

Karin Orenstein
Yarmouth
LD 209

Karin Orenstein
231 Ryder Road
Yarmouth, Maine 04096

Re: Rep. Bell amendment to LD 209

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

My name is Karin Orenstein and I am a resident of Yarmouth and a property abutter of the railroad ROW. I am writing to testify in strong support of Representative Bell's proposed amendment to LD 209 "Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendation of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council."

I own and live on land abutting approximately 520' of the unused railroad tracks. Adding commuter rail service on those tracks would increase unwanted noise on my quiet, wooded property and create a danger for my children and animals, as well as those belonging to families on the other side of the tracks that divide our road. By contrast, a rail trail would give my children a safe way to bike into town and to school. Currently, they must bike part of the way on North Road. When they return, I make them walk their bikes against traffic rather than cross North Road twice, as the second crossing is below a rise in the road that blocks their view of southbound traffic. My husband and I would also gladly use a rail trail. We are not serious cyclists, just recreational ones. We took our bikes this summer to Cape Breton Island and Prince Edward Island where we biked on and marveled at their wonderful rail-trail systems and 0-2% grade that enabled us to keep going. I also regularly hike on area trails and would use a rail trail to bike to local conserved lands with trails.

Neither my husband nor I work outside the home or need regular transportation to Portland or Lewiston-Auburn. Therefore, we have a great deal to gain from a rail trail (child safety, increased opportunities for healthy recreational activity), while a commuter line will negatively impact our quiet enjoyment of our property and our family's safety. Likewise, a rail trail will increase our property value, while a commuter rail will decrease it.

I recognize that my family represents one data point. So let me share my observations about the current use of the railroad tracks. Although entry onto the railroad property is technically disallowed, the reality is that people already make use of it for recreation. I cross over the tracks to leave my property and regularly see walkers, some with dogs, making their way across the railroad ties. And in the winter, I see cross-country ski tracks. Thus, there is a built-in community waiting for a rail trail so they can continue and increase their use of the corridor for healthy recreation. In addition, because a rail trail would be universally accessible, we can anticipate new use by seniors and by community members using wheelchairs or pushing strollers. And then there's all the bike riders, especially kids and their parents, who would prefer a direct, safe, car-free route, that happens to be surrounded by woods and have dedicated bridges for crossing rivers.

Taking a step further back to consider the project more broadly, a rail trail would benefit my community and match its values. Yarmouth has just completed an extensive visioning project that is part of our town's effort to draft a new comprehensive plan. During this process, we created a draft vision statement reflecting our community's values. The first community value they recognized was, "We value the natural environment, including the numerous parks, open space preserves, rivers, and Casco Bay, and prioritize preserving and protecting these areas for enjoyment by all and as critical ecosystems." Throughout the visioning report there was mention of ensuring that residents had access to public transportation, referencing the BREEZ bus and encouraging bike use, but there was no specific

mention of rail service as a way to achieve “regional connectivity.” I don't believe there is a strong enough interest in rail service to or from Yarmouth to justify having a second train crossing through our small town. Use of the CSX line for passenger trains or adding intercity bus service could satisfy the needs of longer distance commuters between L-A and Portland.

A rail trail would be consistent with the Yarmouth community's value of protecting the natural environment and promoting access to it. It would also support local small businesses such as shops and cafes that could be frequented not only by residents enjoying the rail trail but visiting cyclists who decide to take a break in Yarmouth's picturesque village. By being part of a larger rail trail system, Yarmouth could appeal to tourists in the same way that small towns along Canada's rail trails appealed to my husband and I during our summer travels.

In closing, for the reasons stated above, as a property abutter, recreational cyclist, parent of kids who ride bikes independently in town, and Yarmouth resident, my family and I strongly support conversion of the corridor to a recreational trail and oppose its use for commuter rail.

Thank you,
Karin Orenstein