

April 27, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Appropriation and Financial Affairs Committee.

My name is Patty Barber from Hiram, and I am testifying in opposition to LD 1156, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development, and Maintenance of Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Active Transportation.

I am opposed to LD 1156 because parts of it are not fiscally responsible. In order to support a bond, there must be a positive return on investment based on facts, not speculation.

As a prior President of the Hiram Snowmobile Club and with family that ATVs, I know that sleds and ATVs bring large amounts of money into the state coffers, and funding their trails are a good return on investment. Gas taxes, Registration fees, Excise taxes, business support in large dealer fees and repair costs, not to mention food, lodging and clothing. So I support putting money into these trails.

ATVs and snowmobiles use recreational trails. But recreational trails are not Active Transportation Trails. Active Transportation trails are by MDOT's own definition transportation byways, usually paved, that allow people to commute by non-motorized means. These byways specifically prohibit almost all motorized use- they NEVER allow ATV use. They SAY they will allow snowmobiles because they want the clubs to groom for them, but once the sleds' picks (or studded tracks) begin to destroy the paved surfaces, I am sure snowmobile use will be limited.

Unfortunately, and this will be a highly unpopular statement, Active Transportation corridors are not a good fiscal return on investment. According to MDOT's Active Transportation planner, these byways cost 1-2 million dollars a mile to build. There is no gas tax, no registration fees, no excise taxes, or large dealer or repair fees. There may be some lodging and food spending, but I have yet to see hard proof of the millions of dollars advocates say a local pedestrian corridor would bring in. And as for better physical and mental health, well we already have thousands of miles of trails available in Maine for this purpose, many of which could use some of these funds for upkeep.

Active Transportation corridors are under the purview of the Maine DOT by their definition, not under the Bureau of Parks and Land. Spending for Active Transportation should not be hidden within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, but need to be subject to oversight and transparency through the designated MDOT Department of Active Transportation.

Right now, we have serious issues facing Mainers that need to be addressed. Housing, healthcare, education, drug overdose prevention, and transit availability for those who don't or can't bike or walk long distances. We need to be responsible stewards of our tax dollars and target our spending on essential services, and those items which have a proven positive return on investment.

Terminology and costs specific for Active Transportation needs to be removed from LD 1156 language. As written, I am in opposition to this bond request.

Thank you,
Patty Barber Hiram