

LD 511 testimony

To the Joint Committee on Transportation:

My name is Edward Hanscom, a resident of Gardiner, Maine. I am testifying in opposition to LD 511. 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 rail line under threat by LD 511 is the Berlin Subdivision between Portland and Yarmouth and Auburn. Between Portland and Yarmouth, the rail corridor parallels the busy Interstate 295 highway and the slower Route 1 corridor. Between Yarmouth and Auburn, the Berlin Subdivision turns away from I-295 toward Auburn by way of New Gloucester. The Berlin Subdivision has the potential of serving as a more localized passenger rail corridor serving communities from Portland to Yarmouth and beyond. Use of this corridor for local and regional transportation would reduce traffic pressures on I-295 and parking pressures in Portland. Reducing these pressures reduces the temptation of expanding existing I-295 interchanges, arterial streets, and parking facilities at the price of reduced walkability in communities along the corridor. Between Yarmouth and Auburn, both passenger and freight potential for the rail corridor exist.

However, passage of LD 511 could severely harm the prospect of a modern, efficient, and sustainable rail corridor for local needs. This is because LD 511 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. In the overall corridor between Freeport and Portland, a multi-use trail is already being planned and developed alongside Route 1. Continuing to develop this trail along Route 1 in the corridor communities along I-295 will provide a permanent multi-use trail that serves the local needs and preserves this portion of the Berlin Subdivision for future rail use. For the portion between Yarmouth and Auburn, RAIL WITH TRAIL is better than the interim trail option.

I thank the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to testify, and I urge the Committee members to vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS on LD 511. LD 511 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.