

March 4, 2025

Transportation Committee

Testimony in Opposition to LD 511

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Daniel Day, and I oppose LD 511 because it would permanently remove the possibility of future rail use along the Berlin Subdivision. While this bill frames track removal as an "interim" measure, history shows that once rails are gone, they rarely return. Even when there is demonstrated interest in rail restoration, such as the owner of Conway Scenic Railroad expressing a desire to revive service on the Mountain Division in Maine, interim trails have still been approved. This bill would make future rail service significantly harder, if not impossible, to restore.

There is a clear demand for rail access in the region. The Rockland Branch, for example, received five proposals last year when the state issued an RFP, despite losing its only major freight customer. Across northern New England, a section of the former Mountain Division in New Hampshire and Vermont is about to be reactivated after decades of inactivity. Given this growing interest, I support an upcoming bill from Rep. Cheryl Golek that would direct the Maine DOT to issue RFPs for all state-owned rail lines that are not in use. This would allow the state to assess potential interest, potential revenue, and the level of private investment available.

I manage Wheels on Rails, a railbike tour company with locations in Traverse City, Michigan, and Oklahoma City. I am interested in expanding the railbike tour industry in Maine through a new company. Railbikes, which are pedal-powered vehicles that seat up to four people, are a proven recreational attraction that supports tourism and economic growth. Their lightweight design requires minimal track maintenance, and their slow speeds allow them to coexist safely alongside trails in a rail-with-trail configuration. Unlike LD 511, which does not include funding for trail construction, railbike operations could generate revenue that helps fund both rail preservation and trail development.

By keeping tracks in place, Maine retains future transportation options while allowing immediate economic benefits through railbike tourism. I urge you to reject LD 511, as well as LD 30 and LD 29, and instead seek proposals for Maine's rail lines.

Sincerely,

Daniel Day

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