

Mountain Division Rail Road

My name is Lou Stack. I was the Chair of the Route 113 Corridor Committee which was made up of appointed representatives from the five towns of Standish, Baldwin, Hiram, Brownfield and Fryeburg and ably assisted for ten years by the Greater Portland Council of Governments and its representative Caroline Paras. The Committee's mission was to bring economic development and good paying jobs to those five towns by restoring the Mountain Division Rail Line with trail where it could be accommodated.

A feasibility study funded by the Maine Department of Transportation done in 2007 indicated the restoration of the rail line which would include replacing only the ties and ballast while keeping the existing rails was deemed feasible. The Maine Department of Transportation supported the committee's application for a Federal Tiger Grant in 2009. Regrettably we lost out on that opportunity.

So now we have a group promoting trails which doesn't think economic development and good paying jobs for these five towns are important. The great majority of children born and raised in those towns after graduating from high school or college will continue to be required to look for work outside of the town in which he or she was born to get a good paying job.

The land for the rail corridor was initially acquired by eminent domain which required the return of the land to the abutters if the land was used for anything other than rail. When the State of Maine bought the rail line corridor, that stipulation was part of the deal and was codified in state law. If the state used the rail corridor for anything but rail, the land would revert to the abutters. That state law was amended in 2021 to allow other uses, Temporarily, until the rail line was leased to a rail user to move freight and or people.

It would be one thing if this trail group intended to keep within the spirit of this amended law, but it is apparent this group never wants to see the rail line restored. Rather than build their trail along side of the rail, leaving a ten-foot buffer between the rail and trail where it can be accommodated, they are intent on removing all the rails and rail roadbed in the towns of Baldwin, Hiram and Brownfield. This will kill the feasibility of restoring the line and they know it. They can call it the Temporary use of the rail corridor but, it essentially amounts to their permanent use of it and will eliminate the opportunity for economic growth that would create good paying jobs for the residents of those towns. They can avoid this apparent violation of the law by not removing the tracks and rail bed by building their trail alongside the existing rail bed and tracks. They have used as their excuse for removing the rails and railbed that the trail will be cheaper to build. You should know this trail as proposed will cheat you out of your chance for economic development and good paying jobs because they will not build it the right way.

A good example of rail with trail can be found in Fryeburg. The Route 113 Corridor Committee worked with the committee that developed that trail and we endorsed it.

Every resident of Baldwin, Hiram and Brownfield should know that the cost of maintenance, repair, security, trash removal and liability insurance for this trail will be the responsibility of each town.

So, I'm asking people in the towns of Baldwin, Hiram and Brownfield to contact your selectmen and state representatives and senators and tell them that you want to keep alive the possibility of restoring the Mountain Division Rail Line to benefit your sons and daughters in the future.

Thank you for your kind consideration of the above.