-distance rail trail for the public to enjoy. As a nature-lover myself (as well as trains, of course), I do enjoy rail trails. I feel that often overlooked is the possibility of a symbiotic relationship between the rails and the trails.

There are several examples across the country, such as the Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway and the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad to name a few local ones to me here at school, where the tracks are right next to the path, allowing for them to both exist. This is certainly an option in this case. I feel that making it into a trail-only is a loss for economic growth and strengthening of rail transportation, and the trail can co-exist with rail service, so I see no reason to forgo the restoration.

As is evident by my testimonial, I am very passionate about railroads. My dream has been to make a difference in the railroad industry in New England, and that is entirely what inspired me to get my degree in Rail Transportation Engineering, a one-of-a-kind degree in this country. Maybe I am a little biased and self-interested, because that dream would reach heights greater than I ever expected if this project is approved and I get the opportunity to work on its construction and/or operation after college. I truly believe that this rail line could be a major improvement for Northern New England, or even the region as a whole, so please make your decision carefully. I urge you not to pass LD 676.

Thank you.

Sawyer Pedersen