

SUSAN M. COLLINS  
MAINE

413 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904  
(202) 224-2523  
(202) 224-2893 (FAX)

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904  
January 26, 2023

COMMITTEES:  
APPROPRIATIONS  
HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS  
SELECT COMMITTEE  
ON INTELLIGENCE  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON AGING

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write in support of the application submitted by the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) to the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant program. MaineDOT's *Maine Woods to Water Rail Connection Project* will invest in critically needed resources for an area of Maine left economically disadvantaged since the shuttering of the Millinocket and East Millinocket paper mills.

The Millinocket region once served as a forest products hub, with Great Northern Paper Mill (GNP) in Millinocket, once the largest paper mill in the world, providing, along with other forest products companies, thousands of good paying jobs to the region. Following several years of economic uncertainty in the aftermath of the Great Recession, the Millinocket mill closed in 2008 and the East Millinocket mill closed in 2011, briefly reopened, and finally closed in 2014, eliminating the livelihoods of many families dependent on the well-paying mill jobs. Following closure, Our Katahdin, a volunteer-driven nonprofit economic development organization, purchased GNP. Our Katahdin has since made significant investments to the GNP site, creating the *One North* Industrial Park. These investments, which are frequently supported by federal monies, are aimed at attracting new businesses and bringing back well-paying jobs to the region.

MaineDOT's project will rehabilitate existing dormant track between Millinocket and Searsport that once serviced the Great Northern Paper Mill, and will construct a loop track that will serve the new anchor tenant in the *One North* Industrial Park now occupying the old mill location. The businesses that have signed lease agreements at *One North* require rail service to connect to global markets. These investments will also serve to entice new businesses to the area.

The \$56.8 million project, which includes an \$11.4 million match from MaineDOT and private business partners, supports business growth in Maine's forest products industry. One of *One North's* partner businesses, Highland Carbon Solutions LLC, an eco-friendly wood pellet manufacturer, requires reliable rail service to ship its wood pellets to seaports. This project provides a rail connection from the deep Maine woods to the deep-water port of Searsport, ensuring that companies like Highland Carbon Solutions have access to markets around the world.

I urge your careful consideration of this application, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations, and ask that you please notify me, or have your staff notify Trevor Hustus at (202) 224-2534, when a final decision has been made.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

[www.collins.senate.gov](http://www.collins.senate.gov)