



PORTLAND
Regional Chamber of Commerce

93 Exchange Street Portland, ME 04101 • (207) 772-2811

chamber@portlandregion.com • PortlandRegion.com

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Testimony in Opposition to 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

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

March 6, 2025

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

I am Eamonn Dundon, the Director of Advocacy for the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in across region, collectively employing over 75,000 Mainers. I submit this testimony today on behalf of our organization to express our strong opposition to LD 487.

The Chamber is a strong proponent of frequent, reliable, and sustainable public transportation. In fact, it is one of our top three policy priorities. I work extensively with municipal, agency, and non-profit partners through my service on the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System's Regional Transportation Advisory Committee to advance this goal. However, the proposal before you today is a costly solution to an ill-defined problem—one that would weaken Maine's existing public transportation network while providing little tangible benefit to the vast majority of our residents.

The Bangor Transit Propensity Study¹, completed by VHB for Maine DOT in January 2023, provides clear evidence that further studies of this corridor for passenger rail service are an imprudent use of the limited public funds available to support public transit. The study's multiple methodologies demonstrate that by 2040, the highest potential demand for rail along this corridor would reach just 88,000 trips annually. Meanwhile, the minimum estimated cost to construct rail service in this corridor is \$628MM. For context, the Amtrak Downeaster—at its pre-pandemic peak in 2019—carried nearly 575,000 passengers. . This means that even under the most optimistic projects, the path LD 487 proposes sending us down would result in spending over \$600MM to achieve ridership that is just 15% of the Downeaster at its peak. Moreover, Maine's population density is far below what is needed to sustain heavy rail expansion. Research indicates that successful heavy rail investments require population densities of approximately 11,500 people per square kilometer, whereas Portland—the densest city in Maine—has just 1,200 people per square kilometer.

While this legislation does not initially commit state funds, participation in the Corridor ID program would eventually require significant state matching funds—10% for Step 2 activities and 20% for Step 3 activities. These funds would come from the multi-modal transportation fund, diverting scarce resources away from critical investments in Maine's existing public transit system.

For example, the Public Transportation Advisory Council's 2025 report²—recently received by this committee—identified \$108MM in unmet capital needs for public transit system over the next five years and \$8.9MM in annual unmet operational needs. Before committing significant state dollars to heavy rail expansion with high ongoing subsidy requirements, we must first ensure that our existing public transit system is adequately funded and improved.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 487. Thank you for your time and your dedication to serving all Mainers.

¹ [Bangor Transit Propensity Study](#)

² [Public Transportation Advisory Council Biennial Report to Governor and Legislature](#)