



**MAINE
RAIL
GROUP**
MRG, INC

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Senator Tim Nangle, Senate Chair
Representative Lydia Crafts, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

Re: Oppose LD 956

I am Peter Cole, President of Maine Rail Group, Inc. We are an independent all-volunteer non-profit organization that promotes awareness of railroads' contributions to Maine's economy and their vital role in moving passengers and freight. We strongly oppose LD 956 with the goal of protecting another key piece of the Maine rail system.

Rail is the most efficient way to move freight on land. Like any system it uses its branches to feed the system to keep it whole. With no long-term economic planning, Maine is cutting the rail branches that feed the main line and the economic well-being of the state. Leaving only roads as the system of transport means higher highway maintenance and energy costs.

Eastport is the deepest natural harbor in the nation. Estes Head pier has 133K sq ft of dry warehouse storage and a state-of-the-art bulk materials handling system. The system, completed in 2013 as part of a 10-million-dollar port expansion, is anchored by a 7-acre open storage pad with additional acreage available for future expansion.

Eliminating direct ship-to-train service means that this port will continue to be underused. While there's currently no track connecting Eastport to this section of the Calais Branch, there is a right of way. Removing the adjoining 12.2 miles of track would forever foreclose the possibility of connecting Eastport to Maine's rail system.

Consider what's happening at Maine's two other state-owned ports. In Portland, a partnership with Eimskip has spurred an enormous expansion in container traffic, almost all by rail. In Searsport, the rail connection has kept Mack Point competitive and stable. Frankly, the long-term future for Eastport is bleak without a rail option.

We could also ask, what's the need for new trail-only corridor? Trail users already have an adjacent Calais Branch section where track has been removed to create the Down East-Sunrise trail, running 88 miles from Ellsworth through Machias to Ayers Junction. We question whether this additional 12.2 mile section could add significantly to the existing trail experience.

Like all state-owned lines, this one must be evaluated for its economic potential before track is removed. Because no such study has been conducted, we oppose LD956

Sincerely,

Peter Cole, President
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