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I'm writing in support of LD 1370.

For too long, we've overlooked the untapped resources that are right in front of us – long-unused, publicly owned rail lines that crisscross our entire state. Maine is currently losing out on increased tourism dollars and healthier, connected communities that rail trails would bring. Maine's Climate Action Plan calls for using available infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions. Rail trails would do so in multiple ways, including eliminating car trips by creating carbon-free, low or no-cost barrier, transportation alternatives like walking and biking. Moreover, rail trails would actually protect these valuable public lands from development and preserve the ability to use them for trains once again in the future if needed through a legal process known as railbanking.

The Maine Trail Coalition's plan for rail trails in Maine makes a clear and compelling case for regional connectivity via four specific, publicly owned rail corridors. The plan also calls for the construction of thirteen specific rail-trail projects over the next decade. Collectively, these projects would add roughly 250 miles of inter-connected off-road trails, transforming the Maine communities they serve by adding affordable and positive health and economic impacts that would extend beyond the immediate numerous communities that they would serve.

This is Maine. Our motto is "Dirigo - I lead". We should be leading on this but right now we're not, our neighbors are. New Hampshire, Vermont, and yes, Massachusetts, are all investing heavily in rail trails. Why? Because they understand that there will be a return on this investment. We have an opportunity to lead on this issue and I'm asking you to seize that opportunity for the people of Maine and support LD 1370.

The bottom line is that while passenger and freight rail may be appropriate for some currently unused corridors, most can and should be considered for rail trail. Thank you.

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