

Paul Callahan
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LD 676

Good morning. I regret not being able to attend the committee meeting live for this issue and very much appreciate the ability to contribute in this manner.

I come to this topic with a unique perspective toward both sides of it. I grew up supported by my father's nearly 30-year career at the controls of trains. I remain a proponent and fan of this mode of transportation. For 26 years I lived next to a rail line that became the second busiest volume Rail-Trail in the U.S., and was a municipal government liaison to two bicycle committees overseeing it's use.

As a New Englander who has visited family, friends, gone camping, and otherwise travelled to Maine and New Hampshire regularly for 59 years, I can honestly say that the outdoor amenities and opportunities are near the top of my family's list of reasons to do so. The region has excelled at preserving open spaces, natural beauty, and history so well.

As railroads have yielded to roadways for much of the transport of people and goods over the decades, many lines have been converted to shared use paths and seen very successful second lives. I continue to ride rail trails regularly as a main source of exercise and feel that for me personally, the safety they provide as a corridor away from vehicular traffic make them tremendous assets.

Having shared the above thoughts.... I do feel that the situation with the Mountain Division line between Conway and Portland represents the rare opportunity to promote and preserve differently. Where many other converted tracks have been dormant for years with little or no prospect for use, this line connects directly to an operator with the proven ability to maintain, market, and impact the economy of the area for decades. Conway Scenic Railroad has consistently expanded equipment and operations with an eye on even more progress in the future (be it tourism or freight benefits or both). I feel it would be short sighted to treat this line as one that should follow suit converting to pavement. Easy searching shows 35 existing rail trails in Maine and over 40 in New Hampshire. Four hundred, and five hundred eighty-four miles respectively. New England boasts over 1,000 miles in its rail trail network. Add to that many conservation and recreational trails that were not former rail lines and the opportunities are great and growing. With only 2 scenic railroads in Maine and 6 in New Hampshire currently, the future use of this particular section of trackage represents the far less common opportunity to support what trains provide to our region. Having an established railroad operator that is willing to partner in this endeavor is not something we are likely to see an increase of. Please vote "Ought not to pass on LD 676".

I thank each of you for your time and consideration on this matter!
All the best,
Paul Callahan