



Route 113 Corridor Committee  
Standish-Baldwin-Hiram-Brownfield-Fryeburg

December 16, 2009

Nathan Moulton, Manager of Rail Transportation  
Maine Department of Transportation  
16 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0016

Dear Nate:

I am writing to submit public comment on the State Rail Plan on behalf of the Route 113 Corridor Committee.

The Route 113 Corridor Committee is comprised of appointed representatives from the Towns of Standish, Baldwin, Hiram, Brownfield, and Fryeburg who meet on a bimonthly basis to promote regional collaboration in economic development. From 2004 to 2006, the committee organized nine public forums attended by hundreds of residents to generate ideas for improving the regional economy. On January 17, 2008, the group adopted a regional economic development strategy that calls for us to “champion the restoration of rail service on the Mountain Division line” and to seek resources to “construct the Mountain Division trail in a manner compatible with freight and regularly scheduled passenger rail service.” On July 8, 2009, we adopted a resolution to “support the eventual full restoration of the Mountain Division Rail Line to Class III or higher freight and commuter rail service, while recognizing that it may be a phased development starting with bringing the line up to Class II standards which would initially provide freight and passenger excursion service.”

We applaud your efforts to create a state plan that will identify and prioritize critical rail corridors in Maine to capitalize on future funding opportunities. We believe that the Mountain Division meets the criteria you have drafted to be designated as a critical corridor.

**Enhance passenger/freight mobility:** Restoration of the Mountain Division will re-establish a historic link between Portland and the Mount Washington Valley that will benefit businesses, visitors, and residents throughout the state.

*Freight service.* According to estimates prepared by HNTB, the rail line has the potential to move up to 1.3 million tons of freight, removing up to 55,000 trucks per year from major roads, thus improving safety, reducing congestion, and saving us money in maintenance and repaving costs.

*Excursion service.* According to estimates prepared by the Greater Portland Council of Governments, excursion service may attract 35,000 residents and visitors to take a scenic tour of the Saco River Valley, hike in the White Mountains, attend the Fryeburg Fair, canoe the Saco River, enjoy a Sea Dogs, Pirates or Red Claws game, or bicycle or cross country ski on the trail back to the metro area.

*Commuter service.* According to economist Charlie Colgan, the suburbs west of Portland will absorb most the population growth in York and Cumberland counties over the next 25 years. Routes 25, 302, and 114, all of which parallel the Mountain Division, contain 11 intersections that

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operate at a level of service E or F. Commuter service will allow residents to get to work without driving alone, saving fuel and reducing carbon emissions.

**Maintain/enhance service to key industries:** The Mountain Division will serve the state's vital wood products industry, including pulp and paper. Currently, the rail line serves the SAPPI mill in Westbrook, the only paper mill left in Southern Maine. The line runs another 45 miles through the white pine forests of the upper Saco River Valley. These forests are still a key resource to attract future businesses, including manufacturers of wood pellets for residential and commercial heating.

The Mountain Division will also serve Maine's number one industry – tourism. According to the Maine Office of Tourism, one third of all trips to Maine, or 13.5 million per year, include time in Portland. Visitors arrive by all modes - car, air, rail, ferry, and cruise ship. Dubbed "from Ports to Peaks," excursion service on the Mountain Division will be a novel attraction for visitors.

**Coordinate with New England/Canadian enhancements:** The Mountain Division provides a key link between the coast of Portland and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. At the western terminus, the line runs to St. Johnsbury, Vermont, where it can connect to the Canadian rail system to serve the province of Quebec. On the eastern end, the line terminates at the Port of Portland, one of the busiest seaports on the East Coast. The line provides a direct connection to the Portland Transportation Center, where Amtrak service on the Downeaster operates five round trips per day to Boston. This route, which connects to the National Rail System, has been designated by the New England Governors as a High-Speed Rail Corridor. In the future, the station may also provide connecting service to Brunswick and Rockland. Adjacent to the terminus is Merrill's Marine Terminal, which handles break-bulk commodities from around the world. A spur on West Commercial Street could connect the Mountain Division to the International Marine Terminal. The terminus of the Mountain Division is approximately one mile from Ocean Gateway, where over 100,000 visitors arrive annually via ship, including high speed ferry from Nova Scotia. The line is also within 0.5 miles of the Portland International Jetport, Maine's busiest airport.

Thank you for your consideration of the Mountain Division as a critical corridor in the State's rail system.

Sincerely,

David Knapp  
Chairman, Route 113 Corridor Committee