

Peter Cole
Topsham

To: Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, Maine State Legislature.
Senator Bill Diamond, Chair; Representative Danny Martin, Chair
From: Peter Cole, Maine Rail Group Member
Re: In Opposition of LD 1133, section 2
Date: April 15, 2021

Dear Senator Diamond and Representative Danny Martin and other Members of the Committee:

I am Peter Cole residing in Topsham Maine. I am an educator by profession, and a rail advocate belonging to MRG and serving as a volunteer with the Downeaster service. A few weeks ago, as the world waited and watched, the earth's transportation system collapsed due to one stuck ship blocking the Suez Canal. One small part of the transportation artery was blocked, and everything stopped. Having one community decide to turn a rail corridor into a non-rail use will have the same effect on Maine's transportation network. Maine's rail corridors were built to minimize grades, maximize loads, and located in the center of communities. They belong to the citizens of Maine for rail transportation. By threatening the rail corridors, you are stopping future growth, encouraging future sprawl, and cutting out potential investment in towns. I remember visiting friends in California. The nearby freeway had 14 lanes and was still bumper to bumper, barely moving. That is the future in Maine as housing prices continue to rise, and farmlands and wood lots become part of the sprawl.

The State of Maine legislature is being asked to invest in two studies this session to seek information about the possibility of expanding passenger rail on the historically-viable routes that LD 1133 would only further complicate.

Maine is at a crossroads. Does it want wise, environmentally-sensitive growth, or does it want uncontrolled sprawl which has destroyed so much of the rest of the country? Does it desire to attract young people who care about the environment and good transportation? Does it want to provide service to the older residents who already live here? Or, does it want to kill the city centers and spread sprawl over the state?

Bicycle paths are great, but they are not a viable long-distance travel alternative in Maine. Widening the roads for bicycles, having bicycle parking facilities at train stations and stores is much more environmentally sane than building ever-larger parking structures. Train tracks are 4'8 1/2 inches apart, and most of the rights-of-way are not much wider. Does anyone seriously think 4 feet 8 1/2 inches is a good width for a two-way bicycle path? But that width is perfect for rails carrying the most ecologically efficient transportation mode, carrying thousands of passengers from one end of the state to the other.

I urge you to Vote NO on LD 1133, section 2, or carry it over to next year after the Lewiston and Bangor studies have been completed. Section 2 has nothing to do with roads and should not be part of this bill. Maine needs a rail plan connecting the cities of this state together, not a piecemeal approach to bike paths within city limits leading nowhere.