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Testimony of Nate Cloutier

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

April 30, 2025

In Support of LD 1612, “Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Solicit Proposals for the Utilization of Unused State-owned Railroad Lines”

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Nate Cloutier, and I am here today on behalf of the Maine Tourism Association (MTA). MTA has been promoting Maine and supporting tourism-related businesses—from lodging and dining to camps, retail, guides, amusements, and historic attractions—for over 100 years. MTA offers support of LD 1612, “Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Solicit Proposals for the Utilization of Unused State-owned Railroad Lines”.

LD 1612 directs the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) to issue requests for proposals for each unused state-owned railroad line. These proposals can include traditional rail service as well as ideas for recreational or commercial use so long as they preserve the right-of-way for possible future freight or passenger rail. MDOT will evaluate proposals based on the financial viability, economic benefits, alignment with environmental and community goals, and the proposer’s ability to carry out the project.

The bill appears to not advocate for any specific use but rather seeks to open the door for proposals regarding state-owned rail corridors that are currently unused. This is an important distinction. By allowing diverse proposals to be submitted, this bill creates an opportunity for community-driven, locally beneficial projects to be brought forward and evaluated on their merits.

From a tourism perspective, we recognize that what is most beneficial for local communities can, in many instances, be beneficial for the visitors we welcome. Infrastructure that supports economic vitality, whether through restored rail service, multi-use trails, expanded utility access, or other innovative uses, can improve both quality of life and the visitor experience. LD 1612 does not mandate any single outcome but rather encourages public input around underutilized state assets.

We would especially support a process that ensures the tourism industry is part of these conversations. Many of Maine's tourism corridors are aligned with these former rail lines, and what becomes of them has the potential to influence the surrounding region for decades.

In that spirit, we support LD 1612 with the understanding that it maintains openness to all proposals, including those that may ultimately enhance tourism, recreation, or multimodal access, and that it serves as a framework for collaborative discussion.

This bill could help unlock the potential of Maine's underused rail corridors in ways that reflect local priorities and benefit both residents and visitors alike. For those reasons, we urge you to vote LD 1612 ought to pass. Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.