



March 4, 2025

Testimony to the Maine Joint Standing Committee on Transportation on LD 29, Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council.

Thank you Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and esteemed Committee Members for providing this opportunity.

My name is Tamara Whitmore and I am a resident of Gardiner and the Director of Gardiner Main Street. I am writing in support of LD 29, creating the Merrymeeting Trail from Gardiner to Brunswick.

The Kennebec Rail Trail has been a true gift to the communities of Augusta, Hallowell, Farmingdale, and Gardiner. Within the past couple of years, the City of Gardiner and Maine DOT have extended the trail along the Cobbossee Stream in Gardiner's downtown, with the hopes to eventually connect community centers such as our schools and the Kennebec Valley Girls and Boys Club to the Downtown area.

While having a commuter rail line from Bangor to Brunswick would be an asset to our area as well, the economic viability of the project needs to be considered. Until the viability or other circumstances change, why not take the opportunity to focus on other forms of transportation; namely, those that are active, have less energy costs, attract visitors, and result in positive economic growth in the communities along the trail.

Gardiner Main Street has recently developed two Transformational Strategies to guide our work for the next 3-5 years. The first strategy is to increase the amount of people and the time they spend in our downtown. The second strategy is to encourage an active and healthy lifestyle, focusing on outdoor recreation and connection to nature. Both of these strategies would be supported by the creation of the Merrymeeting Rail Trail.

The development of a rail trail from Gardiner to Brunswick, effectively connecting the expanse from Augusta to Brunswick, would be a true game changer for our community. Even a fraction of the positive economic impact that the Eastern Trail in Southern Maine has brought to that area, estimated at \$44.6 million dollars, would go a long way in continuing the revitalization of our downtown, help us retain our current businesses, and attract new businesses to fill empty storefronts. The Gardiner Community is extremely excited by this opportunity.

Thank you for listening to my testimony and considering why this trail project is so important to the Gardiner; we hope you will vote "Ought to Pass".

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tamara Whitmore".

Tamara Whitmore, Executive Director, Gardiner Main Street