

Testimony of
George Lapointe, Mayor, City of Hallowell
Before the Joint Committee on Transportation
4 February 2025

In support of LD 29, Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, I am George Lapointe, Mayor of the City of Hallowell, Maine. I am testifying today on behalf of Hallowell City Council in supporting LD 29, a resolve to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council.

As I testified two years ago at a DOT hearing on the Lower Road Rail corridor, the Kennebec River Rail Trail was controversial when it was developed in the 1990's. Now, the rail trail is very popular for Hallowell residents, business owners, students, seniors and elected officials. This is because the rail trail provides economic, social, and health benefits to our community, as well as Gardiner and Augusta. I use the current rail trail often and see many people enjoying the beauty of the area, getting exercise, and sharing time with family and friends. It provides a safe place for exercise and community for all.

The Kennebec River Rail Trail is also a ribbon of connection between the communities that forms a natural alliance between these Kennebec River cities. In Hallowell, we talk about the need for stronger connections between Hallowell and adjacent towns; the rail trail helps strengthen these connections. The proposed Merrymeeting Trail will provide even more economic, social and health benefits to this region, and to tourists and commercial businesses up and down the Kennebec River.

Rail trails are economic engines for a region; economic benefits which grow over time. My family lives in Missouri where the KATY Rail Trail goes from Kansas City to St. Charles, Missouri along the Missouri River. This 40 year old rail trail has become a catalyst for tourism development in the region with 440,000 users annually and an annual economic impact of \$18.5 million. I believe that similar benefits will happen here as well if LD 29 passes and allows development of the trail from Gardiner to Brunswick. The Merrymeeting Trail, with over 40 miles of trail, will help develop and strengthen the economy of the Kennebec River Corridor.

In closing, Hallowell City Council strongly supports passage of LD 29 and the future development of Merrymeeting Trail to benefit our region and its citizens.

Thank you for your service to the State of Maine. Please let me know if Committee members have any questions; I would be happy to address them.