

LD 209 – May 18, 2023

Good afternoon: Senator Chipman, Representative Williams and members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Nancy Grant, I'm a resident of Portland and I support LD 209.

Rail trails provide an extraordinary resource for people to walk and bike safely to work, to school, to errands, between towns, to public transportation centers, etc. They are a safe option for Mainers of all ages, abilities and socio-economic levels. On Mothers' Day last weekend, I rode my bike on the Eastern Trail, a rail trail in South Portland. I saw small children on training wheels, senior Mainers in wheelchairs and people of every age in between enjoying that safe and peaceful trail.

Maine needs more separate and protected places to ride and walk. Too many Mainers are simply too afraid to walk or bike on our roads. They are afraid of motor vehicles that drive over the speed limit, that drive too close, that won't slow down as they pass and that are multi tasking in every conceivable way as they "share" the road. For too many people, especially young families and seniors, the fear of motor vehicles totally overshadows the joy and utility of riding a bike.

Let's transform some of our unused rail corridors into trails and provide a safe place for all!

As you know, without your approval, rail corridors cannot be used as rail trails. In the past, numerous bills were introduced here, trying to get that approval but the Transportation Committee has often voted against such authorization, always holding out for the possibility that rail would return. Meanwhile, those rail corridors remained unused. Finally, in 2022, you, the legislature, developed the Rail Use Advisory Council process so that we would have a structure for making these decisions once and for all.

The RUAC process for the Berlin Subdivision Corridor included a variety of stakeholders—one from each of the 8 towns along the corridor, one from each transportation mode and other transportation experts—and they studied the corridor for 9 months. Transportation consultants reported on a variety of topics—e.g., feasibility and economic impact studies--and when the Advisory Council got to vote, most voted for a trail use.

We've already spent \$700k studying this corridor. I sincerely doubt that other studies will tell us anything new. Meanwhile, this corridor has been out of service since 2015.

It's time for the legislature to comply with the process they created. The State—that's us--owns the Berlin corridor, so let's make use of it. Let's develop an interim trail on it that is safe and accessible to all. I urge you to follow the recommendation of the RUAC and vote to authorize the use of the Berlin Subdivision corridor as a rail trail today. Thank you.