

Douglas Smith
Windham
LD 259

To: Maine Legislature Transportation Committee

From: Doug Smith

Date: 4/11/23

Re: Neither for or Against LD2569 An Act Making Unified Allocations from the Highway Fund and Other Funds Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025.

My name is Doug Smith. I have been a resident in Windham for over 20 years. I live within ½ mile of the Mountain Division Trail and use it several times a week, year-round. For several years I have been involved with the Mountain Division Alliance motivated by the idea of extending this trail from Portland to Fryeburg.

I am providing testimony regarding LD 259 and item 0265858 – Mountain Division Rail Line, study to evaluate trail development between Standish and Fryeburg and municipal support for operations.

The funding for the planning study of the section of the Mountain Division Rail/Trail is well timed and represents the next logical step in a multi-year process.

When Janet Mills became Governor, the Department of Outdoor Recreation was established.

At that time the Governor directed the Maine DOT Commissioner to look at putting the miles of unused public rail lines to use. The Commissioner in turn directed that a Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) be established for the Mountain Division Line to determine the best use for these public assets.

A Council of 12 people was formed by the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) with input from communities through which the Mountain Division Line runs. These Councilman represented each town between Standish and Fryeburg as well as Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission, 2 members of a rail group (1 chose to drop out), Mountain Division Alliance, Portland Water District, Maine Outdoor Recreation, Greater Portland Council of Governments and Bureau of Parks and Lands. Technical support was provided by 2 members of MaineDOT Rail and Freight Departments.

Experts from rail and trail groups spoke to the Council over the course of 7 months and 9 meetings. They looked at the possible uses and the associated costs for each use.

Three of the possibilities: restoring rail use \$60,000,000, rail with a trail \$148,300,000 and, finally, removing the rails and building a Trail Until Rail \$19,800,00. (See Council Summary on MaineDOT web site). This option keeps the rail bed intact so the trail can return to rail if a sound case can be made based on economic, environmental, and other factors.

The RUAC process was open and deliberative process over 7 months. In the end the vote was 11-1 to build a paved Trail Until Rail.

The Mountain Division Alliance has attended town meetings in Standish, Baldwin, Hiram, Brownfield, and Fryeburg, presented these findings and requested and received a letter of support from each town for the Trail until Rail option.

The Mountain Division Rail Line, study to evaluate trail development between Standish and Fryeburg is the next logical step in this multi-year deliberative and open process to make the best use of this Maine held asset.