

Christian MilNeil  
Portland  
LD 511

I live in Portland, and I urge the Transportation Committee to vote in support of LD 511.

I serve on the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) for the Greater Portland Council of Governments, and in that capacity, I've been involved in regional efforts to finance repairs and improvements to Maine's aging transportation infrastructure.

As you're no doubt aware, Maine has one of the highest transportation cost burdens of any state. Our 31-cent/gallon gas tax is 30 percent higher than the 24-cent gas tax in Massachusetts, because there, many more taxpayers are able to walk or take transit instead of paying the outrageously high costs of car ownership plus highway infrastructure. Our roadway-focused transportation system is literally too expensive to maintain any longer, for governments or for households. Mainers need cheaper alternatives, fast.

You'll no doubt hear testimony that a trail from Portland to Auburn will be a valuable recreation and tourism resource. But I want to remind lawmakers that it would also bring an opportunity for new, low-cost travel options to all the communities along its route, and give thousands of entirely car-dependent suburban households an option to reduce their household transportation costs by walking or riding a bike to jobs, shopping, and services in nearby commercial hubs like Portland, Yarmouth, Pineland Farms, and Auburn.

Building accessible trails and sidewalks to connect our communities is a low-cost infrastructure investment that could have a dramatic impact on lowering government infrastructure spending and private household transportation costs. Unfortunately it's the kind of investment that the Maine DOT has been neglecting for decades and we're paying the price for it. Please vote "ought to pass" for this bill, and furthermore, please encourage our DOT to do better prioritizing cheaper transportation options for all the other communities in our state as well. Thank you for your service.