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Testimony in Support of LD 401-An Act to Require the Maine Department of Transportation to Disclose Transit-Related Funding Disbursement Decisions from the Multimodal Transportation Fund

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
January 24, 2024

Senator Chipman, Representative Crafts and members of the Committee on Transportation,

I am Eamonn Dundon, the Director of Advocacy of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in our region who employ over 65,000 Mainers. We are submitting this written testimony today to express our organization's strong support for the amendment to LD 401 that is being advanced by Senator Chipman.

Over the last few years in my role on the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System's (PACTS) Regional Transportation Advisory Committee and several other smaller PACTS working groups, our region has been incredibly focused on applying metrics-based analyses for all the funding decisions we undertake in allocating our region's share of Federal Transportation Administration and Federal Highway Administration funding. We understood that for too long in our region we put great effort into long term transportation plans that we did not consider when it came time to allocating hard construction dollars. We knew that we had to move in the direction of tying our investments of federal funding to metrics outlined in our plans if they were to ever come to fruition.

This process was not easy, and the incumbent recipients, from municipalities to transit agencies, found discomfort in it at times, but it was necessary to achieve our goals. We worked through two rounds of establishment and revision of a transit funding framework to analyze investments in capital transit projects against our regional goals to ensure that limited dollars achieved their highest and best use. We convened a task force to amend PACTS' Complex Projects policy to ensure that complicated highway and road projects achieved regional goals on time and on budget. All of this has put us in a place to achieve our 5-, 10- and 20-year goals as a region.

Unfortunately, the Maine DOT Multimodal Transportation Fund does not have a publicly transparent methodology for ensuring that the limited funds it disperses are achieving state transportation goals in the most efficient and effective manner. LD 401 is necessary to apply the same level of rigor we do at the regional level to statewide investments in public transportation. I have spoken to this committee in the past about how Maine is a laggard among New England states in dedicating state funding to transit. Given this constrained fiscal support, it is critical that the investments the state does make are of the highest and best use for the funds if we are to meet our aggressive GHG emission reduction goals.

We know that the energy transition will be hardest in the rural areas of our state that do not lend themselves as well to electrification and transit. Thus, it is incumbent upon the department to direct investments in the multimodal fund to uses that will reduce vehicle miles traveled and spur economic development through increased transportation options for Maine workers. That is not possible until the investments made in the Multimodal Transportation Fund are a transparent reflection of our shared state goals. We thank you for your time and commitment to all Mainers, and we ask for your expeditious approval of this important legislation.