

Joseph Leonard
Bangor
LD 511

Dear Members of the Transportation Committee,

I respectfully submit my testimony in opposition to the proposed bill directing the conversion of the Berlin Subdivision rail corridor into an interim bicycle and pedestrian trail. As a long-time advocate for passenger and freight rail in Maine, I have witnessed firsthand the economic, environmental, and social benefits that a robust rail network brings to our state.

First and foremost, it is imperative to recognize that nearly 50% of Maine's carbon emissions originate from personal vehicles. Shifting our focus toward rail transportation offers a more sustainable and cost-effective alternative. Unlike the costly and congested highway expansions observed in states like California, rail infrastructure has consistently proven to be an efficient means to move large volumes of people and goods over long distances. This is especially true when compared to continually investing in car-centric transportation systems, which further exacerbate traffic congestion and environmental degradation.

A multimodal transportation system that integrates rail, bus, and other options is essential for fostering economic growth across our state. Maintaining and enhancing rail corridors not only provides a much-needed alternative to automobile dependence but also supports the development of businesses in central and northern Maine. Reliable rail services can lower transportation costs for freight and improve connectivity for communities that are currently isolated. This connectivity is critical for ensuring that residents of northern Maine are not left behind as economic opportunities flourish in southern Maine and throughout New England.

Furthermore, modernizing our transportation network to include state-of-the-art rail services would offer residents an option for mobility that aligns with practices in other developed nations. A well-integrated system enhances access to jobs, education, and healthcare, while also promoting tourism and overall quality of life. The benefits of such a system extend beyond mere convenience; they are a vital component of a forward-thinking, environmentally responsible, and economically robust state infrastructure.

In conclusion, converting our state-owned rail corridors into bicycle and pedestrian trails represents a short-sighted approach that risks undermining Maine's potential for 21st-century transportation. Such a decision would not only squander our investment in sustainable infrastructure but also irreversibly harm the economic and social fabric of northern Maine, further disconnecting these communities from southern Maine and the broader New England region. I urge you to vote against this bill and instead support initiatives that preserve and modernize our valuable rail assets.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joseph Leonard