

Maine Rail Transit Coalition: "... to elevate rail transportation to its proper balance in transportation investments, planning and decision-making."



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To: Maine Legislature Transportation Committee

From: Maine Rail Transit Coalition
Tony Donovan, Director

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AD

Date: April 19, 2023

Re: In Support of LD 1559 to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and members of the Transportation Committee,

My name is Tony Donovan, I am a Portland resident and founding Member of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC). The Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC) lobbies for federal, state and local policies that promote equitable funding of transit services for all. MRTC's vision is a comprehensive transit design connecting passenger rail service with local transit systems to promote economic and environmental sustainability.

The MRTC is here in to speak in support of LD 1559 An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding.

Public transit is an essential part of modern transportation infrastructure, providing a range of benefits to individuals, communities, and society. Some of the key reasons why public transit is important include:

- **Accessibility:** Public transit provides a critical lifeline for people who don't have access to other forms of transportation, such as those who can't afford a car, those who are unable to drive due to physical or cognitive limitations, or those who live in areas without adequate transportation infrastructure.
- **Affordability:** Public transit is often more affordable than owning and operating a car, which can be a significant financial burden for many households. By providing a low-cost transportation option, public transit helps to promote greater economic mobility and reduce income inequality.
- **Sustainability:** Public transit is a more environmentally sustainable mode of transportation than single-occupancy vehicles, as it helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants that contribute to climate change and air pollution.
- **Congestion reduction:** By providing an alternative to driving, public transit helps to reduce traffic congestion on roads and highways, which can improve travel times and reduce the economic and environmental costs associated with congestion.
- **Social connectivity:** Public transit helps to connect people and communities, providing opportunities for social interaction and fostering a sense of community cohesion.

Overall, public transit plays a critical role in promoting accessibility, affordability, sustainability, congestion reduction, and social connectivity, making it an essential component of modern transportation infrastructure.

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LD 1559 involves the Public Transit Advisory Council in identifying measurable goals related to expansion, efficiency, affordability, and environmental impact. This involves several steps, such as conducting research, gathering data and stakeholder input, and developing specific targets and metrics to measure progress.

To begin, the Public Transit Advisory Council would define what is meant by "expansion," "efficiency," "affordability," and "environmental impact" in the context of public transit. For example, expansion could refer to increasing the coverage area or frequency of transit service and incorporating passenger train services into the modal choices. Affordability encompasses factors such as fare prices and accessibility, while environmental involves reducing emissions or promoting the use of passenger train with good connectivity to bus, ride share and non-motorized means of mobility.

Once these definitions have been established, the Council could then work to identify specific, measurable goals related to reducing transit-related emissions, improving accessibility for low-income riders, or promoting the use of public transit among specific populations. To ensure that these goals are meaningful and achievable, the Council would need to gather input from a variety of stakeholders, including transit riders, advocacy groups, and transit operators. They might also review best practices from other cities or regions that have successfully implemented similar initiatives.

Overall, the directive to identify measurable goals related to expansion, efficiency, affordability, and environmental impact is an important step in promoting the continued growth and sustainability of public transit systems. By setting clear targets and metrics, the Council can help ensure that public transit is meeting the needs of riders and communities in a way that is equitable, efficient, and environmentally responsible.

Incorporating a public participation process into the development of measurable goals for public transit expansion, efficiency, affordability, and environmental impact is an important step in ensuring that the goals are reflective of the needs and priorities of the community.

One way to do this is to engage in a robust public outreach campaign that seeks input from a diverse range of stakeholders, including transit riders, community members, advocacy groups, and other interested parties. This could involve hosting public forums, conducting surveys, and using social media or other digital platforms to solicit feedback.

In addition, it can be helpful to provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue and engagement throughout the goal-setting process, so that stakeholders can provide input and feedback at key milestones. This could involve establishing a community advisory board or other formal mechanism for ongoing stakeholder engagement.

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Overall, incorporating a public participation process into the development of measurable goals for public transit expansion, efficiency, affordability, and environmental impact can help to ensure that the goals are reflective of the needs and priorities of the community, and can promote greater buy-in and support for transit initiatives over the long term.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.

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Train Time