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**TESTIMONY OF the SOUTHERN MAINE PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
to the Committee on Transportation**

**SPEAKING IN SUPPORT OF LD 404**

**Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of  
the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council**

**DATE OF HEARING: Thursday May 18<sup>th</sup> 2023**

**Honorable Senator Ben Chipman, Honorable Representative Lynne Williams, and  
Distinguished Members of the Committee on Transportation:**

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Schumacher, Executive Director of the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC), the regional planning organization for York, southern Oxford counties and also the town of Baldwin. I was also the Chairperson of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council.

I am here to speak in favor of LD 404. The process undertaken by the Council was open and inclusive, covering a 7-month period, including a public meeting with over 100 attendees, ultimately resulting in a strong recommendation by a vote of 11-1 in favor of a paved bike trail while preserving the corridor for future rail use as provided for in the State Rail Preservation Act. The implementation of this recommendation will result in a continuous 40-mile bike trail to an area of rural Maine that has seen little investment in such activities.

The factors for this recommendation are numerous but primarily include:

- The positive economic impact would include the creation of 240 jobs, \$12.2 million in labor income, \$14.6 million in value added gross regional product and over \$31.5 million in output/revenue.
- The cost of \$20 million for a paved trail is more affordable, as opposed to the much higher costs for rail use.
- There is already 4 miles of existing trail along the corridor in Fryeburg and 5 miles of trail in on the southern end, known as the Sebago to the Sea Trail.
- Snowmobile access will be permitted in the winter months.
- Personal and physical health benefits of a trail are key assets, bringing an opportunity for increased wellbeing and health to these rural communities.

Studies suggest, (including an SMPDC study conducted in 2022) that bike trails and outdoor recreation serve as economic drivers within a region. As the organization providing economic development and planning services for the towns along the corridor, we believe outdoor recreation has become a prime component of an achievable economic development strategy which encourages small business, creates

a brand and an identity for a region which may not have had one, and can also serve as lure for active recreation participants and younger residents. The town of Fryeburg has made the pursuit of outdoor recreation opportunities a focus of their economic development efforts.

All these factors will add vibrancy to the Saco River Valley economy and act as a catalyst for future growth. The addition of this bike trail can be a truly transformative event for the region and one we strongly support.