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Health & Human Services Committee
Ranking Member

LD 1370 - *“An Act To Establish Trail until Rail Corridors”*

Good afternoon Senator Diamond, Representative Martin, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Marianne Moore. I represent Senate District 6, which includes all of Washington County along with Winter Harbor, Gouldsboro, and Sullivan in Hancock County.

I am here today in support of LD1370, *“An Act To Establish Trail until Rail Corridors”* specifically as it relates to the Calais Branch Railroad Corridor.

Permit me to give you a little background/history about [the Calais Branch Railroad](#):

The Calais Branch Railroad Corridor is 127 miles long and connects Brewer to Calais in Downeast Maine. The Railroad began in 1898. For decades trains loaded with freight and visitors rumbled to Calais and Eastport. They made the return journey loaded with fish and timber. One of the most famous users of the railway line was former President Franklin Roosevelt. The Roosevelts would use the train to carry them to Eastport where they would catch a boat to visit the family’s summer retreat on Campobello Island. In 1921, the railroad was used to shuttle President Roosevelt back to New York City when he was stricken with polio. Fast forward to 1984, the corridor fell silent as the train service that had lasted more than 80 years ceased. It was acquired by the

Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) in 1987 from Maine Central Railroad for the purposes of rail preservation

The business potential to support rail freight service has been analyzed and determined to be insufficient at this time, with no improvement projected for the foreseeable future. Unless major changes occur in national and international freight distribution patterns, the significant capital necessary to reactivate the Calais Branch Railroad for freight transportation is unlikely to yield a positive return on those investments. The condition of the existing tracks, ties and railbed has deteriorated significantly.

On July 15, 2005, Governor Baldacci charged the MDOT with developing a Trail Management and Maintenance Plan for an interim multi-use trail on the Calais Branch Rail Corridor between Ellsworth and Ayers Junction. To assist the Department in developing the plan, MaineDOT formed the Calais Branch Trail Management Committee whose membership included:

- Maine Department of Conservation (MDOC),
- law enforcement representatives,
- the National Park Service,
- the municipalities in Hancock and Washington counties,
- regional planning and economic development agencies, and
- local citizen trail groups.

The Plan was the result of a cooperative effort between the MaineDOT, Maine DOC, the advisory group and local interests advocating for the creation of a multi-use trail within the corridor, while protecting the corridor and its important infrastructure to meet future rail needs. I have provided you a copy for your reference.

The Plan recommended the Bureau of Parks and Lands of MDOC be the long-term manager of this multi-use trail, due to its extensive

experience in constructing and managing other multi-use trails throughout Maine. MDOT and the Bureau entered into an agreement to oversee the corridor rehabilitation, subsequent trail construction, and long-term management and maintenance of the trail, while preserving the conditions along the corridor so that railroad use could be revived if market conditions changed.

The Sunrise Trail Coalition, organized more than a decade earlier, was enlisted to provide public support for the trail manager and to represent the various interests of the multiple groups that use the trail.

Construction entailed removal of the substandard rails, repair of washouts, placement of decking over bridges, rehabilitation of the corridor, and construction of a 12-foot wide, compact gravel base.

Total cost was estimated to be \$3.9 million, financed by sale of the rails, ties and other hardware.

Construction began in the Spring 2008 along the easterly 49 miles of the trail from Machias to Ayers Junction. A ribbon cutting ceremony was held January 31, 2009 at Ayers Junction for the opening of these 49 miles to winter activities. Construction began in the spring of 2009 for the remaining 36 miles from Machias to Washington Junction. It was completed in the fall of 2010. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at Washington Junction in September 2010.

The final 2.2 mile segment from Washington Junction to High Street Trail head in Ellsworth was completed in the Fall 2016 and officially opened on December 2 at a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Sunrise Trail Coalition and the City of Ellsworth.

In reviewing the very thorough Plan, reference is made to an additional 12 mile section, Ayers Junction to Calais, to complete the multi-purpose trail along the Calais Branch Corridor thus the purpose of my bill.

The Plan actually states: “Retain in its present state to support future freight rail access from Eastport through Ayers Junction to Calais connecting to the New Brunswick Southern Railroad. This section also goes through the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge, which currently does not allow motorized uses, except for snowmobiles. The Management Plan Committee recommends that an effort be made to provide a trail connection, including on and off road, from Ayers Junction to Calais.” We feel it’s time to start the planning process!

In community discussions, concerns were shared regarding any removal of the freight rail access to Eastport. Should the plan recommend its removal, I point out the Plan includes a Rail Corridor Preservation Strategy beginning on page 3: “MDOT’s priority is to preserve and protect the corridor for future rail use. If conditions develop that enables the return of rail, then the corridor can be readily upgraded to accept new rail. At that time, every effort will be made to relocate the trail, and to minimize the time the trail is not available for use.”

The Plan goes on to say: “The question has come up and has been extensively evaluated concerning whether or not to remove the rail and ties from the rail corridor or cover over them in anticipation of saving costs at the time of reintroduction of rail. The MDOT’s Rail Division, as well as the Multimodal Project Development program (which handles freight, passenger rail, and trails) has been very involved in the development of this plan. They have determined that removing the rail and ties will not affect the future rail viability of the corridor. In fact, the increased attention that the corridor will receive as a result of the institution of this proposed management plan will help preserve the integrity of the rail bed by having increased annual maintenance, repairs to washouts, grading that sheds water off the railbed to reduce erosion, and numerous other maintenance activities. It is their observation that:

Removing the existing rail and ties will make it more efficient to restore rail service in the future.

1. The existing rail is substandard and will need to be replaced.
2. The existing ties are deteriorated and will further deteriorate as time goes by.
3. Ballast that meets modern standards will have to be placed on the railbed when rail is restored.
4. Removing the existing ties and rail will make it more efficient in the future to install new ballast, ties and rail.”

Completing the trail will also promote economic development in much needed areas! In January 2017, the Hancock County Planning Commission released their Down East Sunrise Trail Impact Assessment. This study was implemented with generous support from the Sunrise Trail Coalition, Davis Conservation Foundation, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands and Maine Department of Transportation.

The report combined several streams of data to assess the economic impacts of the Sunrise Trail between 2013 and 2015. Direct, indirect and induced economic impacts have been significant and positive.

- A trail-count camera identified more than 6,000 trips by individuals as users crossed the checkpoint at the western gateway in Washington Junction in the town of Hancock during 9 months in 2014 and 2015.
- Camera counts provide a very detailed map of time of travel, mode, date, day of week, season, weather conditions, persons per vehicle and more.
- Two-hundred ten respondents to a user survey at trail intercepts and online indicated spending an average of \$31.04 per day on

food, \$22.56 per day on lodging as well as major purchases of equipment such as snowmobiles, ATVs and bicycles.

- Total direct economic impacts of the trail are estimated to be approximately \$236,000 over the ten month study period (excluding November and December). Indirect and induced impacts may match the direct benefits, doubling the overall impact.
- Overall satisfaction with the DEST is high, but bicyclists were more likely to be critical of trail surface conditions.
- Users provided a wealth of comments about their experiences and attitudes about the trail.

Their study concluded: “The Down East Sunrise Trail has produced measurable and significant economic benefits for Downeast Maine ranging from approximately \$236,000 to \$1,000,000 for a 10 month period in 2014-2015. Even at the low end of this range, the measured benefits appear noteworthy. In addition to these economic benefits, there have been a variety of important recreation, health, quality of life and community benefits. Rider satisfaction is high, but will only be sustained if there is ongoing attention to trail maintenance, security and cleanliness. Community satisfaction, particularly the business community, will require additional systematic research.”

Completion of the Down East Sunrise Trail will create the single longest stretch of off-road trail along the East Coast Greenway in Maine. (The East Coast Greenway is envisioned as an off-road urban trail connecting Calais, Maine to Key West, Florida. Testimony after mine will speak more about the East Coast Greenway.)

We know the planning this final leg of the trail will take some time and energy. We know it will not be completed overnight, but we feel it’s time to start the planning process. Our vision would be for all of the

stakeholders to come together to make it happen and complete the Down East Sunrise Trail!

Thank you! I would be happy to answer any questions!

