Darrin Martone
LD 487

Good Morning Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Transportation Committee,

On March 14, I'll wake up at 1:40 am to drive an hour and forty minutes to the Brunswick Amtrak station to take Downeaster Train 680, leaving at 4:30 a.m. The reason is that I, like most University of Maine students, have family south of Orono, and there are few trains to Maryland via Boston. While leaving so early is a struggle, I'm more bothered about the 120-mile drive to the nearest Amtrak station. This is even more infuriating when you realize Orono has a rail connection to Maine's major cities and towns, including Bangor, Pittsfield, Waterville, Lewiston & Auburn, Yarmouth, and eventually Portland.

CSX has realized the value in upgrading this line. Students who live by the tracks often ask me why there are work crews in the middle of the night. I explain that they're continuously welding the track, which means more frequent and faster trains. Amtrak looks much more favorably on expanding passenger service if rail is continuously welded.

Opponents say there's not enough demand. This is delusional. When I decided to attend UMaine in 2021 one factor was that there was a bill to study rail passenger service from Brunswick through Augusta and Waterville to Bangor.

Foolishly, I thought Maine DOT would see the inherent benefits and extend Downeaster service. I didn't foresee that the propensity study DOT commissioned left out all the people who cannot drive or prefer not to drive. It also did not count people coming from other locations to ride the train.

The reason passenger rail legislation keeps coming back is that it's extremely popular. Now, with a new bill and a slightly different alignment I hope it will be properly understood, and earn the committee's approval. Those who disapprove of expansion north while themselves having an Amtrak station make it look like they're pulling the ladder behind them, and ignoring the northern three-quarters of Maine.

Thank you, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.