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**Testimony in Opposition to LD 1750-Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Complete a Service Plan and Determine Scope of Work for the Restoration of Rail Use of the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor from Downtown Portland to Auburn**

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation  
January 30, 2024

Senator Chipman, Representative Crafts and members of the Committee on Transportation,

I am Eamonn Dundon, Director of Advocacy of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in our region who employ over 75,000 Mainers. We are submitting this written testimony today to express our organization's strong opposition to LD 1750. We came before this committee nearly a year ago to oppose LD 860, and we are back today in the same posture because these pieces of legislation would advance an expensive folly that distracts from practical and feasible solutions at our fingertips to improve public transportation in Maine.

Importantly, this legislation runs counter to the process established in Maine for the evaluation of unused rail corridors. Public Law 21, Chapter 239 established a Rail Use Advisory Council to look at future options for this corridor, and seven of the 15 appointed members of that commission recommended an interim trail use for this corridor without rail, with just 5 of the members supporting rail<sup>1</sup>. This process also included cost estimates for the range of options on this corridor that concluded rail use would cost at least \$274MM. Advancing this legislation that contravenes the plurality of that commission would upend a deliberative public process that included a broad array of commission members and extensive public engagement.

Additionally, this proposal has no foundation in the regional Metropolitan Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTP) put together by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in these two regions. We participated in the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System's LRTP completed in 2023<sup>2</sup>. This is an extensive document outlining all the planned transportation expenditures for the next 20+ years, and nowhere in the either the fiscally constrained project list, or the aspirational project list, was rail service between Portland and Auburn prioritized. This means that of the \$920.44MM we will spend on public transportation in our region through 2045, and the at least \$192.43MM we would like to spend if discretionary resources are identified, rail between these two cities was not contemplated for expenditure. In fact, the \$274MM price tag for rail on this corridor exceeds the entire aspirational project list of \$192.43MM which includes projects like revamped and new stations on the existing Downeaster, increased bus frequency, and new transit hubs for existing transit service providers.

Similarly, this project is not identified as a priority in the public transit plan of the Androscoggin Transportation Resource Center (ATRC), the Lewiston Auburn MPO. ARTC's Lewiston Auburn Transit Study<sup>3</sup> from 2021 lists 25 needs to address transit demand in the region, and none of those include rail service between Lewiston/Auburn and Portland. Additionally, the study lists 17 long-term projects, and again, passenger rail does not make this list. In fact, the study expressly recommends four daily bus trips between Lewiston/Auburn and Portland using a Ford Cutaway van at a cost of \$166,504 in annual operating costs. If that service were to

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<sup>1</sup> [Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council Summary and Recommendations](#), Maine DOT, 2023

<sup>2</sup> [Connect 2045](#), Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System, 2022

<sup>3</sup> [Lewiston-Auburn Transit Study](#), Androscoggin Transportation Resource Center, 2021



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Regional Chamber of Commerce

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be introduced, it could be run for over 1,600 years for the same cost as the capital construction costs of introducing Class 3 rail service between the cities.

Finally, I would note that we were pleased to participate in Maine DOT's study process for bus service between Portland and Lewiston/Auburn<sup>4</sup>. The study determined that rail would cost anywhere from \$264-\$349MM in capital costs, with an additional \$15-20MM annually in operations and maintenance costs. In contrast, bus service on this route will have start-up capital costs of \$1.6MM, with annually recurring O&M costs of \$0.9-\$1.2MM. This project is proceeding and will be an important barometer of transit demand between these destinations. The committee should not advance other transit solutions until the demand and efficacy of this far less expensive option is determined over the pilot phase of implementation for this service.

We thank you for your time and commitment to all Mainers, and we ask you to vote Ought Not to Pass on this legislation.

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<sup>4</sup> [Lewiston-Auburn to Portland Commuter Bus Implementation Study](#), Maine DOT, 2023