

LD 1370 An Act to Establish Trail Until Rail Corridors

Good Afternoon Senator Diamond, Representative Martin and other members of this distinguished Joint Standing Committee on Transportation,

My name is Jon Kachmar and I am the Executive Director of the Eastern Trail located in Southern Maine. I am providing testimony on behalf of the Eastern Trail Alliance and the Eastern Trail Management District. I am here with strong support for LD 1370 that would facilitate interim use of four rail corridors as trails until needed for rail. The Eastern Trail, which is currently offers 23 miles of off-road trail from South Portland to Kennebunk is built on the defunct Eastern Rail Line, as well as an additional 42 miles of on-road trail. The vision of the Eastern Trail is a 65-mile off-road alternative transportation and recreation corridor from South Portland to Kittery that would help complete the Florida to Maine East Coast Greenway.

LD 1370 is a fair and reasonable approach to using rail corridors in a temporary capacity for alternative transportation and recreation until demand warrants active rail corridors. Like freight and passenger rail, trail corridors can have a significant economic and social impacts to local and region areas. In 2018, we know that the off-road portion of the Eastern Trail had over 250,000 users. Additionally, this annual trail activity resulted in \$3M dollars of local investment in lodging, food, and other items such as bicycle equipment. Although we do not have actual counts of trail users for 2020 during the pandemic, we estimate based on other trails and open spaces that have been counting users as well as Google data aggregated from users' phones, that there were probably three times as many trail users during 2020, possibly representing upwards of 750,000 walkers and riders and upwards of \$9M in related investments.

The Maine Rail-Trail Plan 2020-2030 calls for continuing preservation and maintenance of a separate and active rail corridor for freight and passenger service that can be used to extend future rail from Boston and more populated communities in Southern Maine.

In addition to being good for the economy, trails provide alternative transportation options for work commuters, opportunities for recreation and healthy exercise that is free to access and available to all, and opportunities to connect communities to other open spaces such as municipal and nonprofit land trust properties along the trail. I have personally heard from many individuals who are eager to commute on their bikes on off-road trail between Portland and the communities to the south located along the Eastern Trail.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass". Thank you.