

LD 209 Testimony in Favor-- Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendation of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council

Good Afternoon Senator Chipman, Representative Williams and other members of this distinguished Joint Standing Committee on Transportation,

My name is Jon Kachmar and I am the Executive Director of the Eastern Trail located in Southern Maine. I am providing testimony on behalf of the Eastern Trail Alliance and the Eastern Trail Management District. I am here with strong support for LD 209 that would authorize a rail trail from Portland to Auburn—also known as the Casco Bay Trail—which would connect to the northern terminus of the Eastern Trail in Portland. The Eastern Trail, which currently offers 23 miles of off-road trail from South Portland to Kennebunk is built on the defunct Eastern Rail Line, as well as an additional 42 miles of on-road trail. The vision of the Eastern Trail is a 65-mile off-road alternative transportation and recreation corridor from South Portland to Kittery that would help complete the Florida to Maine East Coast Greenway.

LD 209 is a fair and reasonable approach to using rail corridors in a temporary capacity for alternative transportation and recreation until demand warrants active rail corridors. Like freight and passenger rail, trail corridors can have significant economic and social impacts at the local, regional and state levels. In 2021, we know that the off-road portion of the Eastern Trail had over 250,000 users and this increased closer to 300,000 in 2022. Additionally, this annual trail activity resulted in \$44.6M dollars of local investment in lodging, food, and other items such as bicycle equipment and related expenses, with \$12.5M from earnings and \$32.1M from sales.

The Maine Rail-Trail Plan 2020-2030 calls for continuing preservation and maintenance of a separate and active rail corridor for freight and passenger service that can be used to extend future rail from Boston and more populated communities in Southern Maine, and the Eastern Trail agrees that rail is important and critical to the state's future. However, we feel the best use of this long-underutilized corridor between Portland and Auburn is a rail trail that supports alternative forms of transportation other than trains or cars.

In addition to being good for the economy, trails provide alternative transportation options for work commuters, opportunities for recreation and healthy exercise that is free to access and available to all, and opportunities to connect communities to other open spaces such as municipal and nonprofit land trust properties along the trail. I have personally heard from many individuals who are eager to commute to work on their bikes or run the off-road trail between Portland and the communities to the south located along the Eastern Trail, and an increasing number of people are already commuting this way including myself.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 209. Thank you.