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To: Maine Legislature Transportation Committee
From: Maine Rail Transit Coalition, Tony Donovan, Director 
Date: January 29, 2024
Re: Support of LD 1750

Senator Chipman, Representative Crafts, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation

My name is Tony Donovan, I am a Portland resident and founding Member of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC). The Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC) is an advocacy group engaged for the purpose of expanding passenger rail services as per the 1995 Maine State "Passenger Rail Service Act.", that established the Maine State rail authority NNEPRA "... to take all actions that are reasonably necessary to initiate, establish or reinstate regularly scheduled passenger rail service between points within this State and points within and outside this State."

The MRTC is here in support of **LD 1750 Directing the Department of Transportation to Consider Reasonable Rail Uses Before Recommending Interim Trail Use on State-Owned Rail Corridors**

We have reviewed the testimony by trail advocates in opposition. With the limited time given to address this I will only say that they are making incorrect comments. We hope to debate that later.

The fact is the Berlin Subdivision Rail Use Advisory Council voted to support rail with trail. That there was not a majority opinion for any of the options is reflected in the Commissioner not, as per legislative directive, not submitting legislation to build a trail. Interim or otherwise.

I believe he said something to the effect of having to look at this under the hood a little more.

LD 1750 does just that.

Like every previous consultant report initiated by this legislature in the previous 25 years, the Berlin RUAC report says passenger train service can operate on this line. That some consider the (inflated) estimate of the investment to be high is not an objective conclusion. Investments in transportation are relative. Few question the \$500 million in turnpike expansion and that is only 9 miles. We need to know more about the actual costs of rail.

The most important aspect of the RUAC process on this Berlin and all Maine railroads is that it initiated the interest of private railroad owner-operators in the use of these railroads. The Conway Scenic Railroad investing in the Mountain Division. The Fingerlakes and Midcoast rail considering the Rockland branch and discussion Brunswick to Augusta. Now we have this Delaware-based Ameristar Rail, taking a look at the Rockland Branch.

During the Berlin RUAC 2 proposals were put forth to use the line, one for an electric train demonstration from a firm in Pennsylvania, the other based on an earlier MeDOT plan for operating DMUs on this route. LD 1750 directs MeDOT to propose a service development plan for light rail passenger transit based on the findings of this RUAC process. As is recommended by the City of Portland,(attached), supported by the City of Auburn and voted in support of by half the members of that Berlin RUAC.

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This SDP will involve towns that might have a station location, it will allow consideration of the impacts of TOD around the stations in these towns generating local involvement with something that can be understood.

Yes, as in the RUAC report, the plan will include a trail. The Service Development Plan would include all modes of access connecting communities and neighborhoods to paces with train service.

And Yes, Maine DOT does have the funds for this. Maine has at least \$2 billion in new transportation money, from the Biden Administration Build Back Better Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). A law when passed directed the money to be used for alternatives and climate initiatives. MeDOT got \$200 million from the state's general fund on top of that. The DOT has the money for this study.

LD 1750 will move Maine into the 21st century of new ideas, progress in sustainable transportation, meeting the objectives of the Governor's Climate Council impacts of transportation on the climate and open opportunities for better, affordable access to housing, jobs health care and services. All while bringing benefits to communities on the route from Portland to L/A.

I understand that many of you hearing this have made up your minds. You know the Maine Department of Transportation is opposed, and that is good enough for you. Or you do believe the rhetoric of the BCM.

But we appeal to those of you here and the larger legislative body, and to the people of the state of Maine. Don't give up on these railroads. Take this one step toward an actual plan. A plan that will engage towns, attract private investors, and bring rail operators to the table.

Passing LD 1750 does no harm. It will delay the movement to rip up the tracks. A delay that is called for considering the value of these state assets. But it will also meet the wishes of the Berlin RUAC members that asked for rail and who represent the largest cities and a much larger population base along this corridor.

Support LD 1750. Direct MeDOT to hold their rail to trail planning and plan a true multi-modal use of this corridor, one of Maine's, and the planet's most valuable assets.

Thank you.

Tony Donovan

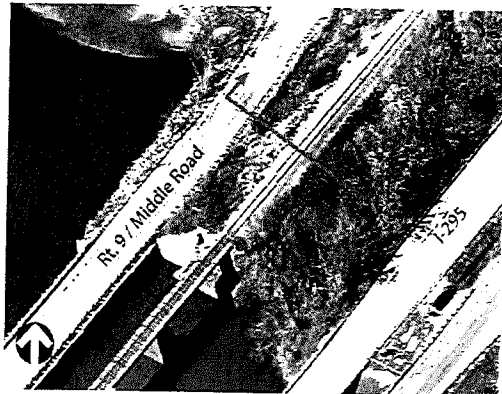
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Anthony J. Donovan, Director
Maine Rail Transit Coalition
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Mailto: MElikesRail@Gmail.com

Train Time

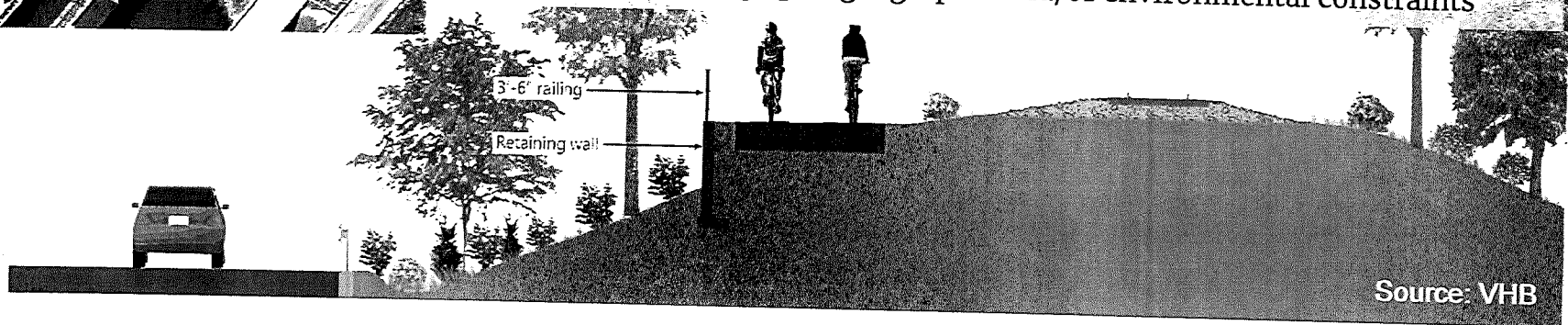
Portland

Staff Recommendation (if action desired)

Rail with Trail (Co-Location Option)



- Also recommend MaineDOT complete transit alternatives analysis for corridor (i.e. light rail, BRT, something else), terminating at Ocean Gateway
- Followed by design for transit and co-located trail uses
- Scope of design work to include abutters, stakeholders (i.e. Roux, etc.) to evaluate on and off-corridor segments for the trail, depending upon geographic and/or environmental constraints



City of Auburn Maine Resolve for SLA



RESOLVE 09-12192022

City Council Resolve

IN CITY COUNCIL

WHEREAS, the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Transportation, pursuant to Public Law 21, Chapter 239, established a Rail Use Advisory Council to facilitate discussion, gather information, and provide advice regarding the future use of the state-owned section of the St Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad Berlin Subdivision between Auburn and Portland; and

WHEREAS, the City of Auburn was provided a seat on said Council to provide input on city plans and policies relating to the future use of this rail corridor; and

WHEREAS, state of Maine acquired this corridor through two purchases, one in 2007 and another in 2010, as part of on-going planning for freight and passenger movements between the City of Portland and the City of Auburn; and

WHEREAS, the city has identified south Auburn as a growth area in its most recent Comprehensive Plan and multi-modal use of this corridor, including for active transportation, would increase its attractiveness for residential and commercial investment; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Auburn City Council supports a "rail with trail" recommendation from the Rail Use Advisory Council and the expedited movement of any necessary planning and design work to implement that recommendation between Maine's largest city, Portland, and the city of Auburn.

A TRUE COPY

ATTEST Susan Clements-Dallaire 1/3/23
Susan Clements-Dallaire, City Clerk Date

Source: City of Auburn

Auburn Resolve 09-12192022

Auburn City Council Resolved: 'support a "rail with trail"... and the expedited movement of any necessary planning and design work to implement that recommendation between Maine's largest City, Portland, and the City of Auburn.'

Passage on 12/19/22, 7-0

Unanimous passage.

ATRC Rail Support Letter

January 31, 2023 Letter to DOT

- ATRC Supports Rail with Trail
- Desires More Active Discussion on Future RUAC Planning



January 31, 2023

Bruce Van Natta, Commissioner
Maine Department of Transportation
10 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04433-0010

Dear Commissioner Van Natta,

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Lewiston-Auburn urbanized area, the Androscoggin Transportation Resource Center (ATRC), when considering the Rail Use Advisory Council's proposals, strongly supports the "Rail with Trail" option being advanced through the RUAC process.

We feel that the positive impacts of recreational trail use coupled with the potential future rail use, both freight and passenger, would conform with our overall transportation goals of improving access, safety, and reliability in our transportation system but also allow for continued economic growth within our MPO member communities as both residential and commercial growth continues to climb. Having the possibility of regional, national, and international rail access in the future keeps our communities relevant from a logistics standpoint.

Coupled with our support position, comes a request. We would respectfully request that ATRC be invited to participate in further RUAC planning and all future transportation related forecasting and feasibility studies that may impact our MPO communities (Lewiston, Auburn, Lisbon, Sabattus).

We appreciate your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Allen".

Larry Allen
Interim MPO Transportation Director
ATRC - AACC
125 Marley Road
Auburn, ME 04211

Source: ATRC

RUAC Member Vote Tally, 12/22/22

Interim Trail Until Rail: 7 Votes

(i.e. Track Removal)

- Dick Woodbury, Casco Bay Trail Alliance
- Angela King, Advocacy Manager, Bicycle Coalition of Maine
- Amy Kuhn *for* Hope Cahan, Town Councilor, Falmouth
- Diane Barnes, Town Manager, North Yarmouth
- Christopher Chop, Transportation Director, Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG)
- Scott Laflamme, Director of Economic Development, Yarmouth
- Nate Wildes, Executive Director, Live + Work in Maine

Rail with Trail: 5 Votes

(i.e. Trail Next to Track)

- Jonathan P. LaBonté, Transportation Systems Analyst, Auburn
- Tony Donovan, Maine Rail Transit Coalition
- Bill Shane, Chair, Town Manager, Cumberland
- Brian Harris, General Manager, Maine Yacht Center
- Jeremiah Bartlett, Transportation Systems Engineer, Portland

RUAC Member Vote Tally, 12/22/22 (cont.)

Rail Only: 1 Vote

(i.e. No Trail)

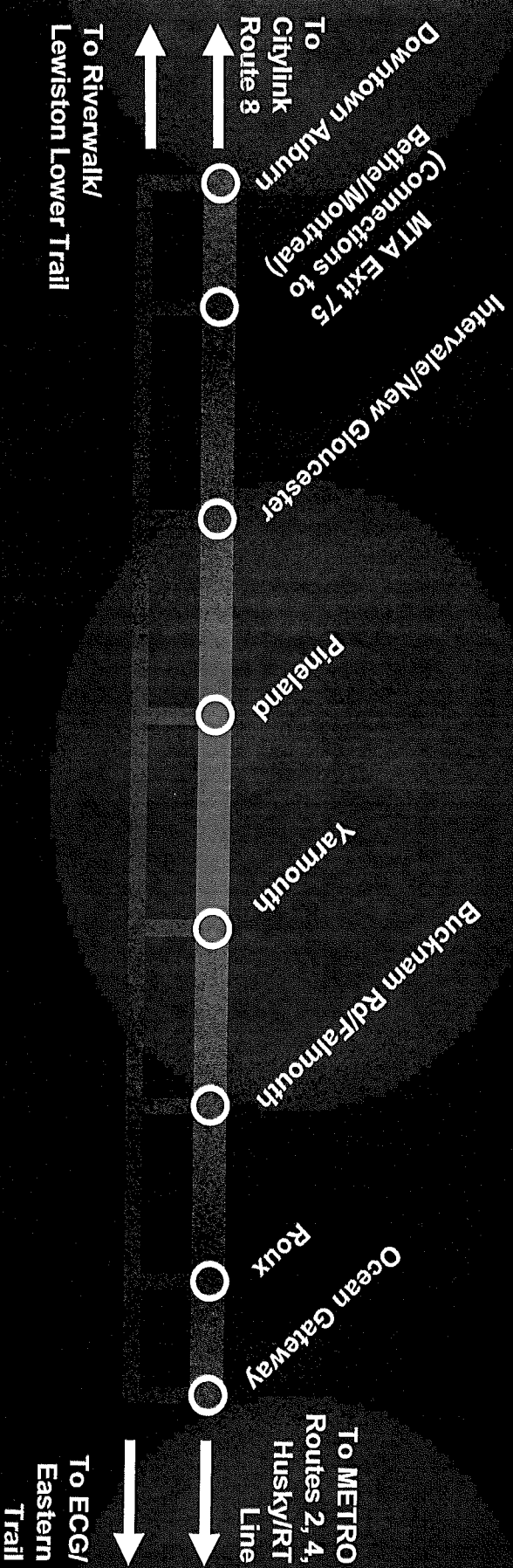
- Charles Hunter, AVP Government Affairs, G&W
(Genessee & Wyoming) RR Services, Inc.

Abstain from Voting: 2 Votes

(i.e. No Position)

- Natalie Thomsen, Town Planning,
New Gloucester
- Becky Taylor-Chase, Town Administrator,
Pownal

Thank You!



(Potential 'Grand Trunk Greenway/Transitway')

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THE RTC](#)[CRUZ511](#)**Streets & Highways****Highway 1 Corridor
Program****Highway 1
Environmental
Documents****Bus-on-Shoulder
Project****Soquel-Morrissey Aux
Lanes****41st Ave-Soquel
Ave/Dr Aux Lanes,
BOS & Chanticleer
Bike/Ped
Overcrossing****Bay/Porter to State
Park Dr Aux Lanes,
BOS & Mar Vista
Overcrossing****State Park Dr to
Freedom Blvd Aux
Lanes****Highway 17****Highway 9****Highway 1-17****Interchange Widening****Other Highways****Bicycle****Santa Cruz County Bicycle
Route Signage Program****Pedestrian****Rail****Right of Entry Requests****Preventative Maintenance****Operating Agreement****Passenger Rail****Rail Service Studies****Rail Line Purchase****Due Diligence****Trails****Monterey Bay Sanctuary
Scenic Trail****MBSST Master Plan****Final Environmental
Impact Report****North Coast Rail Trail****Zero Emission Passenger Rail & Trail Project****Project Overview**

The Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project proposes a new high-capacity passenger rail service and stations on approximately 22 miles of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (SCBRL) from the city of Santa Cruz in the north to Pajaro, just south of Watsonville. The project also proposes 12 miles of Coastal Rail Trail Segments 13-20 from Rio Del Mar Boulevard through the community of La Selva Beach and the City of Watsonville, as well as the Capitola Trestle reach (Segment 11, Phase 2).

The project aims to take advantage of the publicly owned rail right-of-way to provide passenger rail service to connect the most populated areas of Santa Cruz County to each other and to the greater region as well as to provide integrated intercity travel options for riders on the Central Coast. Passengers will be able to bypass Highway 1 and local arterials that are highly congested, providing high-quality connections to key destinations within the county.

In addition to the 22 miles of rail transit service, the new trail would nearly complete the 32-mile Coastal Rail Trail providing a dedicated bicycle/pedestrian travel facility that serves the proposed rail stations by developing 12 more miles of the trail that are not constructed or currently under development.

In October 2023, as the first task of the project, the RTC began work on the Project Concept Report. This report will define, evaluate, and develop a project rail and trail build concept that will be advanced into subsequent project tasks. Read the project's Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement [here](#).