

Testimony in Support of LD 1141, An Act to Improve Access and System Preservation by Providing Shoulders and Bicycle Lanes on State Roadways Leading to State Parks and Other Significant Destinations

**To the Committee on Transportation
by Josh Caldwell, Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator
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Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Josh Caldwell. I am the Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator at the Natural Resources Council of Maine. NRCM has been working for more than 60 years to protect, restore, and conserve Maine's environment, on behalf of our 25,000 members and supporters. I'm here today to testify in support of LD 1141, An Act to Improve Access and System Preservation by Providing Shoulders and Bicycle Lanes on State Roadways Leading to State Parks and Other Significant Destinations.

Maine's bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is behind the curve. The 2022 Bicycle Friendly State Report Card gave Maine's bike and pedestrian infrastructure a C- rating, ranking Maine 10th out of 11 states in the Eastern region.¹ 2021 was the most dangerous year on record for pedestrians in Maine despite reduced traffic rates from the pandemic, pointing to a system that prioritizes cars over people's safety.² Despite our history of not adequately investing in infrastructure for people who walk, bike, or roll, 2023 has the potential to be an inflection point for Maine. An unprecedented amount of funding is available from the federal government for improving bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and the creation of the first ever Maine Statewide Active Transportation Plan earlier this year shows promise for a more connected, safe, and environmentally friendly system for Maine pedestrians. LD 1141 represents an opportunity to continue on this recent trajectory and implement sensible solutions to an existing transportation problem.

Our beautiful State Parks are a draw for Maine residents and visitors alike, and as such, the routes to access them can become congested easily with car traffic. Increasing safe access for bicyclists and pedestrians will help to reduce congestion, improve safety for everyone, and

¹ https://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/BFS_Report_Card_2022_Maine.pdf

² <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2022/04/15/news/pedestrian-deaths-increased-in-maine-last-year-joam40zk0w/>

encourage engagement with Maine's protected natural spaces in ways that create no pollution at all.

Maine's bipartisan Climate Action Plan identifies reducing emissions from the transportation sector as "Plan A," citing that 54 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from cars and trucks in Maine.² The Clean Transportation Roadmap, commissioned in 2021 to establish a pathway for reducing emissions from the transportation sector, identifies improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure as a key recommendation to reduce vehicle miles traveled and diversify Maine's transportation system.³ A sustainable transportation future for Maine features safe, affordable, and accessible alternatives to driving – including walking and biking infrastructure throughout the state. It makes sense that this should start with the places that are most heavily trafficked each year.

People will not use alternative modes of transportation unless the infrastructure is there for them to do so safely and reliably. Making this investment in our most heavily trafficked areas and incorporating quality bike and pedestrian planning for all new transportation projects will result in long-term dividends for our state from an economic, public safety, and environmental vantage. Safe biking and walking infrastructure is a key facet of our statewide transportation system, for which the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) has primary responsibility. It follows that MDOT should be tasked with planning and paying for these investments. We would like to see this effort around high-traffic State Parks incorporated into the implementation of the MDOT Statewide Active Transportation Plan developed earlier this year. Further, a dedicated funding source for shoulder-widening, bike lane development, and pedestrian safety would be prudent for MDOT to create and resource as the Department moves forward with the implementation of the Statewide Active Transportation Plan.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to vote Ought To Pass on this important legislation.

Thanks, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.