

Testimony Before the Joint Standing Committee on  
Transportation

In Support of LD 29

*Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the  
Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council*

March 4, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Committee, I am Ryan Gordon, a resident of Hallowell, speaking in support of LD 29, *Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council*.

I live in Hallowell about 300 yards from the Lower Road rail line. My wife and I both work in Augusta, and we both use the Kennebec River Rail Trail to commute by bicycle, 12-months of the year, because we only own one car. My 11-year-old daughter also uses the trail to get to school, visit friends, and exercise. The Rail Trail is an important and necessary transportation resource for us. During my commutes, I have got to know many other trail users, many of whom cannot drive cars because they are children, live with disabilities, or are poor or frugal like me. They also rely on this trail as critical infrastructure for their lives.

However, there is currently a half-mile gap in the trail through downtown Hallowell, which forces trail users into heavy traffic on Route 201, and is a major barrier especially for children like my daughter. Hallowell's recent Comprehensive Plan calls for completing the Rail Trail through town along the rail corridor, but redevelopment of the corridor through Hallowell is only possible if the Lower Road is approved for use as a trail on the railroad bed.

I followed along with the work of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council, and I support their recommendation to use the rail corridor for trails, because it would allow us to complete the trail through Hallowell. It is also the only affordable, realistic option for building the Merrymeeting Trail, which I also support because it would bring similar benefits to many other people.

While I like trains, passenger train service here is not a realistic option. It is just wasteful to wait many decades for train service that might never arrive, while the corridor sits unused and degrading. The Merrymeeting Trail and extensions to the Kennebec River Rail Trail could be built much more quickly and cheaply than restoring train service on this line. My community, family, and I would very much benefit if we could use this public space for non-motorized transport, and I'm looking forward to using it as soon as possible.

On the other hand, I simply don't need costly passenger train service. It won't help me get to work, to the grocery store, or around my community, but bike trails will. I already own one car for medium-length trips, and when I travel to Boston, I take the bus, which is faster and cheaper than the train. What I really need in the Kennebec valley is local active transportation, which in my opinion, is the future of clean transportation, local economies, and community design.

To conclude, the public support and much of the funding for these trail projects is ready for the passage of this resolve. Please allow us to use this public space now for people like my family and friends. Please vote ought to pass on LD 29. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and thank you for your work for Maine communities like mine.