



April 23, 2025

Senator Tim Nangle, Senate Chair
Representative Lydia Crafts, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

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Re: Testimony of TrainRiders Northeast Neither For Nor Against LD 1451, An Act to Strengthen Coordination of Community Transportation

Dear Senator Nangle and Representative Crafts:

I am the President of TrainRiders Northeast. TrainRiders is the grassroots citizens' organization that was the driving force behind the initiation of the Downeaster passenger rail service between Brunswick and Boston and continues to strongly support that service to this day. It also supports improvements and expansion of passenger rail service in Maine and throughout the Northeast, where such expansion is rationally justifiable given current and projected economic and social conditions.

TrainRiders Northeast is neither for nor against the passage of LD 1451. Improving the "efficiency, accessibility and availability of transportation for transportation-disadvantaged populations" is a laudable endeavor. Quite frankly, the Downeaster Passenger Rail Service does just that already, not merely in those parts of the State through which it runs, but also in other parts of the State from which those who have issues with accessing transportation can reach that service. Currently, the Downeaster has a 50% off fare for those 65 years of age and older and provides a 30% discount for those who use that service for transportation to and from medical appointments. Additionally, it provides a 50% discount to passengers with a disability and to Medicare cardholders. Finally, it provides roll-on, roll-off service for those with wheelchairs and other disabilities, something that is not duplicated by other transportation modes. On the other hand, TrainRiders cannot now say whether the creation of the Council proposed by LD 1451 will be effective in providing further support for those who now face transportation deficiencies. Therefore, it takes no position on whether this bill should be enacted.

TrainRiders does, however, have one comment on the bill. The bill, in both its original and amended forms, does not provide for any direct

representation of passenger rail services on the proposed Council. True, that Council would include a representative of the Commissioner of Transportation, but MDOT is concerned with the interaction of various modes and spends most of its time and energy on matters other than passenger rail. Given the Downeaster's current involvement in the provision of services to passengers who may have issues with obtaining transportation services, a representative of passenger rail should be included in the Council. This should be someone from the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority or from the passenger rail advocacy community. Failure to include such a person on the Council could, as is so often the case, result in passenger rail services being ignored in the Council's analysis and actions.

For these reasons, as well as others, TrainRiders does not take a position on the passage of this bill. This Committee, however, should consider whether the bill, if it is to be passed, should be amended in response to the foregoing comments.

TrainRiders apologizes for its inability to attend the public hearing on this bill, which is now scheduled for April 23. As always, TrainRiders appreciates this opportunity to provide the Committee with its comments and stands ready to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,


F. Bruce Sleeper, President
TrainRiders Northeast
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