



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

PO Box 88  
Belfast, ME 04915  
Phone: (207) 761-5616  
[www.sierraclub.org/maine](http://www.sierraclub.org/maine)

To: Committee on Transportation  
From: Ania Wright, Legislative and Political Specialist, Sierra Club Maine  
Date: 4/25/2023  
Re: **Testimony 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***

---

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and members of the Transportation Committee, I am testifying on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. To that end, we urge you to vote 'ought to pass' on L.D. 1559.

LD 1559 solidifies Maine's climate goals and realistically funds the scale of change needed to transition our economy and transportation system. Currently, the Climate Action Plan focuses on promulgating EVs and the DOT is mostly focused on fixing existing roads and bridges. We are at a critical juncture. We can keep throwing money at roads and bridges and supporting an economy and communities based on individual cars, or we can plan for what is necessary to achieve a clean and just transportation future.

The idea that public transportation is somehow incompatible with rural Maine communities is a myth that needs to be revisited. Speaking with my grandmother about this bill, she recalled being able to take a train from college in Boston back to Downeast Maine via the Maine Central Railroad and connecting trains.<sup>1</sup> Flash forward to 2023, and there are now no regularly scheduled or reliable public transportation options for getting to Downeast Maine. When I lived in Bar Harbor from 2016 to 2022, having a car was an absolute necessity.

We must think differently as we plan for the future of our state. Most rural communities continue to exist because of cars and trucks. The expansion of cars led to the expansion of roads into the country, and more and more folks living suburban and rural lifestyles. With the subsequent demise of industries like the paper industry and increased costs of cars and fuels, and because these communities were designed around workforce housing for industry and not around transit, downtown commerce, or community, many Mainers are spending large portions of their income on transportation in order to be able to meet their basic needs like going to the grocery store or doctors appointments.

The benefits of increased public transit are numerous:

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.downeastscenicrail.org/history/>

- Public transit commuters face far lower crash rates and have a traffic casualty rate about a tenth of the automobile's rate<sup>2</sup>;
- Public transit use reduces emissions significantly, especially with the rise of electric buses<sup>3</sup>, which would not only help with reaching the states emissions reduction goals, but also reduce local air pollution;
- Public transit is significantly cheaper in comparison to a car for individuals. Car expenses can be on average \$894 monthly<sup>4</sup>, while bus transit monthly passes on average cost \$58.53<sup>5</sup>;
- Public transit expands access to local downtowns and businesses. It connects commuters to better job opportunities, which benefits both employers and employees;
- Improved public transit means that people have access to healthier foods, vital services, better employment, and recreational activities. This means more socioeconomic mobility, a key to better quality of life;
- Expands mobility for Maine's unique population, specifically older Mainers. Mobility and access for all is a key justice issue;
- Expands access to job opportunities, basic amenities, and places around the state. It also decreases car dependence, which is a major barrier to transportation access

Our future economy should be based on renewable energy, smart growth principles, and natural resource protection. To provide another anecdote, I traveled a few years ago to Denmark to visit a friend, and though she lived in the countryside almost an hour away by car from the major city of Copenhagen, we were able to walk, bike or drive a short distance to a train station that would take us into the city. Instead of spending an hour in the car, we were able to enjoy an affordable alternative that got us there faster and without the local pollution or emissions. Rural communities are not inherently incompatible with public transportation, but they do require investment and design, specifically around village centers. The two new positions supporting planning capacity as outlined in this bill would help Maine achieve that.

Transportation justice requires funding. Money matters, and we don't have unlimited funds, but addressing the climate crisis is the biggest transition of the modern world after the industrial revolution, and we need to actively make that change within the next decade with active government funding. This can't be a slow transition facilitated by economic interests, this is our own planning that is needed, and the state of Maine must encourage it by increasing funding, strengthening the Public Transit Advisory Council, and amending the Sensible Transportation Policy Act, as outlined in L.D. 1559.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and again, we urge the committee to unanimously support L.D. 1559.

Sincerely,

Ania Wright

Legislative and Political Specialist

Sierra Club Maine

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vtpi.org/safer.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://blog.greenenergyconsumers.org/blog/why-electric-buses-make-sense-now#>

<sup>4</sup> <https://newsroom.aaa.com/2022/08/annual-cost-of-new-car-ownership-crosses-10k-mark/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/990891/us-average-monthly-passes-in-transit-mode-transport>