

Mike Byron
Maine Rail Group

To: Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, Maine State Legislature
Senator Bill Diamond, Chair; Representative Danny Martin, Chair
From: Mike Byron, Resident of Hallowell (formerly of Augusta)
Re: In Support of the Maine Rail Group's LD227 Ought to Pass
Date:

Dear Senator Diamond and Representative Danny Martin, and other Members of the Committee. My name is Mike Byron: a former 9 year member of the Augusta City Council; a former 5 year Litchfield Town Manager; a former 6 year Substitute Teacher at Cony Middle School/High School and at the Capital Area Technical School; and a former N.Y.C and Augusta Maine Commercial Banker. I'd like to talk to you today on the positive Economic Impact of Passenger rail service through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor.

On December 15th 2001, Amtrak's Downeaster made its first run from Boston to Portland, with three stops in Massachusetts, three in New Hampshire, and four in Maine. Along its 145 mile route, the Downeaster now makes four daily round trips (temporarily down from five), and it extends to Brunswick with six Maine stops, transporting thousands of riders and contributing millions of dollars to Maine's local economies. Since 2003, ridership has more than doubled - during Fiscal Year 2019, ridership was a half million customers.

Having Amtrak near shopping and entertainment has been a boon for developers. According to Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPPRA), which provides funding for the service, the Downeaster transports more than 100,000 annual Visitors to Maine, who contribute a \$29million economic impact, including visitors to Freeport, where LL Bean's Flagship Store has been located for more than 100 years.

For Chris Thompson, owner of Thompsons Point Development Co., developing land adjacent to the Portland Station was "intentional." Thompsons Point's groundbreaking occurred during December 2016, which now includes retail, restaurants, concerts, meeting and wedding space, and, slated to open in 2021, the new \$14 million Children's Museum.

In Saco, Eric Chinberg converted an old, abandoned tannery mill, across the street from the Amtrak Station, into "Saco Mill #4," a mixed-use development, which includes 150 apartments, and 4,000 SF of commercial space, home to 15 large and small businesses.

In Downtown Brunswick, even with the closing of the former Brunswick Naval Air Station, office development, retail and service are booming, with the station itself, home to a hotel, housing, medical center, a bank, restaurants, and retail.

Creative uses of Augusta's city-owned Kennebec Locke property, in coordination with passenger rail service through Augusta, offer unparalleled opportunities for residential and commercial transportation-oriented development (TOD) for Augusta and its entire region.

In summary, investing in passenger and freight rail could bring as much as a 80% match in federal funds to Maine, while attracting significant private investment. Public investment in this critical railway corridor will have an enormous economic impact for the Cities of Augusta, Waterville and Bangor, and will enrich the lives of Maine residents and visitors, from millennials to our seniors through increased mobility and access.

We of the Maine Rail Group hope that you will support LD227 Ought to Pass, and thank you for your time today.