



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

PO Box 3760
Portland, ME 04104
Phone: (207) 761-5616
www.sierraclub.org/maine

To: Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
From: Andrew Blunt, Sierra Club Maine
Date: February 25, 2025
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 487:** *Resolve, Directing the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority to Apply for Federal Funding for the Purpose of Identifying the Rail Corridor Connecting Portland to Orono as an Intercity Passenger Rail Corridor*

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

I am testifying on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members and supporters nation-wide. As we seek to build a more resilient and sustainable transportation system in Maine that better connects our communities, we urge you to support all efforts to expand passenger rail service, including L.D. 487.

This bill requests that Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) apply for federal funding through the Corridor Identification and Development Program at the Federal Railroad Administration to identify a rail corridor connecting Portland to Orono as an intercity passenger rail corridor.

Applications for this federal program are a typical first step for state and local governments, as well as regional passenger rail agencies, to develop new passenger rail. The funds cover eligible activities related to the initiation of development efforts including the development of a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a service development plan for new or existing rail corridors. Given the costs associated with extensive planning activities related to passenger rail, utilizing federal funding when available is a prudent and necessary step towards establishing new corridors and improving existing ones.

L.D. 487 explicitly names extending service to four of Maine's largest municipalities north of Portland: Lewiston, Auburn, Waterville, and Bangor, with service extending to Orono for service to the University of Maine. These are some of Maine's key population centers, our largest engines of economic growth, and are anticipated to remain so over time. Demographically speaking, Auburn in particular is expected to experience significant population growth over the next ten years, who would strongly benefit from this service.¹

¹https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/sites/maine.gov.dafs.economist/files/inline-files/Maine%20Population%20Outlook%20to%202030_0.pdf

Increasing connectivity between Portland and Lewiston/Auburn has been long-discussed, and would bring significant economic benefits to both cities and surrounding towns, specifically in terms of workforce and commerce connectivity. In addition, this route provides clear potential benefit for students across Maine at UMaine, Thomas College, Bates College, and Colby College, who would all benefit from increased connectivity, particularly to and from Portland, where many students seek summer training opportunities and internships.

Overall, Maine's public transportation service is currently failing to meet the needs of Maine people, and passenger rail would help to bridge gaps in service. A conservative estimate suggests that current public transit programs meet only 11% of Maine's total need – 3 million out of 28 million trips per year.² Additionally, increased transportation choices, including passenger rail, can help reduce transportation costs for Maine families. Basic transportation expenses for most Maine households exceed \$1,000 per month – higher than the costs of other necessities such as food and housing for many families.³ For a robust transit future that prioritizes the health, safety, and cost of transportation to Maine families, we need to take an all of the above approach, including serious consideration of passenger rail.

Maine has a strong history of passenger rail. In fact, in 1920 there were 13 daily passenger trains between Portland and Waterville.⁴ In many ways, L.D. 487 is a reclamation of that history and the value of collective mobility that it provided. Reestablishing passenger rail is a noncontroversial policy decision, displayed by the rare and impressive bipartisan support for this bill. That is because passenger rail is a nonpartisan investment in our communities that drives economic growth, job access, and accelerates our sustainability targets. There is something for folks of all ideologies and political proclivities to support about passenger rail.

This bill is a modest start at building a more robust passenger rail network in Maine, but the potential here is incredibly significant. Together, let's take this important first step towards establishing a more well-connected Maine, and a more resilient transportation future.

We encourage the committee to support L.D. 487, and steward the future of passenger rail in Maine.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Blunt
Legislative and Political Strategist
Sierra Club Maine

² <https://www.jtgfoundation.org/2025/01/data-brief-shows-gaps-in-maine-families-access-to-transportation/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/ruac/lowerroad/docs/2023/Appendix%20F_Lower%20Road%20History.pdf