



# Presumpscot Regional Land Trust

May 18, 2023

## **Testimony in Support of LD 404 “Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council”**

Dear Transportation Committee,

My name is Rachelle Curran Apse, as the Executive Director of the Presumpscot Regional Land Trust, and I am testifying on behalf of the Land Trust in support of LD404. The Land Trust is a local nonprofit with hundreds of members serving Gorham, Gray, Standish, Westbrook, and Windham - four of the nine communities along the Mountain Division corridor.

One of our priorities is to provide trails close to home for everyone in the region we serve. As a result, we coordinate the Sebago to the Sea Trail, a 28-mile trail from Standish to Portland that follows the Mountain Division corridor for nearly half the trail. Expanding the Mountain Division rail-trail has been a priority for our Land Trust for over a decade.

The five-mile section of the Mountain Division rail-trail within our region that already exists in Gorham and Windham is accessible to people of all ages because it is paved, wide, and flat. As a result, it is the most used trail west of Portland, with thousands of people using it for active transportation (including biking to work) and exercise (including walking, running, biking, and for families with strollers).

The number one question our Land Trust receives from residents in our region is when will the Mountain Division rail-trail expand east and west of the current section in Gorham and Windham? Many of these residents commute to work using the current rail-trail section and want to see the rail-trail extended so they have a safe active transportation route.

We are so glad there is momentum to expand this Mountain Division rail-trail both east and west of the current 5-mile Gorham to Windham section.

The five miles east through Windham to downtown Westbrook is state-owned rail corridor. There is broad agreement that this section will have a trail next to the rail to leave the opportunity for future rail within Greater Portland (which includes Portland, Westbrook, Windham, and Gorham) as these towns continue to grow quickly. Windham and Westbrook are actively working with DOT to finish a feasibility study. This is a different project and not related to LD404 but along the same Mountain Division corridor.

Separately LD404, if passed, would allow a trail in the railbed for 30 miles from Standish-Fryeburg, which would connect the two rail-trails that already exist, including the 5 miles in Gorham/Windham and 4 miles in Fryeburg.

DOT has already invested in making the state-owned Mountain Division line an active transportation corridor, with 9 miles of rail-trail. In addition, every town along this state-owned corridor supports the expansion of the rail-trail. This bill will continue the commitment to invest in the Mountain Division line as an active transportation corridor on this section of state-owned tracks that have been unused for over 40 years and where there are no future train prospects in this rural area from Standish to Fryeburg.

If the rail-trail is created it will connect from the New Hampshire border to Windham. And as the rail with trail expands east, it will include Windham into Westbrook and then Portland connecting to the Eastern Trail. When the Mountains Division 50-mile corridor is fully built out with a rail-trail it means over 100,000 people will have the opportunity to use this active transportation corridor within their communities.

Thank you for your consideration in passing LD404, which is an important next step in the continued investment in the rail-trail along the state-owned Mountain Division corridor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachelle C. Apse".

Rachelle Curran Apse  
Executive Director