

May 18 Testimony by Edward Hanscom of Gardiner to the Joint Transportation Committee against LD 209: An Act to Authorize an Interim Use Trail on the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor

Legislation over the years in Maine has consistently recognized that the highest and best use of railroad corridors is for rail transportation. They were designed and built to provide a uniquely efficient mode of transportation for people and goods, a purpose for which they continue to serve and will serve far into the future. The Maine Legislature has called on MaineDOT to preserve these lines for future rail use.

However, the removal of track from any rail corridor, as a practical matter, is the permanent destruction of the rail corridor. No Maine rail corridor converted to non-rail use in this way has ever been restored to rail service. The history of rail line preservation in Maine has shown that the only effective way to preserve lines for future rail use is to leave existing tracks in place.

The Berlin Subdivision rail line was built as part of a mainline (the Grand Trunk) to connect the Portland area to the Lewiston-Auburn, western Maine, northern New Hampshire, and on to Montreal, Canada. As such, it was built to a high standard of design and materials. The portion between Portland and Yarmouth is in a suburban setting, parallel with I-295 and US Route 1. The portion between Yarmouth and Auburn is in a rural area through North Yarmouth and New Gloucester. Together, they form a rail link between two of Maine's largest and densest urban areas --- Portland and Lewiston-Auburn.

MaineDOT's 2010 *I-295 Corridor Study* identified the suburban part of the Portland-to-Auburn rail line as a promising commuter rail corridor that could be part of a larger strategy to reduce vehicle-miles travelled and traffic congestion on I-295. Use of this corridor as a commuter rail corridor to Portland from Falmouth, Yarmouth, and beyond is the most effective option for reducing vehicle-miles travelled on I-295 north of Portland.

Conversion of this corridor to a trail will have negligible value for commuting and other everyday travel purposes. The distances involved are just too long. National statistics indicate that the average walk trip is well under a mile and the average bicycle trip is less than 3 miles. Biking or walking to work along this corridor is impractical for all but the most committed cyclists, and any trail that people are driving their cars and trucks to use is not doing anything to reduce vehicle-miles or fight climate change.

Instead of tearing up rail lines, we should look at our villages and built-up areas, where land use is dense enough to support short trips from home to village centers, schools, parks, and local businesses. These are the places where automobile travel can be converted to bicycle and pedestrian travel. Investments in sidewalks, bike lanes, and bicycle parking spots that make walking and biking safer and more convenient in these denser areas will help convert short-distance automobile trips to walking and biking trips. As we create more walkable and bikeable villages and built-up areas, they become the ideal origins and destinations for longer trips by rail (and bus) transportation that connects these areas, reducing longer-distance automobile trips as well.

Reject anti-transportation bills like LD 209.

Support pro-transportation bills like LD 860 and LD 406, which recognize the transportation value of Maine's rail corridors.