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Committee on Transportation: Testimony in Support of LD 1612

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Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Daniel Day. I proposed LD 1612 because it reflects a growing reality: Maine has several state-owned railroad lines that are out of service, and multiple entities are now interested in their economic potential. With two Class I freight railroads now operating in the state, the viability of these lines is growing.

In just the past few months, the RFP for the Rockland Branch drew five proposals. The winning bidder announced that Dragon Cement's new owners intend to resume freight service, and several other businesses on the line are preparing to return to rail. Conway Scenic Railroad has submitted a plan to bring back freight and eventually passenger service on the Mountain Division. Maine Switching Services is also in discussions with the Department of Transportation to reactivate the Lower Road.

These developments directly contradict recent RUAC reports that deemed the Mountain Division and Lower Road commercially unviable. LD 1612 would provide the Department of Transportation with clear direction to revisit these assumptions.

Railroads bring so many benefits. Freight rail can reduce emissions by up to 65 percent compared to trucking, and passenger rail can cut emissions by up to 80 percent compared to cars. The Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad, a small heritage operation, has contributed an estimated \$3 million to Waldo County's economy. I am now offering to build on that and launch a new railbike operation in Maine, at no cost to the taxpayers, that would bring visitor revenue to local communities and generate direct revenue for the state. Railbike tours help keep infrastructure intact and maintained, while preserving the option for future freight or passenger service. As an outdoor enthusiast, I also support a strong trail network. I believe rail and trail advocates can work together, and potentially use a portion of rail revenue to address the fact that there is currently no funding for trail construction.

People once thought it was not feasible to bring electricity, broadband, and cell coverage to rural areas, yet we found ways to make it happen. Passenger and freight rail deserve the same forward-looking mindset. If Maine wants to be serious about sustainability and long-term economic growth, it should preserve its options for the future by welcoming private-sector ideas now.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Daniel Day