

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and honorable members of the Transportation Committee,

My name is Matt Gilley and I'm the program director for the Centers of Innovation at Thomas College in Waterville. As someone who experienced his first trip to Boston on the AMTRAK Downeaster this past summer and living in a community that's on the proposed expansion, I was compelled to be here today to speak in favor of LD 487.

Although critics would argue that times have changed and therefore passenger rail service has become a thing of the past, my experience working with young people in my hometown suggests to me that returning to rail makes all the sense in the world.

Many adults can reflect on their teenage years, anxiously waiting for the day when they are old enough to pursue their driver's license. I can remember the day I got mine and the parking spot I parked in. Fast forward a few years and I found myself working at Waterville Senior High School as a JMG specialist, in a classroom that overlooked the half empty parking lot, where just a handful of student cars sit. To my amazement, obtaining a driver's license was something most of my students avoided, citing the cost of driver's education and ultimately needing to purchase a car. Today's young people are just not driving in the numbers they used to. In the 1990's when I was in school, around three quarters of 16-year-olds got their license. Today's rates are cited to be between 60% and 65%. In a rural state like ours, public transit is not available in most communities. Passenger rail would be a solution to this growing issue, connecting these young people with other parts of our state for work and/or leisure.

At Thomas College, I also coach track and field. With a team with 53 members, transportation can be tricky. Today, the team leaves for their spring trip to California to compete in two meets over seven days. Because of schedules, cost, and the flight leaving from Logan Airport, our athletes are asked to get themselves to the airport. Most members of the team do not have a car and because of this, we had a team meeting last week to discuss options for those who couldn't easily get to Logan. The solution they came up with? They all bought train tickets to Boston and are finding rides down to Brunswick, a much easier task than finding a ride all the way to Boston.

Unfortunately, we're too late to live our State motto on this issue, given the investment and expansion efforts that has taken place in other states, but we can finish what we started in the early 2000's and connect the two halves of the State. As other areas of the country have demonstrated there are many economic, environmental, and tourism benefits to expanding passenger rail. Let's act on something that is truly rare today, investing in a service where all members of society, regardless of socioeconomic status, would benefit, breathing new life into many communities that struggle to attract people and economic development. The folks north of Brunswick deserve the same consideration that was afforded to the southern half of the State almost two decades ago. Please support LD 487. Thank you. - Matt Gilley