

Doug Smith
Windham Resident for 20 years
LD 1450

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

I testify today in strong support of Senator Bennett's LD 1450 "An Act to fund the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council" and vote OUGHT TO PASS for LD 1450.

I have been a resident of South Windham for 20 years and live ½ a mile from the Mountain Division Trail. As the trail was built and paved, I came to use the trail more and more for walking, biking, and X-country skiing in the winter. From Spring until late Fall my wife and I are on the trail 3+ times a week. We are not alone. There are many other walkers, runners, cyclists, skateboarders, snowmobilers, and families with children, baby carriages, and dogs. It is a wonderful asset for Windham, Gorham, and the region. It has become a destination for safely exercising and seeing familiar faces.

I have ridden rail-trails in 6 states and 2 Canadian Provinces. My direct experience has taught me about the multiple uses and users of these trails. We encountered many locals and tourists recreating and people commuting to/from work on foot or bike.

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail is a prime example of the economic and health benefits of converting a rail corridor into a trail. Ironically, before it was called the Lamoille Valley Railroad (LVRR) this rail line was part of the Portland and Ogdensburg Railroad. The LVRR was the 93-mile section of this route traversing Vermont from St. Johnsbury to Swanton. Like the Mountain Division Rail, the LVRR ceased regular passenger in 1956 and freight service in the early 1970's. Vermont purchased the LVRR in 1973.

At 93-miles in length the LVRT trail until rail is 3x the length of the Mountain Division Trail (Standish to Fryeburg section). This spring the construction of the LVRT was completed. Like the existing paved portions of the Mountain Division Trail the LVRT is used for walking, jogging, hiking, cycling, snowmobiles, and other winter sports. Vermont is already experiencing business and tourism growth in the towns through which the LVRT passes in addition to offering safe, healthy recreation opportunities for Vermonters. In Maine, with the Mountain Division Rail Trail, we have the similar opportunity to revitalize and use another section of the Portland and Ogdensburg Railroad.

Importantly, one of the key success factors described in the 2022 Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Management Plan is the ongoing engagement of the towns along the trail. From Westbrook to Fryeburg each of the towns the Mountain Division Rail corridor passes through have submitted letters expressing full support for the construction of the Trail until Rail. This is a critical first step to make sure Maine realizes the return on the investment in the Mountain Division Rail Trail.

LD1450 provides funds for the construction of the trail connecting existing sections paved in Windham/Gorham/Standish and Fryeburg. I am totally in favor of having a paved, trail until rail for this 31-mile section as authorized by passage of LD404.

Frankly speaking, it makes sense for many reasons starting with:

- The tracks no longer serve a purpose. And, after being studied several times over the last 15 years by consultant's expert in transportation planning and analysis retained by the MaineDOT, show no prospects for being revitalized and economically viable in the foreseeable future.
- This is the most expedient way to build the trail and put this important Maine asset to good use.
- This is by far the least expensive way to build the trail. According to the Mountain Division RUAC Summary and Recommendations report (May, 2022) the cost of constructing a paved Trail until Rail is estimated at \$ 20.1 million and a rail with a trail was at estimated at \$ 145.8 million - over 7x the cost.

Please vote Ought to Pass for LD1450 so Mainers can utilize this dormant and precious resource.

Sincerely,
Doug Smith