

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and Members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Emma Bond and I am a resident of Portland. I am here to testify in strong support of Rep. Bell's proposed amendment to LD 209, "Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendation of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council."

This bill amendment would authorize an interim rail trail on the unused rail corridor connecting Portland to Auburn, along the Berlin Subdivision Route. This trail would be transformative for my community in Portland. Based on the study area from the recent Rail Use Advisory Council, the trail would connect the Eastern Prom to East Deering and the new Roux Institute campus, as well as connecting Portland to Auburn in a 26.5 mile active transportation thoroughfare.¹

The Portland-to-Auburn interim trail is realistic, cost-effective, and would enable people to safely travel around the Portland area (and beyond) without a car. If approved for an interim trail use, MDOT has listed the Portland-to-Auburn trail as a first priority among rail-trails, based on criteria such as accessing "jobs, educations, business, recreation, and other destinations" and serving "first- and last-mile connections to other transportation modes."² Once approved, the project could also apply for federal funding. Indeed, the Casco Bay Trail Alliance is currently being considered for a Congressional earmark for a related part of the trail network in Freeport.

An interim trail is the best path forward for this corridor. Not only does it help solve the first and last mile connections to other public transportation (including, as MDOT has proposed,³ a new bus service connecting Portland and Lewiston), but it would not hinder the possibility of future passenger rail. As explained in the proposed bill amendment⁴, any non-rail use would be "considered interim in nature, because all such rail corridors must be preserved for future rail use as provided in the State Rail Preservation Act." Moreover, the proposed route runs parallel⁵ to the CSX rail line, which already has active passenger rail from Portland to Yarmouth, and could continue passenger rail service to Lewiston in the future.

MDOT has stated that it plans to proceed with a 2-year pilot commuter bus service between Portland and the Lewiston and Auburn area, which "is more flexible [than passenger rail] in terms of defining and revising workforce and equity needs" and "is climate friendly."⁶ An interim trail would perfectly complement this enhanced public transportation option.

Approving an interim trail would represent a critical step forward for active transportation in Maine. Please accept the proposed bill amendment and vote "ought to pass."

¹ MaineDOT. "Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor Study, Portland to Auburn, Maine," pg. 3 (2023) https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/docs/parac/2023/230208_Berlin-Sub%20Final%20Report_Final.pdf.

² MaineDOT, "Maine State Active Transportation Plan," pg. 60 (2023) <https://uploads.mainedotpima.com/61ce252e-3dec-4b84-974b-d43a957c812e.pdf>.

³ MaineDOT Memorandum Re: Lewiston and Auburn Passenger Rail Economic Evaluation (04/11/2023) https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/larailplan/_assets/docs/L-A%20Memo%20and%20Study%20April%202023.pdf.

⁴ Proposed Amendment to LD209, <https://cascobaytrail.org/proposed-amendment-to-ld209/>.

⁵ Casco Bay Trail Alliance, "Trains," <https://cascobaytrail.org/trains/>.

⁶ MaineDOT Memorandum Re: Lewiston and Auburn Passenger Rail Economic Evaluation (04/11/2023) https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/larailplan/_assets/docs/L-A%20Memo%20and%20Study%20April%202023.pdf.