



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT of NATURAL and CULTURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION of PARKS and RECREATION
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February 7, 2023

The Honorable James Gray
and the Senate Finance Committee
State House, Rm 103
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

RE: SB 55 making an appropriation for the Cannon Mountain tramway

Dear Chair Gray and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources ("Department"), Division of Parks and Recreation ("Division") regarding SB 55 making an appropriation for the Cannon Mountain tramway ("the Tram"). The Department appreciates the sponsors of the bill bringing this decision before the New Hampshire Legislature as the original Tram and Tram II were both legislative initiatives.

In 1934, Governor Winant assigned a committee to survey the White Mountains for the best site to install the first Tram in North America. Cannon Mountain was unanimously chosen. In 1937, legislation passed in support of financing the Tram and it was built with the help of 200 Civilian Conservation Corps workers, beginning the construction of Franconia Notch State Park. The first Tram opened to much fanfare in 1938 and operated for 42 years. With support from the legislature again, Tram II was licensed in February 1980 and has been in operation for 43 years.

The Tram is one of the leading daily spring-summer-fall attractions in all of New Hampshire. During the winter, the Tram services ski area clientele 3-4 days per week, providing supplemental access to Cannon's 4,080' summit. Since its installation in 1980, the current Tram has transported over 8 million park visitors.

After over 40 years in year-round operations, the Tram's primary systems such as the cars themselves, the hanger arms, the carriage trolleys, the electromechanical componentry, the motor and the braking systems need to be replaced. Each of these systems has an estimated remaining lifespan of 3-5 years.

In 2020, the Department presented to the Capital Budget Oversight Committee its forthcoming need to address the future of the Tram. In preparation, we solicited studies to explore various options, including the construction of a new tram versus a gondola system. Last February, we held a public information session and solicited public feedback about the options. There was overwhelming public support for replacement of the Tram versus installing a gondola. Further detail on these reports can be found on our website with a link provided at the bottom of this testimony.

The Department has reviewed various tram size, speed and other variables. We are working with the Department of Administrative Services, Division of Public Works, to establish Phase 1 engineering to allow us to be prepared if and when funding is appropriated. Timing is especially critical because the manufacturer of the current Tram has notified us that key replacement parts will no longer be available. We are concerned that without funding and a plan in place for replacement, that the Tram will not be in service in the near future. In consultation with the Department of Administrative Services, Division of Public Works, we have been provided an estimate of \$25 million to address the identified needs.

The Tram is a major feature of Franconia Notch State Park, a routinely top-rated state park in the country. People from all over the world travel to Franconia Notch State Park to walk the Flume Gorge, rent a paddle boat on Echo Lake, camp at Lafayette Campground, remember the Old Man of the Mountain, and ride the Tram to get sweeping views of the Notch and spend time above 4,000 feet. The overall success of Franconia Notch State Park directly supports our greater New Hampshire State Park system. We can predict that losing a key feature of the Franconia Notch State Park experience will have a negative impact on the overall enterprise system. An investment in Tram III helps maintain the diverse attractions that draw millions of visitors to Franconia Notch State Park.

The intent of the State Park System, as laid out by the general court in RSA 216-A:1, is to achieve the following purposes:

- I. To protect and preserve the unusual scenic, scientific, historical, recreational, and natural areas within the state.
- II. To continually provide such additional park areas and facilities as may be necessary to meet the recreational needs of the citizens of all regions of the state.
- III. To make these areas accessible to the public for recreational, education, scientific, and other uses consistent with their protection and preservation.
- IV. To encourage and support tourism and related economic activity within the state.

We appreciate your consideration to reinvest in the State's only Tram, preserving the opportunity for future generations to experience a part of New Hampshire that has been considered by some as iconic, and to us- a critical financial component that directly meets the statutory intent prescribed for the State Park System.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for SB 55. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Wilson
Director

C: Sarah L. Stewart, Commissioner, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

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Link to Tram reports and public information