



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Sally Cluchey

15 Brickyard Way
Bowdoinham, ME 04008
Phone: (207) 814-8879
Sally.Cluchey@legislature.maine.gov

March 4, 2025

**Testimony of Rep. Sally Cluchey in support of
*LD 29, Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the
Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council*
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation**

Good afternoon Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and esteemed members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Sally Cluchey and I proudly represent the communities of Bowdoinham, Bowdoin and Richmond.

I come before you today as a cosponsor and legislator representing the communities along the heart of the Lower Road corridor – communities that have worked tirelessly for many years to make the Merrymeeting Trail a reality.

These days, there is a lot that divides us, and less and less that connects us. For the towns of Brunswick, Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, and Gardiner, one thing that connects us in a very real sense is this long-unused rail corridor. This state-owned asset has not seen regular active train service for the better part of 40 years. Study after study has shown that the cost of restoring service is simply prohibitive. In the meantime, the corridor languishes on the taxpayer's dime.

If we went back 40 years and told residents of our communities that train service was not coming back on this line anytime soon, and we recommended they consider using the corridor as a trail, they would be wise to listen. The economic, health, social, and environmental benefits that would have accrued to our communities over that time are incalculable.

We can't go back in time, but we can look forward. The Rail Use Advisory Council process for the Lower Road was informed by reams of data, including the 2023 Bangor-to-Portland Rail Feasibility Study. This study found that there is neither the demand nor the potential for federal funding that would make restoring passenger service on this line realistic for at least several

decades. This confirmed what previous studies have consistently found, and it prompted the RUAC to recommend overwhelmingly that the corridor be repurposed as a trail on an interim basis.

I also want to note another reason I am supportive of the Merrymeeting Trail. One of my other roles is as director of Bowdoinham Community Connections, part of a statewide pilot to strengthen local support networks and improve access to essential resources. With Bowdoinham's aging population and growing service demands, many of our residents are isolated from the life of the community.

The Merrymeeting Trail will offer immediate benefits to our participants. It will provide easy walking access from the village and waterfront, the heart of Bowdoinham in all seasons and a place where generations intermingle. It will be good for our health and our pocketbooks, too. A study from the American Heart Association found that, "For every dollar invested in building trails, nearly three dollars in medical cost savings may be achieved." Spending time outside on trails also has proven mental health benefits, having been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and isolation.

Through my work with Bowdoinham Community Connections and in my role as State Representative for House District 52, I know that the Merrymeeting Trail is the right next step for our communities. It's the best use of a languishing public asset to the benefit of taxpayers, and it's an opportunity for real community connection at a time when we need that more than ever.

Thank you for considering this bill.