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To: Maine Legislature Transportation Committee

From: Tony Donovan, Director
Maine Rail Transit Coalition

Date: May 17, 2021

Re: **VOTE OUGHT TO PASS: L.D. 991 Directing the Department of Transportation To Complete a Feasibility Analysis To Initiate a Commuter and Passenger Train Service between Portland & Lewiston and Auburn**

Senator Diamond, Representative Martin, and members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Tony Donovan, and I am a Founding Member of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC). MRTC, along with the Maine Rail Group and Rail Users Network, is a leading advocacy group for the restoration of passenger train services in the region, to take advantage of the existing railroad corridors assets found in every part of the State of Maine.

I submit this testimony **in support of LD 1534 "An Act to Preserve and Protect the State's Rail Corridors"**. Note - This is not a new bill. It adds to existing law¹.

Maine's railway corridors are under assault by well-intention groups and individuals. Over the past few decades, as we have worked so hard to restore passenger train service, there have been concerted efforts by these well-meaning individuals to use these railway corridors for recreational purposes. The problem is that the movement to convert to non-motorized recreational purpose is so entrenched under the assumption that rail service will not return, that it is difficult to get the information out to these folks that rail can and is making a return, often made more difficult as trail plans are often funded by our own Maine Department of Transportation.

Right now, critical railroad corridors are under consideration for trails that connect Augusta-Bath, Westbrook-Portland, Yarmouth-Portland, to name a few. Railroad corridors throughout the state have already been converted to trails that have either eliminated, or seriously impacted the actual rail infrastructure. For example, the Augusta Lower Roads, the 88-mile Calais Branch, the Union Branch in downtown Portland, the Mountain Division in Windham. **Time is of the essence.**

¹ **Maine Revised Statutes, Title 23: TRANSPORTATION Chapter 615: STATE RAILROAD PRESERVATION ACT; §7102. FINDINGS OF FACT**

The Legislature makes a finding of fact that a viable and efficient rail transportation system is necessary to the economic well-being of the State. [1989, c. 398, §7 (RPR)]. The Legislature makes a further finding of fact that the State must take active steps to protect and promote rail transportation in order to further the general welfare. [1989, c. 398, §7 (RPR).]

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This bill is to address the need to have the trails advocates and government agencies, planners and funding sources **come to the table to talk** with passenger train advocates - something they have not done in the past – and are not doing right now. The intent is not to prevent corridor use for other than trains. The purpose of this act is to allow the use of the corridor for trains **to be evaluated before** the decision is made to install a trail. A use that can prevent rail restoration - its intended and highest and best use. If there is room in the corridor – and the funds to pay for it, then we might encourage multiple uses of these corridors.

This bill is also an opportunity to inform the general population of the potential for passenger train service, the real possibility that it can be restored, that modern trains do not pose negative impacts for communities they serve, and in fact restoration of passenger train services enhances community walkability, reduces the need for and environmental impacts of cars and can reduce the expenses related to transportation.

The Climate cannot wait. The economy should not be made to wait. State rail planners should no longer delay consideration of new routes. While we wait, we lose these valuable assets to nature and to trails.

Believe me, it is Train Time.

For additional information, links to reports and studies on this subject, please call/text 207-329-6732 or email MeLikesRail@GMail.com any time.

Sincerely

Tony Donovan

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Tony Donovan
Maine Rail Transit Coalition

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Maine Rail Transit Coalition

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