



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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Testimony in Support of LD 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

To the Committee on Transportation

by Josh Caldwell, NRCM

March 6, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Josh Caldwell, and I am the transportation policy advocate for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I stand here today in support of LD 487. NRCM is Maine's leading nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting Maine's environment, with nearly 24,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am also the Vice-Chair of the Public Transit Advisory Council and serve on the Transportation Working Group of the Maine Climate Council.

If passed, LD 487 would direct that an application be submitted to secure federal funding to study the feasibility of passenger rail connecting Portland and Bangor. This is an essential first step in understanding the costs and benefits associated with significant investment in passenger rail and should be pursued this year.

Transportation produces half of the carbon pollution that causes climate change in Maine — more than any other sector in Maine, by a long shot. In fact, reducing emissions from our transportation sector is Plan A in Maine's Climate Action Plan. This requires investments in less-polluting modes of transportation, like public transit and active transportation. Studies by the

U.S. Department of Transportation have shown that passenger rail travel results in 20-25% of the greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile compared to personal vehicle travel.¹²

Providing reliable options for Mainers to get around beyond personal vehicles will not only reduce our annual emissions. New data shows that the average cost of owning a vehicle is more than \$12,000 per year.³ These high costs, along with other reasons like health issues, disability, or personal preference, are why at least 90,000 Mainers of driving age cannot or do not drive.⁴ More transportation options, like rail, alongside other investments in transit and active transportation infrastructure, will lessen transportation cost burden for families and provide greater access for residents and visitors alike to Maine business centers, educational institutions, and recreational areas.

The Amtrak Downeaster recorded record ridership last year, and transit ridership more broadly is rebounding from pandemic lows. As the cost of car ownership continues to rise for Maine individuals and families, transit is becoming a more necessary and appealing option for commuters, students, tourists, and families alike.

The route under consideration has the potential to connect Maine's three largest cities with passenger rail, providing route continuity from Bangor to Boston. It would also connect several of Maine's leading colleges and universities, serving a population that otherwise has limited mobility in our state, but has great potential for peer-to-peer learning and exchange. This line would also provide access to Maine's interior businesses and recreational opportunities without increasing congestion or wear and tear on roadways.

This bill shows movement from previous iterations that would have required a financial commitment of around \$20,000 from the state. LD 487 does not require that state commitment. Further, the Corridor Identification and Development Program under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is set to expire next year, so the 2025 application window may be the last

¹ U.S. DOT, *Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Four Real World InterCity Passenger Trips: A Comparison of Rail, Air, and Road Travel Modes by City Pair*, December 2022, https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2022-12/CO2EmissionsByMode_FinalReport_FRA_12.2.22_PDFa.pdf

² U.S. DOT, *Public Transit's Role in Responding to Climate Change*, January 2010, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/PublicTransportationsRoleInRespondingToClimateChange2010.pdf>

³ AAA, *Your Driving Costs: The Price of New Car Ownership Continues to Climb*, September 5, 2024, <https://newsroom.aaa.com/2024/09/aaa-your-driving-costs-the-price-of-new-car-ownership-continues-to-climb/>

⁴ John T. Gorman Foundation, *Data Brief Shows Gaps in Maine Families' Access to Transportation*, January 2024, <https://www.jtgfoundation.org/2025/01/data-brief-shows-gaps-in-maine-families-access-to-transportation/>

opportunity for some time to take advantage of federal resources and gather the data necessary to make major transportation decisions for Maine.

Passenger rail is a big investment; however, our transportation system is not sustainable in its current form from an environmental or cost perspective. Research shows that investments in public transit pay off. According to the American Public Transit Association, every dollar invested in public transit leads to five dollars in economic returns.⁵ This application has the potential to set a solid foundation of understanding so that we can make informed decisions about the future of passenger rail in Maine.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 487. Thank you for your time and consideration.

⁵ Economic Impact of Public Transit Investment, <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Economic-Impact-Public-Transit-2020.pdf>