

## LD 29 testimony

To the Joint Committee on Transportation:

My name is Edward Hanscom, a resident of Gardiner, Maine. I am testifying in opposition to LD 29. This bill would remove existing track on a state-owned rail line for interim use of the track bed as a trail. However, the affected line has foreseeable use as a rail corridor for passenger and freight transportation.

The state-owned line under threat by LD 29 is the so-called Lower Road, which provides the ONLY direct rail connection between Portland, Maine's largest city, and Augusta, Maine's capital city. A portion of the Lower Road is already in productive passenger and freight service with Downeaster passenger service and CSX freight service to Brunswick. From Brunswick, tracks extend north to Augusta (and beyond to Waterville) and east to Rockland via the active Rockland Branch, which is being studied by NNEPRA for future passenger service. Brunswick is home to the Downeaster's current terminus and is now the third busiest Downeaster passenger station, after Boston and Portland. Much of the growth in passenger traffic at Brunswick can be traced to passengers from points north and east using Brunswick as the place to board the Downeaster. Brunswick is also home to NNEPRA's Downeaster train layover facility, a convenient servicing point for passenger rail services extending east to Rockland and north to Augusta. With the growth of Downeaster users north and east of Brunswick and the presence of the layover facility, it's not a question of IF passenger rail reaches Augusta, it's WHEN passenger rail reaches Augusta. The Lower Road could also be a direct freight link to Augusta and a secondary freight route to Waterville.

However, passage of LD 29 could severely harm the prospect of modern, efficient, and sustainable rail transportation to Augusta. This is because LD 29 calls for the removal of the existing track and replacing it with pavement or stone dust. Why spend millions of dollars to remove track and millions more to install an interim trail? This type of trail installation would be wasteful in two ways: it would waste the money used to create an interim facility, and it would increase the cost of preparing the track for future rail use. And rail use is why the State of Maine acquired rail lines under the State Railroad Preservation Act of 1988.

Can tracks be preserved in a way that allows trails to be installed permanently? Yes. It's called RAIL WITH TRAIL. Trails can be installed to the side of the tracks in a way that would allow the railroad to operate and the trail to remain permanent. The Lower Road between Augusta and Gardiner serves as an example of RWT, where a 6-mile trail was installed beside the tracks to serve a populated area where sufficient demand for a trail existed. If trails are to be installed anywhere else along the Lower Road, this is the model that should be followed, with priority given to the transportation needs of villages along the route.

I thank the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to testify, and I urge the Committee members to vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS on LD 29. LD 29 would waste precious funds to remove track to install an interim trail and waste an opportunity to work toward a more modern, efficient, and sustainable transportation system.