

Transportation Committee Hearing: LD 956 Testimony - Public Hearing <sup>4</sup>3/4/25  
East Coast Greenway Alliance – Emily Paskewicz

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation:

My name is Emily Paskewicz, I live in Brunswick, ME and I am the Northern New England Manager for the East Coast Greenway Alliance. The East Coast Greenway Alliance leads the development of a 3,000-mile biking and walking route from Calais, Maine to Key West, Florida, designed to safely connect people to their communities and key destinations. Today I, on behalf of the East Coast Greenway Alliance, am testifying in support of LD 956 and the interim trail that it will create while preserving the Calais Branch Corridor for future potential rail use.

The corridor covered in this bill is the proposed location for a critical segment of the East Coast Greenway and an extension of the Downeast Sunrise Trail from Ayers Junction into Calais. This link is also identified as part of the proposed network in the Maine Active Transportation Arterials plan. By allowing an interim trail along the Calais Branch Corridor, over 12 miles of new multi-use trail will be created allowing the Down East Sunrise Trail and East Coast Greenway users to reach the Calais border safely and comfortably. It will also put Canadian tourists and trail users 12 miles closer to connecting from the Coastal Link trail in St. Stephen, New Brunswick through Calais and onto the Downeast Sunrise Trail.

Along the East Coast Greenway, and within Maine, multi-use trails provide a positive economic boost for urban and rural areas alike. Tourism is already a significant economic driver for Down East Maine, and expansion of the Down East Sunrise Trail is a strategic investment in that sector. As part of the final report prepared for the Calais Branch Rail Use Advisory Council, an economic analysis prepared by RKG Associates (Page 12 - *Calais Branch Rail Corridor Study*: <https://uploads.mainedotpima.com/2805a0dc-9052-4c02-a4fc-41d6c3b517be.pdf>) estimated that annual spending for out of area users on this new section of trail would fall between \$980K and \$1.47 million. These estimates for the proposed trail are bolstered by the calculated economic impacts from existing trails in the state, like the Eastern Trail in Southern Maine. In 2021 the Eastern Trail's economic impact from visitor spending by net new users was calculated to be over \$14.3 million within southern Maine. (Page 5 - *Economic Impacts of the Eastern Trail*: <https://www.easterntail.org/documents/Nov2021ETEconomicImpactReport.pdf>).

Long distance trails aren't just good for attracting tourists though, they can also help to draw in new residents and retain existing ones. A 2019 study from Headwaters Economics found that the availability of recreational opportunities can often make a difference between gaining or losing population, particularly for rural counties, nationwide. (*Recreation Counties Attracting New Residents and Higher Incomes*: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/recreation-counties-attract-report.pdf>). Within Maine, a recent study from the State found that for over half of recent transplants, access to outdoor recreation was reported as a strong influence on their decision to move to Maine (Page 9 - *Why People Move to Maine*: <https://www.maine.gov/decd/sites/maine.gov.decd/files/inline-files/WHY%20PEOPLE%20MOVE%20TO%20MAINE.pdf>). The extension of the Down East Sunrise Trail, as enabled by LD 956, will expand recreational opportunities and local access for the benefit of several communities in Down East Maine.

By authorizing this dormant state-owned rail corridor for use as interim multi-use trail, this bill represents a critical step forward for recreation, tourism, and connectivity in Maine. For these reasons, I urge you to vote yes on LD 956.  
Thank you.