

March 30, 2025

To: Sen. Nangle, Rep. Crafts, and distinguished members of the Joint Transportation Committee:

I am Peter Cole of Topsham, president of the Maine Rail Group (MRG), and we oppose one provision of LD 154, specifically Section 7 of the bill.

Section 7 would remove from the State Railroad Preservation and Assistance Act, a requirement that the Department of Transportation consults with “a regional economic planning entity” before “dismantling or changing of state-owned track for a non-rail use.”

This requirement is clearly in addition to, and not instead of the second provision, which concerns recommendations from “a regional transportation advisory committee.” This second requirement has been met through the Rail Use Advisory Committees (RUACs) that have already reported on several different state-owned railroad lines. To date, the first requirement has not been met.

LD 154’s summary describes the regional economic planning requirement as “an outmoded reference” in existing law. We strongly disagree with that assessment.

How can this requirement be “outmoded” when the statute also requires DOT to determine that “removal of a specific length of rail owned by the State will not have a negative impact on a region or on future economic opportunities for that region”?

MRG believes this means that an economic impact study *must* be conducted so that the Transportation Committee and the entire Legislature can have a complete and comprehensive picture of the effects of the proposed railroad removal. The RUAC process was not designed to accomplish this purpose, so the first requirement in the statute remains unfulfilled.

At a time when the economic development needs of rural Maine have never been more pressing plus there are several new proposals for rail use of state-owned lines, we should not be removing safeguards against the unwise forfeiture of valuable transportation assets owned by the State of Maine.

Along with other members of the rail community you will hear from, the Maine Rail Group urges the Transportation Committee to amend LD 154 by deleting Section 7.

Respectfully,
Peter Cole
President, Maine Rail Group