

Testimony of the Greater Portland Council of Governments

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*

April 25, 2023

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and Members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Andrew Clark, Transit Program Manager at the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG). I am here today to speak on behalf of GPCOG in support of a portion of LD 1559, *An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding*.

GPCOG serves 25 municipal members in Cumberland County, from Sebago Lake to Casco Bay, as well as Saco, Biddeford, Arundel, and Old Orchard Beach through the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS). We deliver transportation, land use, sustainability, and economic development services to our members and their communities.

Our testimony today focuses on Section 12 of LD 1559 which provides a one-time General Fund appropriation of \$25 million dollars to increase subsidies to bus transit agencies for operating and capital purposes, and an additional \$13.6 million dollars to the Department of Transportation for bus transit operating costs and the creation of two new positions at the Department to support transit planning assistance.

As we testified to you on LD 259, in our work supporting PACTS we see firsthand how disruptive the pandemic has been for our public transportation providers. Although federal relief funding (CARES and ARPA) helped transit agencies “weather the storm” of the pandemic, ridership has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, which is particularly challenging for bus transit operators who serve vulnerable populations dependent on bus service for work, wellness, and life’s necessities.

Continuing levels of depressed ridership, coupled with rising costs, could signal the beginning of a fiscal cliff which will disproportionately hurt vulnerable people and will also reduce our region’s future capacity to build well-located growth and development in tandem with robust transit services.

The solution is to increase operating funding to \$6.6 million per year to cover the immediate short-term need, and to also provide \$25 million in state subsidies for bus transit agencies operating and capital funds. These state investments will ensure that agencies are not forced to reduce services at a time when we need them to do more than ever.

These funds will also bring Maine’s investment in public transit closer in line with national averages and help public transit agencies invest in well-located housing and sustainable transportation projects, advancing state housing and climate policies like *Maine Won’t Wait*.

At PACTS, we are ready to deploy new state funding in public transit. We have already engaged in a detailed public process to identify and prioritize future public transit investments, and worked hard to reach consensus among transit providers on how new funding can be used in the most fair, effective, and efficient ways possible.

All we need is your support. For all these reasons we urge you to support the passage of Section 12 in LD 1559. Thank you for the opportunity to share our support, and please let me know if we can do anything to advance your work on this important legislation.

**Helping communities thrive and prosper in the Greater Portland and Lakes Region**

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