

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

Good morning, my name is Michael Johnson and I'm a student at Thomas College in Waterville.

I, along with most other college students, live on campus for most of the year and like most students I don't own a car because I can't afford one. This severely limits my travel options, especially due to the fact there is currently no passenger rail in Waterville. Whenever I need to go home my parents have to make a 3-hour round trip from our home near Bangor to pick me up in Waterville. If there was direct passenger rail service that traveled through Waterville to Bangor, I could simply take the train and from Bangor it would only be a 20-minute drive home.

Currently, passenger rail only goes as far north as Brunswick, even though most of Maine's major cities, from Lewiston to Bangor and Orono, are all connected to Brunswick and Portland by a rail route owned by CSX. CSX has been upgrading this route with better, continuously welded rail, allowing trains to run faster and more frequently. These upgrades are beneficial for expanding passenger rail. Amtrak has been making upgrades of its own, with new Airo trainsets on order that will enter service on routes like the Downeaster beginning next year.

If there is passenger rail serving Waterville, students from both Thomas and Colby Colleges would have the option to travel south to Portland and Boston, either for leisure or for traveling home to family. This would save them the trouble of taking a shuttle bus from Waterville, which would include a long drive and traffic congestion as you approach Boston. It's not just colleges in Waterville either, college students in Lewiston, Waterville, Bangor and Orono all stand to benefit from passenger rail, especially those who cannot drive on their own.

With those thoughts in mind, just from college students alone there is enough demand to justify expanding Amtrak service north, giving northern Maine another travel option that is already enjoyed by the southern part of the state and proven to be popular. I hope that this legislation supporting passenger rail will be approved by this committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration.