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**To:** Maine Legislature Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
**From:** Maine Rail Transit Coalition, Tony Donovan, Managing Director  
**Date:** April 26, 2023  
**Re:** **In Opposition to LD 1156** An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development and Maintenance of Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Active Transportation

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Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Tony Donovan, I am a Portland resident and founding Member of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC). The Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC) lobbies for federal, state, and local policies that promote equitable funding of transit services for all. MRTC's vision is a comprehensive transit design connecting passenger rail service with local transit systems to promote economic and environmental sustainability.

**The MRTC is here in Opposition to LD 1156 [An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development and Maintenance of Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Active Transportation.](#)**

I write this on Earth Day 2023. Earth Day, founded at a most critical time in American modern history when everyone, across all spectrums of politics, gender, demographics, and geography came together to recognize human impacts on the natural environment and how our acts can be doing harm to ourselves.

We understand that the off-road ATV and snowmobile industries are great economic boon to this State. I am very aware that speaking out against these modes of recreation sparks pushbacks from major, very influential interests. So, I will not dwell on the harm these machines do to that natural environment we hold so dear. **However, the MRTC is opposed to carbon based recreational use of trails, leading to our opposition to this bond.**

We have a problem one specific use of this bond in this section of LD 1156:

Sec. 6. Disbursement of bond proceeds. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry shall work with the Department of Transportation in evaluating and making grant decisions on proposals that would advance the Department of Transportation's statewide active transportation plan.

Maine's Railroads were purchased by the state through Bonds issued specifically for the eventual restoration of train services, passenger, and freight. Not for trails.



**The one thing that is critical to understand is when a railroad infrastructure is torn out for the purpose of a recreational trail, the environmental impacts of motorized uses go beyond the pollution and impacts on waters and soils. State funding for the removal of these vital transportation infrastructure assets destroys any hope for a future that offers a economical and environmental alternative to cars. Cars, which according to the Governors Climate council contribute 54% of pollution in Maine.**

The state funded the removal of 88 miles of railroad serving the Downeast communities from Acadia to Calais. The Sunrise Trail, built under the auspices that it would be a place for healthy recreation, is now actually a high-speed ATV and snowmobile route. The long-term impacts of removing a segment of the statewide railway system may not be realized for years. But it is certain no freight will operate on this corridor ever again, much less passengers.

The MeDOT new Active Transportation Plan references conversion of state-owned "inactive" railroads to recreational trails throughout the document. MeDOT has hired a staff person to research and implement this policy. MeDOT has budgeted over \$11 million for the new Active Transportation Plan.

This is reflective of the current, well-organized movement by trail advocates to rip up railroads for recreational trails. Maine trail advocates seek to join the so-called successes of the national Rails to Trails Conservancy that has to date removed 12,000 miles of railroad infrastructure in the country. Maine has been on their list for a long time.

Unitil it is firmly established that Maine's railroads have no use for train service, it is our position that no taxpayer bonds should be used for removal of the railroads. In fact, we suggest just the opposite. Transportation bonding should be used to leverage the billions of federal infrastructures dollars to restore Maine-owned railroads, and there are several legislative acts in this 131<sup>st</sup> session that seek to accomplish this, including LD 406, which directs the MeDOT to establish a Vision Plan for train use of the certain state-owned railroad corridors.

**It is our position that LD 1156 be Amended to exclude any expenditures on the following railroads:**

- **The St. Lawrence & Atlantic / Berlin Subdivision, 30 miles from Portland to Auburn/Lewiston**
- **Lower Road, 40 miles from Brunswick to Augusta**
- **Mountain Division, 55 miles from Portland to Fryeburg**
- **Rockland Branch, 60 miles from Brunswick to Rockland**

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*Train Time*