

Transportation Committee Hearing: LD 956 Testimony - Public Hearing 4/4/25

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

My name is Jenny Ward and I reside in Greenville, Maine and I am the Interim Director of the Maine Trails Coalition an organization founded in 2019 following a statewide gathering in October 2018, where public interest in connecting communities through trails was overwhelmingly evident. Since then, MTC has grown into a statewide voice for trails, fostering diverse collaborations to champion the establishment, use, and stewardship of Maine's trail networks.

We support LD 676 because:

- As a coalition organization, our vision is to support a statewide network of trails that connect communities and support economic development, tourism, active transportation, and public health. This legislation aligns directly with our mission, reinforcing the vital role trails play in Maine's future.
- In 2021, Maine DOT's Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) voted 11:1 for the conversion of 31 miles of existing railroad track to an interim trail-until-rail.
- In July of 2023, LD 404 codified into law the recommendations of the Rail Use Advisory Council. Over 200 people offered testimony in support of LD 404.
- This is an important next step to establish a means to capture and manage the vital funding for the continued planning and construction of the Mountain Division Trail.
- A recent study commissioned by the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development found that **access to outdoor recreation amenities is the top reason people choose to move to Maine**. With outdoor recreation contributing **\$3.4 billion to Maine's GDP**, this sector is a proven driver of economic growth. As demand for outdoor recreation continues to rise, it is essential that we invest in and expand these opportunities (supported by LD676)—not only to strengthen Maine's economy but also to enhance its reputation as a vibrant, healthy, and desirable place to live.

I thank committee members for their consideration and urge them to vote: **"Ought to Pass"**

Thank you.

Jenny Ward, Interim Director of Maine Trails Coalition