



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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Testimony in Support of 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

To the Committee on Transportation

by Josh Caldwell, Climate and Clean Energy Policy Advocate for NRCM

April 4, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Josh Caldwell, and I am here on behalf of the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) in support of 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. NRCM is Maine's leading nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting Maine's environment, with nearly 20,000 supporters statewide and beyond.

The Downeast Sunrise Trail has long been a recreational destination for Washinton County while providing transportation access and recreation for local residents. It is the longest continuous trail portion of the East Coast Greenway in Maine, and the opportunity to extend the trail to Calais unlocks significant economic and environmental benefits. This trail would solidify Calais as the starting point of the East Coast Greenway from Maine to Florida and would provide connectivity options to trails in Canada, increasing recreational tourism and associated economic growth.

The economic impact of safe multi-use trails separated from car traffic is monumental. The Calais Branch Rail Corridor Study estimates that local spending induced by this new trail would be between \$980k and \$1.47 million annually, providing a major boost to Calais and nearby towns.¹ We've already seen trails such as the one proposed here generate significant economic return for surrounding communities elsewhere in Maine, including the Eastern Trail spanning from Kittery to Portland, which is the southernmost Maine portion of the East Coast Greenway. That trail segment has been found to generate more than \$44 million annually while hosting

¹ Maine DOT, Calais Branch Rail Corridor Study, October 2024, <https://uploads.maine.dotpi.ma.com/2805a0dc-9052-4c02-a4fc-41d6c3b517be.pdf>

more than 250,000 users.² Visitors and residents alike use the trail to exercise, recreate, commute, and access local businesses and outdoor destinations.

The safety benefits of these trails are also significant. Maine's roads have seen an uptick in pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities in recent years, and one part of the solution is creating spaces where active transportation users can travel without needing to compete with cars for the same space.³

Further, transportation is by far the top contributor to climate pollution here in Maine. Providing active transportation infrastructure such as this trail will encourage clean transportation alternatives like biking, walking, and rolling, and mitigate car congestion and associated pollution.

For these reasons, we urge you to support LD 956. I am happy to answer any questions.

² Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission, November 2021, *Economic Impact Study for the Eastern Trail*, <https://www.eastertrail.org/the-economic-impact-of-the-eastern-trail/>

³ Portland Press Herald, March 2025, *Maine's seen 6 pedestrian deaths already this year. Last year at this time? None.*, <https://www.pressherald.com/2025/03/04/maine-s-seen-6-pedestrian-deaths-this-year-already-last-year-at-this-time-none/>