



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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**Testimony in Support of LD 29, LD 30, and LD 511, To Implement the Recommendations
of the Rail Use Advisory Councils**

To the Committee on Transportation

by Josh Caldwell, NRCM

March 4, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Josh Caldwell, and I am here on behalf of the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) in support of all three bills before you today to implement Rail Use Advisory Council recommendations: LD 29, LD 30, and LD 511. NRCM is Maine's leading nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting Maine's environment, with nearly 24,000 supporters statewide and beyond.

If passed, these bills would authorize the construction of 58 miles of multi-use trails separated from vehicle traffic connecting cities and towns in Maine with a combined population of more than 151,000 people. This is an enormous opportunity to advance Maine's active transportation infrastructure by connecting communities and economic centers, providing recreational opportunities for visitors and residents, increasing safety for bicyclists and pedestrians, and reducing car dependency and associated climate pollution.

The economic impact of safe multi-use trails separated from car traffic is monumental. We don't have to look far to see that multi-use paths such as the ones proposed here generate significant economic return for surrounding communities. A 2019 study found that the annual economic impact of the Eastern Trail spanning from Kittery to Portland is more than \$44 million, hosting more than 250,000 users annually.¹ Visitors and residents alike use the trail to exercise, recreate, commute, and access local businesses and outdoor destinations.

The safety benefits of these trails are also significant. Maine's roads have seen an uptick in pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities in recent years, and one part of the solution is creating spaces

¹ Economic Impact Study for the Eastern Trail, <https://www.easterntail.org/the-economic-impact-of-the-eastern-trail/>

where active transportation users can travel without needing to compete with cars for the same space.²

Further, transportation is by far the top contributor to climate pollution here in Maine. Providing active transportation infrastructure connecting some of Maine's largest population centers will incentivize and enable people-powered transportation in a growing region rather than investments in polluting car infrastructure.

We would like to see the full 25 miles of the Portland to Auburn corridor authorized for trail use as is called for by LD 511, but we stand in support of both LD 511 and LD 30.

We understand the desire to maintain these corridors for future rail use, and we are supportive of an interconnected multimodal transportation system that allows for a diverse array of non-polluting transportation options, including passenger rail. However, in this case, the best interim use of these corridors is clearly accessible multi-use paths, as affirmed by the RUAC recommendations. The Maine Rail Preservation Act ensures that Maine's rail corridors will remain preserved for future rail use and that any construction on those corridors is interim in nature. There is a big opportunity here to invest in community-connecting infrastructure while leaving the door open for future rail use, and we think this is the best path forward this session.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 29, LD 30, and LD 511. Thank you for your time and consideration.

² Maine Highway Safety Reports Uptick in Pedestrian Deaths Last Year, <https://mainemorningstar.com/briefs/maine-highway-safety-reports-uptick-in-pedestrian-deaths-last-year/>