



4/11/2023

1 | Page

To: Maine Legislature Transportation Committee

From: Maine Rail Transit Coalition
Tony Donovan, Director

Date: April 11, 2023

Re: In support of LD 406 An Act to Expand Passenger Rail Service
Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and members of the Transportation Committee,

My name is Tony Donovan, I am a Portland resident and founding Member of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC). The Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC) lobbies for federal, state and local policies that promote equitable funding of transit services for all. MRTC's vision is a comprehensive transit design connecting passenger rail service with local transit systems to promote economic and environmental sustainability.

The MRTC is here in support of LD 406 New title: Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation To Develop and Adopt a Rail Corridor Use Vision Plan for State of Maine-Owned Railroads

Maine faces increasing traffic congestion and the reality that affordable housing is often no longer near the workplace. Our climate – and our very way of life – is in danger – as we confront the reality of global warming without any practical plan to address it. Ambitious goals, even those set in statute, do not get us any closer to building a comprehensive transportation system that will quickly reduce our carbon footprint, create more livable downtowns, and allow all Mainers – including the elderly, those with limited mobility and limited means – to work, shop, recreate and live full and meaningful lives.

Several bills that will be heard by this committee propose to remove railroad tracks, which belong to the people of Maine, to allow construction of trails and bikeways. Before this Legislature allows any rails to be torn up, we need to consider the real and tangible benefits that rail transit – especially light rail, connecting with the familiar Amtrak trains like the Downeaster, can offer to our communities and our state.

Despite all the studies that have conducted previously, the state, and particularly the Department of Transportation, has never done this before for state-owned corridors. That's what we're asking this Legislature, to do. Rail advocates don't believe all parties have been invited the table. Today, you'll hear from the public and the business community about how rail service can not only strengthen downtowns – as it already has elsewhere in Maine – but solve vexing problems, including providing affordable housing not dependent on an ever-increasing supply of roads, parking, and congestion. Cities and states across the country are doing this, and there's abundant federal funding available.

4/11/2023

2 | Page



At least seven rail corridors of more than 400 miles were purchased in the 1980s for future train use through bond issues approved by the voters and two-thirds of the Legislature. Most have existing, usable tracks. These train corridors connect town and village centers throughout the state.

Four corridors are now front and center:

- The St. Lawrence & Atlantic / Berlin Subdivision, 30 miles from Portland to Auburn/Lewiston
- Lower Road, 40 miles from Brunswick to Augusta
- Mountain Division, 55 miles from Portland to Fryeburg
- Rockland Branch, 60 miles from Brunswick to Rockland

There are more than 25 town centers along these corridors. Community leaders, much less residents, often do not know a state-owned rail corridor connects their communities to others throughout the state. Do residents of Yarmouth Village know it could be 10 to 15 minutes by rail to downtown Portland? Or five minutes from Falmouth? We've heard about nice bike rides, but what about a nice, safe, comfortable all-weather interurban light rail connection?

The highest and best use, the use that's most equitable and provides economic benefits for the greatest number of people, must be our goal. Decision-makers in towns along the corridors, business owners and the state require good data to make informed decisions on these critical and valuable transportation assets.

By ignoring or delaying good answers to the potential value of rail service, the state creates the impression passenger train use will take too long. It takes political will and foresight to see that Maine needs transportation alternatives that get workers to their jobs, everyone on their way, and helps meet our climate goals far faster than a roads-only approach.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Anthony J. Donovan, Director
Maine Rail Transit Coalition
84 Middle St. Portland, Me. 04101
(207) 329-6732 Mobile
Mailto: MElikesRail@Gmail.com

Train Time

* Please consider the environment before printing this message.