

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

My name is Kristine Keeney, of Greenwood, Maine, and I am submitting written testimony based on being a resident of Western Maine and my experience as the Northern New England Manager for the East Coast Greenway Alliance, which leads the development of a connected biking and walking route from Calais, Maine to Key West, Florida, designed to transform the communities it connects through by offering people a safe place to commute, exercise, engage with their neighbors, and visit new places. I urge you to support LD 404 to allow the Mountain Division rail corridor to become a trail and LD 1450 to help fund the building of the Mountain Division Trail.

During the difficult days of the pandemic, the Greenway and other trails were and continue to be sanctuaries of sanity and havens of health for Mainers, with usage of the Back Cove Trail in Portland tripling and the Loon Echo Land Trust recording a 40% growth in trail use on their property in Bridgton from 2019 to 2020.

I am a strong supporter of LD 404 and LD 1450 for several reasons:

First, because it is a key step towards creating a complete and connected transportation system, comprised of both rail and trail corridors, that both reduce emissions and increase mobility options. The [Maine Active Transportation Arterials](#) vision calls for “connecting all of Maine’s 25 largest municipalities and over 2/3rds of Maine’s population” with multi-use trails for active transportation that increase safety and access to existing and future transit options, employment centers, and key community destinations.

Second, this trail extension will connect to the 9 miles of Mountain Division Trail that already exists in Fryeburg and in Gorham and Windham and these bills would allow a long planned multi-trail project in the region that has significant public support to move forward on a rail corridor that has not had a train run on it for 40+ years ago.

Authorizing and investing in the Mountain Division Trail will open future opportunities for commuting and recreation between Portland and North Conway, and all the communities in between, as the Mountain Washington Valley Recreation Path in North Conway is under construction and planned to connect to the existing trailhead in Fryeburg.

Third, 86% of Mainers favor creating “trail until rail” corridors, if the trails could be converted back to rail use if needed, according to a statistically significant statewide *Critical Insights on Maine Survey* in November 2019. Support was consistently between 83 and 88% across regions and political parties, making it **clear** that the majority of Mainers support “trail until rail.”

Fourth, the economic impact from these corridors will be meaningful for the communities they run through. The potential economic impact of multi-use trails in Maine is well documented in analyses of existing infrastructure. According to a 2021 study commissioned by Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC), total annual economic activity supported by use of the Eastern Trail is \$44.6 million, including \$32.1 million in sales, \$12.5 million in earnings, over \$1 million in incremental tax revenue, and 364 jobs supported in the region.

The outdoor recreation industry has long been key to the state’s economy; generating \$3 billion annually, ranking the Maine **5th in the country** in terms of percentage of GDP created by the sector. This industry is also an employment driver in the state- supporting more than 30,000 jobs, accounting for 4.9% of employment, \$460 million in direct spending, and generating \$548 million in state/local tax revenue annually.

Multi-use trail infrastructure boosts the economy by attracting new retailers and service providers, drawing more people to existing businesses, retaining and recruiting workforce, creating transportation options to housing and employment centers, and enticing bicycle and outdoor recreation tourism. The creation and marketing of a world-class trail network, seamlessly connecting Maine's most populous cities, towns, and communities, would be game-changing for Maine's economic future.

Fifth, the proposed interim rail trail use takes into account the fact that an alternative rail-with-trail design makes the construction cost of the project prohibitable. A rail-with-trail design with significant financial and environmental costs is unnecessary because there is no viable or identified freight or passenger service for this rail corridor.

Lastly, 54% of Maine's greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation; active transportation can provide zero-emission options, between where people live and work. With the emergence of electric bicycles or e-bikes, active transportation is an even more viable alternative. A regional multi-use trail network is complementary to expanding transit by providing critical first/last mile connections from where people live to transit, which will bolster ridership on existing lines and increase the potential service area for future rail expansion.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to support LD 290 and vote for an "ought to pass" Committee Report.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.