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Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

RE: LD 1559 - An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify 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** We would like to thank Representative O'Neil for bringing this important legislation forward.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

We are in strong support of LD 1559, which aims to improve and reinvigorate the state's public transit systems by increasing funding, promoting coordination, and facilitating long-term planning.

Maine has long faced a systemic lack of funding and coordination for public transit, which has had a significant impact on the state's economy, environment, and overall quality of life. This bill represents an important step forward in addressing these issues and building a more sustainable and equitable future for all Mainers.

One of the key provisions of the bill is the requirement for the Public Transit Advisory Council to meet four times per year, identify measurable goals for expansion, efficiency, affordability, and environmental impact in each geographic region, and report that information to the Department of Transportation. This will ensure that the council is able to provide frequent and relevant recommendations on public transit decisions and promote the interests of public transit stakeholders across the state.

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The bill also amends the transportation policy in the Sensible Transportation Policy Act to include facilitating and supporting public transportation systems in the State and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, solidifying Maine's commitment to public transit in statute. By amending Title 23, the bill makes an explicit commitment to public transit in DOT's decisions on capital investments, transit planning, and projects, ensuring that public transit is considered as a viable option in all transportation planning activities.

Furthermore, the bill expands the membership of the Public Transit Advisory Council and authorizes it to establish a steering committee with the Commissioner of Transportation to direct the work of the council. This will ensure that the council is representative of all stakeholders and has the resources it needs to effectively promote public transit across the state. The Advisory Council is directed by the bill to prepare a statewide transit plan and a statewide mobility management program, which will help to coordinate local and regional transit needs and ensure that public transit is an integral part of Maine's transportation system.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to support this bill and take action to improve Maine's public transit systems. By bolstering state transit planning and assistance, increasing state funding for on-road public transit, and solidifying Maine's commitment to public transit in statute, we can build a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all Mainers.