

May 17, 2021

Senator Rick Bennet
State Of Maine
Transportation Committee

Subject: *LD 1370 – Trails until Rails...*

Dear Senator Bennett,

I have been a resident of South Windham, Maine for over 17 years. During this time, I have seen the development and paving of the Rails-to-Trails section from Rt 202 in Windham westward through Gorham to Standish. The Trail is 4/10 of a mile from my neighborhood and readily accessible. I use it several times a week, almost all year around. It has become an important part of my family's exercise routines. Others in my neighborhood are also frequent user of the trail for recreation and outings with friends and relatives. Over the last year the trail has become a critical means (and excuse) to get out, exercise and, while maintaining a safe social distance, see other people.

When the weather is nice, I often see dozens of people out walking, pushing baby carriages, jogging, biking, and, during the winter, snow shoeing, X-skiing, and snowmobiling. The trail is an open invitation for exercise and healthy lifestyle and used by many.

This well used, 5 Mile section of trail is a great beginning and demonstrates the potential of extending the rails to trails from Standish to Fryeburg. The Study LD 1370 sets the stage for putting Maine's rails to use as Trails until feasibility for rail use is demonstrated. This would open opportunities for recreation, outdoors exploration and quality of life, but also increasing sense of community and economic benefits for all the towns the trail passes through.

For example, given the length of trail from Windham and Fryeburg and the scenic nature of the route it will attract tourists from around Maine and beyond and have a direct economic benefit to the area. This observation is based on direct personal experience. I have traveled to NC and Virginia just to bike along New River Rails to Trail (50+ miles) and the Virginia Creeper Trail (34 miles) to name a few. Along these trails I sought lodging, ate in restaurants, and rented bikes – investing in the local economy. These trails were made more attractive because of their length, scenic beauty and resulted in multi-day excursions.

In summary, I suspect the benefits from using Trails until Rails will be amplified dramatically by the quantity and length of trails created. Such as the connection of Windham with the section in Fryeburg, and on to NH. I fully support and advocate passage of LD 1370 with the intent of using an asset that is currently not fully used.

Sincerely,

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