

To: Distinguished Chairs Senator Diamond, Rep. Martin and Members of the JSCT.

I'm John T. Sutton (Jack) from Belgrade, Maine and Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.), writing in opposition to LD 1133 in its present form as it pertains to "trail until rail" conversions for State-owned railroad corridors.

Maine Rail Group has sought to preserve State-owned railroad corridors and return them to productive railroad uses, starting with the Brunswick-to-Augusta corridor, more than thirty years ago. Lately, we introduced LD 227 for your consideration, to authorize and fund a study of the public transportation demands, economic opportunities and environmental benefits of passenger rail service extending from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor. That service would utilize the inactive State-owned corridor from Brunswick to East Augusta, connecting with mostly active track now owned and operated by Pan Am Railways that continues from East Augusta to Bangor. Such study will complement the study previously authorized and conducted for separate, but related passenger rail service between Portland and Lewiston. The Brunswick-Augusta-Waterville corridor is a separate market region, with no alternative rail route between Brunswick, Augusta and Waterville, hence the study proposed by LD 227 should be less complicated than that for Portland-Lewiston.

We believe that re-energized national interest in passenger rail transportation, its demonstrated economic spin-offs, its environmental advantages and the Downeaster's positive reputation now combine to justify and support realistic, near-term goals to extend passenger rail to Maine's more populated regions. We recognize that Maine's Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) and AMTRAK are already functioning to provide the essential professional administrative and operating skills needed to manage and coordinate extended passenger rail services as proposed.

Presumably, the proposed LD 227 study will outline the type and frequency of extended passenger rail services envisioned. Subject to such study, our initial concept is to extend one or more daily Downeaster trains through Augusta to Bangor. Single or multiple units of self-powered passenger rail coaches would operate separately to provide more stops and more frequent local service within Maine.

We'd like to record that our group is not opposed to trails per se – but only where they interfere with prospective railroad operations, create safety issues or add incremental costs to rail. For example, the Brunswick – Augusta corridor south of Gardiner is predominantly a single-track railroad with numerous pinch points that cannot accommodate the railroad with a closely parallel trail – think safety, bridges, embankments, rock cuts, drainage works, trackside poles and structures, etc. For future passenger rail, we would look to AMTRAK standards for railroad-trail separation and barriers. We note the Gardiner-Augusta corridor segment was largely built as a two-track railroad and the accompanying trail was built with MaineDOT assurance that the existing trail can be safely accommodated.

Please delete LD 1133 references to "trail until rail" or vote Ought Not to Pass for the bill, because trail conversions, once established will be politically difficult or impossible to reverse.

I'll be pleased to respond to your questions.

Respectzfully, Jack Sutton
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