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March 4, 2025

Testimony of Representative Art Bell, before the Transportation Committee

LD 511: Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Art Bell, and I represent House District #103, Yarmouth.

I believe LD 511 is an ideal public policy initiative. Re-envisioning abandoned State-owned assets and returning them to public use, while also encouraging healthy recreation and economic spending. A robust active transportation trail system statewide will support the Maine Climate Action Plan; the 2020-29 Maine Economic Development Strategy; and enhance the vibrancy of Maine's cities, quintessential villages, and rural areas.

Maine DOT's (Department of Transportation) "Active Transportation" plan states: "implementing this plan will improve pedestrian & bike safety, expand mobility, support economic development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance community vibrancy, quality of life and public health for Maine." ***LD 511 will address each of policy these goals.***

Public engagement was an important part of the Berlin Subdivision "Rail Use Advisory Council" process. Comments were solicited in a variety of channels between April 2022 and January 2023, including five virtual RUAC meetings, three in-person RUAC meetings, one public meeting and

through email comments, via direct email to MaineDOT and submissions through the MaineDOT website.

Over 700 public comments were received, and approximately 86% of the public comments received indicated support for a trail. This included comments specifying desire for "trail until rail" and/or support for the development of the Casco Bay Trail Loop and connection with the Eastern Trail.

Development of the Berlin Subdivision Rail corridor to trail usage was cited as having:

- A strong baseline of potential trail users based upon socio-economic metrics, area population density, and demand for walking & biking facilities.
- Potential for increased consumer activity by trail users could lead to \$3.5 to \$5.3 million annual spending.
- Presence of a recreation trail has the potential to show a positive fiscal impact to residential property values along the corridor; and
- Offering expanded recreational facilities will encourage more active lifestyles that can lead to reduced health care costs.

Over the past many years, my wife and I have biked rail trails across the country, and we can't wait to invite our many friends in the "bike tourism" world to join us here in Maine!

For all these reasons, I strongly support "OUGHT to PASS" for LD 511.