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**Testimony of Nate Moulton
Maine Department of Transportation
Before the 132nd Legislature, Joint Standing Committee on Transportation**

Neither For Nor Against

*LD 956, Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Implement the
Recommendation of the Calais Branch Rail Use Advisory Council to Create a Multi-use Trail*

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, I am Nate Moulton, Director of the Office of Freight and Business Logistics at MaineDOT. MaineDOT is neither for nor against LD 956, but would like to raise some points for consideration while you deliberate on this legislation.

This bill directs MaineDOT to implement the recommendation of a statutory Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) process and would authorize the removal of 12.26 miles of inactive railroad track from the Route 214 intersection at Ayers Junction in Pembroke to Route 1 in Calais. Any future project resulting from the authorization would be subject to available funding, permitting and municipal agreements.

The RUAC process was established during the 130th Legislature and can be found in 23 MRSA §75. It provides the Commissioner of MaineDOT the authority to establish a RUAC upon the petition of one or more governmental entities. The purpose of a RUAC is to facilitate discussion, gather information, and provide advice to the commissioner regarding the future use of a rail corridor identified in the petition. Recommendations must include the benefits and costs of potential uses of the rail corridor, including rail and trail use, with the understanding that pursuant to the state rail preservation act, any non-rail use of the corridor is considered interim in nature.

The Calais Branch Rail Use Advisory Council (the Council) was formed in March of 2024 upon the request of the municipalities of Machias, Pembroke, Dennysville, Baring Plantation, and Charlotte. The eleven-member council met over an eight-month period and during that time reviewed the approximately 12.26 miles of state-owned, former Maine Central Railroad line from milepost 254.29 in Pembroke to milepost 266.55 in Calais.

In October 2024, the Council issued a 4-page summary/recommendations report with a supporting 89-page consultant report. Ten out of the eleven Council members voted to

recommend the conversion of the 12.26 miles of existing railroad track to an interim multiuse trail. One member of the council abstained from voting.

The RUAC estimated cost of constructing a trail until rail with a stone dust surface on this 12.26-mile segment was \$13.9 million; a paved trail was estimated at \$18.1 million. Federal funding for such projects is limited and could become even more so. Any state funding would need to be identified through MaineDOT's Work Plan process. Given the cost and limited funding, this project could take many years to complete.

The reason MaineDOT is neither for nor against LD 956 is two-fold. First this legislation is in some ways counter to the RUAC process. The State Rail Preservation Act states that "If the Commissioner of Transportation receives a report from a rail corridor use advisory council established under section 75 that includes a recommendation of track removal or other change for nonrail use and the commissioner concurs with that recommendation, the commissioner shall seek legislative approval of the recommendation by submitting legislation..." LD 956 was not submitted by MaineDOT, in part because our department cloture date had passed by the time this RUAC report was finalized.

It should be noted that MaineDOT does have some concerns regarding this proposed interim trail. These concerns are centered around the trail ending at the Route 1 grade crossing in Calais. This location does not provide an adequate or safe location for parking or trail access. We believe it is important that any project commencing should have a connection to a safe location for trailhead and parking. These are issues that should be addressed as any plan moves forward.

Thank you and I would be happy to address questions the committee might have.