

## LD 404 - PD Written Comment In Favor

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Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and Members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Paul Drinan and I am a resident of Westbrook. I am writing to testify in strong support of Senator Bennett's LD 404 "Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council".

The 12-member Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council voted 11-1 to recommend the interim conversion of 31 miles of existing railroad track to a 10-foot wide paved bicycle and pedestrian trail. The Mountain Division Corridor runs through some of the fastest growing and most dense communities in Maine where there is a need for safe active transportation corridors because Westbrook, Windham and Gorham have some of the highest rates of accidents in the state. This future trail system will be a critical bikeway that will connect Portland to Fryeburg and become a regional economic development hub for the people of Maine.

- LD 404 will bridge the existing gap between Gorham and Fryeburg and will set the stage for the next critical section - Gorham to Westbrook. These are not stand-alone projects but components of what will be regional active transportation and economic development systems.
- LD 404 can help make Maine a top destination for hiking, biking, active transportation, skiing, snowmobiling and many other uses.
- LD 404 will keep us on track to contribute to Maine's economy, since trails are such a critical part of Maine's \$3 billion outdoor recreation economy.
- Looking at first and last mile connections, the northern end of the MDT starts at the second busiest entry point into the State of Maine, just to the east of the Mt Washington Valley at the Maine Tourist Center. On its journey through the towns of Fryeburg, Brownfield, Hiram, Baldwin, Standish, Gorham, Windham, and Westbrook, it connects over 11 recreation areas and preserves. It follows the course of the Saco River, part of the Presumpscot River and passes near Sebago Lake.

- When the trail connects to Portland, it will pass through 9 towns with a combined population of 144,000 people. Trail use is predicted to be substantial in both directions as people ride to recreational areas as well as to connect their communities. Many of these towns are in the same school districts and the trail serves as a commuting corridor for students. There will also be ample opportunity for business creation along the trail.
- Like similar trails in other parts of the country and Canada the Mountain Division Trail will attract tourists who may take multiple days to ride the entire length of the trail with the possibility of connecting to the Eastern Trail, Casco Bay Trail or the Amtrak/Downeaster.
- Trail Until Rail: best value and the corridor is [protected in perpetuity via railbanking](#).
- [Maine's Climate Action Plan](#) calls for using “available infrastructure” and “reducing carbon emissions” and rail trails fit the bill.
- Key goals of Maine Department of Transportation's [Maine State Active Transportation Plan](#) align with the outcomes of LD 404. These include:
  - Safe Travel
  - A Vibrant Economy
  - Connectivity
  - Environmentally Sustainable Transportation System
  - Equitable Access
  - Healthier Maine (which translates to a healthier economy)

If, indeed, the State of Maine wants to support economic impact opportunities, equitable transportation, environmental justice, and public health, a rail trail checks all the boxes. Climate change has elevated Maine's active transportation imperative from desirable to essential and urgent. Active transportation infrastructure enables emission-free transportation, outdoor recreation, and improved public health.

Nothing is safer, nothing is cleaner, more affordable, more accessible, and therefore more equitable, than a car-free trail for walking and biking. The proposed RUAC's recommendations for the Mountain Division Trail will provide these benefits to the residents, visitors, and neighbors in the region. I ask that you vote Ought To Pass on LD 404.

Thank you,

Paul Drinan