



January 29, 2024

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1750

Greetings distinguished members of the Committee on Transportation:

My name is James Tassé, and I am the assistant director for the Bicycle Coalition of Maine (BCM). Our mission is to make Maine better and safer for bicycling and walking. On behalf of BCM, and aligned with the views of our more than 20,000 members and supporters, this testimony is submitted in OPPOSITION to LD 1750.

The BCM supports passenger rail as a transit solution where it is viable and cost-effective. We do not support spending money for feasibility studies on railroad lines that cannot sustain passenger rail. And we cannot support the MaineDOT planning to restore service on a line that was recently recommended for conversion into a trail.

Recent studies have found that Maine cannot at this time support passenger rail. Passenger rail service decreased decades ago to the point where it was not feasible to keep trains running on most rail lines, and this has not changed, according to current data.

The Bicycle Coalition of Maine believes that feasibility study dollars might be better spent on building actual transportation facilities. We also are concerned that these calls for more study or service restoration are little more than tactics to further delay the construction of trails on fallow railroad corridors.

This rail corridor has been the subject of a "Rail Use Advisory Council" (RUAC) process which concluded in January of 2023. A majority of members of the Berlin Subdivision Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) concluded that the unused rail line between Portland and Lewiston-Auburn should be converted to an interim trail. The development of a service plan for this line will only slow down action on creating the trail that the majority of residents in the area would like to see built, and which the group dedicated to studying the issue recommended.

We also continue to oppose discussion of "Rail with Trail" (RWT) on this corridor, as it is generally prohibitively expensive. The RUAC study noted a cost of about

\$47 million for just a stone dust trail, but that cost balloons to \$90 million for Rail with Trail. Our position is that RWT is so expensive that nothing is likely to happen if that option is pursued. Building a trail on this corridor is the most cost-effective choice for restoring it to public use in the short to medium term.

The BCM is supportive of any mode that reduces reliance on single occupant automobiles, and thus we in principle support rail. But we also believe that if there was a chance that the market economy could make a profit running trains in Maine, it would have happened already. We further believe that if MaineDOT felt that the passenger rail was worth the huge public investment, it would have happened already. Conducting endless feasibility studies only postpones interim conversion of unused railroad corridors into trails, wastes money, and thwarts the decision of legislatively-directed processes like the RUACs.

Thus we recommend and request an ONTP report on LD 1750. We further recommend that the committee direct the MaineDOT to implement the majority recommendation of the Berlin Subdivision RUAC.

Thank you for your time and service to the people of Maine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "James C. Tassé".

James C. Tassé
Bicycle Coalition of Maine

James Tasse
Bicycle Coalition of Maine
LD 1750

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