

May 18 Testimony by Edward Hanscom of Gardiner to the Joint Transportation against LD 1450: An Act to Fund the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council

You should have heard testimony on why to reject LD 404: Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council. Obviously, rejection of LD 404 would mean that funding proposed in LD 1450 should also be rejected. But what should be funded if transportation system improvement is really the goal? Here is an idea.

For a tiny fraction of what it would cost to rip up the Mountain Division and replace it with a trail, fund LD 860: An Act to Identify the Railroad Lines from Portland to Bangor as a Major Corridor and to Fund a Feasibility Study. This act would produce the first serious analysis of restoring passenger rail service between Portland and Bangor. Should it go through Lewiston to Waterville and Bangor, or should it go through Brunswick and Augusta to Waterville and Bangor, or both? What amount of ridership should we expect between these cities, and to points south of Portland, including Boston and beyond? What speed and frequency of passenger rail service would be appropriate? What would the trackwork, stations, rolling stock, and operations cost? What benefits would accrue from such a service in terms of reductions in vehicle-miles, reductions in greenhouse gases, increased tourism, and increased economic development? What are the phases of implementation that should be followed? A proper Portland-to-Bangor passenger rail feasibility study, as envisioned by LD 860, would answer these questions, and it would accomplish a necessary step to apply for federal funds set available for passenger rail expansion. Funding LD 860 could lead to sustainable transportation for the many. That's a much better outcome than bike rides for a select few.

Reject LD 1450.

Support LD 860.