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LD 676

To whom it may concern

I am writing my own thoughts on the news that the MEC Mountain Division could be ripped up for another bike trail.

I strongly disagree with any plans to remove the rails between Fryburg and Sebago. These tracks have a lot of history and future potential, if they are removed then all of that is lost. Once a trail is in place it is very hard for any railroad to reopen the line even if the line is "Railbanked" for future use.

While currently there is no train traffic on the line, that does not mean that there is no potential for future train use. I am aware that Conway Scenic Railroad (CSRX) has interest in operating the line. This brings potential growth to the local tourism economy. It would also keep the line in operation for any future freight traffic as well.

I also want to make note of the somewhat recent purchase of the New Hampshire Central Railroad by the Vermont Rail System (VRS). The Vermont Rail System is already in the works of restoring the Western half of the Mountain Division between Whitefield, NH and St. Johnsbury, VT and is working to acquire customers and transloading facilities along the route. They already gained back a customer in Hazen and have been clearing the former yard in Whitefield for a transloading site. What's to say that in the future, freight service isn't a possibility as well? I went over the line in Google Maps and found two lumber companies along the line. Potential customers?

I know a small section of the line in Sebago Windham, ME was taken up but if there is need/want to reconnect the entire line in the future, laying a short section of rail is a lot easier than an entire railroad. Freight Rail takes a lot of trucks off the roads and helps to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions. While it may be a stretch, maybe even someday getting an Amtrak train from Boston or Portland running to Conway and beyond. But there will be no possibilities of anything happening if the rails are removed.

I am wondering why the rails would need to be removed at all to include a trail. Rails WITH trails work very well together. I can name a few places where rails and trails work great together. The Reading Blue Mountain & Northern in Jim Thorpe, PA has the Lehigh Gorge Trail that runs right next to the active railroad for many miles between Jim Thorpe and White Haven, PA. The Reading Northern's subsidiary railroad the Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway, has "Bike trains" Special trains where you can bring your bike along for the 25 mile trip to White Haven then bike back to Jim Thorpe on your bike. Having a rail with a trail next to it would work great for something like this on the Mountain Division.

Another Railroad that has the Rail WITH trail is the Western Maryland Scenic RR in Cumberland, WM. The Bicycle Rt. 50 "The Great Allegheny Passage" trail runs right next to the rails for all of the route. There are more around the United States that work just like these two examples and that could work great for the MEC Mountain Division.

Lastly, If none of the options above will work and a trail has to be put down on the right of way where the rails are, why not leave the rails in place and put the trail between them or right next to them. I am a member of the Cotton Valley Rail Trail Club in Wolfeboro, NH. We are a group of track motorcar owners and operators and with the Cotton Valley Rail Trail, we are able to operate our track motorcars along the 8 miles of line between Wolfeboro and Wakefield, NH. At the same time, the walking and biking trail runs right between the rails and along side wherever possible. This lets both walkers and bikers use an amazing trail but also lets us continue to operate the line as well. The members of CVRTC do a lot of trail maintenance to keep it open not only for the track cars but also for everyone else who enjoys using the trail. The

trail is owned by the State of New Hampshire and give permission to us to operate on the line. The MEC Mountain Division is also currently operated by us track car operators who get permission through MEDOT.

In conclusion, I feel that the MEC Mountain Division should not be removed. As Conway Scenic has already expressed interest in the line and the potential for future growth, removal of the rails is unnecessary and would hurt the future of the area. Getting the line operational again for scenic passenger trains would keep it operational for any freight opportunities as well. Rails with trails can and does work and should not be ruled out for this line. It is a scenic line that can serve both those who wish to ride a train and those who wish to ride a bike or walk.

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