

*Written Testimony  
Against the Removal of the Mountain Division  
between Fryeburg, ME and Standish, ME*

The United States of America was built on railroads. To this day, freight and passenger railroads across the country move people and goods, from one location to another. Given the possibilities and advantages of rail as a mode of transportation, it is reckless and irresponsible to remove inactive lines that have the potential of reactivation in the future.

Why? Rail transportation remains safer than trucking, more economical and efficient than trucking, it has the multi-use capability of providing freight or passenger service on the same track, and lastly it could generate revenue, business and jobs.

Despite recent incidents and events in the freight railroad industry that have negatively swayed the general public's opinion on rail safety, hauling freight by train remains much safer than over the road by truck. According to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, between 1975 and 2021 truck related hazardous materials accidents caused sixteen times more fatalities than by rail. Obvious continual risk factors include the close proximity of hazardous material hauling trucks to passenger cars and pedestrians on busy roads. In fact, from 2017 to 2021, hazardous material accidents caused by trucks gradually increased, whereas between those same years hazardous accidents caused by rail have gradually decreased.

There is no question that hauling freight by train is much more efficient than by truck. With a 3-1 ratio, it would take three truckloads to fill just one freight car. With an average 50-car freight train, that is equivalent to 150 trucks. According to the United States Census Bureau, the population of Maine grew by 2.6% over the decade between 2010 to 2020. Coupling that with the 30% increase in tourism visitation to the state from 2020-2021, as stated by the Maine Office of Tourism, it can be predicted that truck traffic will increase. What comes with increased truck traffic? Congested roads and highways, a higher risk of accidents, and a higher rate of road degradation. Why confront these possible risks, when another option exists? Move the increase of truck traffic by rail. Now, this is not an argument striving to restore rail traffic in the immediate future, but rather an argument seeking to leave the Mountain Division in place for future *possibilities*, supported by these facts that clearly show the benefit of rail versus truck. Unfortunately this will not be possible if the Mountain Division is torn up for a rail trail. Once a rail line is removed, it is very difficult to re-install one in the future, as opposed to upgrading an existing track.

With tourism rapidly increasing in the state of Maine, not only would freight service benefit this area but also passenger service. The Mountain Division was a historic link, bringing people and families from urban areas such as Portland to rural, scenic areas West of the city and to the White Mountains. The Mountain Division thus would still serve as a vital network for passengers between the NH/ME state line and Portland.

According to the Florida Department of Transportation, in order to convert one mile of rail to one mile of 12 foot wide trail, it requires \$393,119.18. This bill is proposing 31 miles of conversion, which at that average rate set by the Florida DOT, equals just over \$12 million. However, as much as *\$18 million* can be appropriated one-time to the “replacement of the tracks on the 28 miles of rail corridor between the towns of Fryeburg and Standish”, as funded by the Department of Transportation’s Multimodal Transportation Fund Z017. That means, a ghastly amount of \$12-18 million from tax revenue would be channeled into funding a free, public rail trail that draws no direct income or revenue to the town or state. The rail trail conversion would not create jobs, except possibly during the conversion construction process only. This raises questions such as, how many people would actually use the trail? How often would they use it? What demographic would truly benefit from this project? What would maintenance of this lengthy rail trail entail and who would fund that work? These are serious questions that need to be answered before a hefty decision such as removing railroad track is decided upon.

In conclusion, it is foolish to consider removing the Mountain Division railroad between Fryeburg, ME and Standish, ME. The line exists as a potential vital link in the future when freight and passenger demands rise, and trucking strains local roads. (I know that I am not the only one who has gotten stuck behind a slow moving Poland Spring water truck on Route 113). A considerable amount of tax revenue, (\$18 million) would be wasted on a non-revenue rail to trail conversion with no promise of job creation or income. In addition, most rail corridors and railroad rights-of-way in NH and ME reach a 66 foot width, providing plenty of room for the roadbed to preserve the railroad and also accommodate a trail to the side. Much of the right-of-way is already brush cut quite wide, and an unofficial dirt path already exists next to the railroad tracks. As stated previously, once track is removed, it is very difficult to re-install it. Thus, I urge you please, to seriously consider keeping the Mountain Division rail line intact and thereby creating a trail next to it between Fryeburg and Standish. There most certainly may come a time in the future, when a safer, efficient, environmentally-friendly alternative form of transportation such as rail, is needed in this area.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,  
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