

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

My name is Craig Bramley. I am a resident of Portland. I am writing to you in support of LD 1020. I support LD 1020 because:

- Building the Gorham Connector would have serious negative impacts on a historic farm, homeowners, development patterns, and the environment.
- The envisioned highway would bring minimal benefits to commuters in the area west of Portland.
- The Gorham Connector cannot be funded solely on tolls generated on that stretch of highway. It would require all Maine Turnpike users to pay higher tolls.
- The possibility that the Gorham Connector will be built has deterred and will continue to deter investment in potentially impacted properties and prevent the progress of other more appropriate approaches to regional transportation.
- **Removing the Turnpike Authority's authorization to build the Gorham Connector is necessary to allow the impacted cities, towns, residents, and planning authorities to move forward with a comprehensive approach to regional transportation.**

I first learned about the Maine Turnpike Authority's ("MTA") intention to build a 6-mile highway from the Maine Mall area to Gorham in December of 2021, when it was described in an article in the Portland Press Herald. Because the plan struck me as a throwback to a time when construction of major highways was seen as panacea for transportation issues, I began to learn about the history of the plan and the potential impacts. At that time, the highway was presented as both essential and inevitable, and the MTA had not yet conducted any meetings seeking public input.

Over the last 3 years, the proposal has been thoroughly interrogated and broadly rejected. We have learned that building the Gorham Connector would irretrievably change Smiling Hill Farm and impact the native trout population of Red Brook. Two communities key to the project, Scarborough and Westbrook, have stated that they don't want the project to proceed. Whenever the public has had an opportunity to offer feedback, it has been overwhelmingly in opposition to the highway. Discussions involving stakeholders with a broader transportation perspective have shown that other less extreme and more sustainable approaches to transportation can relieve the traffic. As a society, we have come to recognize that building highways induces more driving and sprawling development that impacts local farms and threatens the preservation of open space. Once the Gorham Connector plan was subjected to public scrutiny, the MTA decided to pause its efforts on the project and to "stand by to help however we are able."

LD 1020 is necessary even though the MTA has pulled back from the Gorham Connector. As the law stands today, the MTA – a quasi-independent governmental agency – has the authority to build a highway from South Portland to Gorham. As long as they secure the required permits, they can build the highway even if all impacted communities state clearly that they highway. They can build the highway even if the public is broadly opposed to its construction. Under current law, the MTA Board can choose to build the highway even if other approaches are proven to be more effective and less expensive. Furthermore, the MTA can even use eminent domain to build a highway that is unnecessary, unwanted, destructive, and unreasonably expensive.

LD 1020 is the Maine Legislature’s opportunity to act on behalf of the public and the impacted communities. Deferred projects like the Gorham Connector are sometimes referred to as “zombie projects” because they remain on the shelf waiting to be revived. So long as the MTA has the authority to build a major highway from South Portland to Gorham, that possibility will loom over the region and impact the consideration of all other alternatives. Businesses like Smiling Hill Farm will have to consider the possibility that part of its land could be taken by eminent domain. Homeowners will wonder whether it is worth investing in their property. Planners, Maine DOT, and municipalities may hesitate to pursue other solutions because they reasonably believe that those solutions could be impacted or even cast aside based on a decision of the MTA Board.

The passage of LD 1020 will create clarity and allow for a rational, comprehensive approach to transportation planning in the region west of Portland. Passing this bill will not eliminate the possibility of a highway or other new roadway being chosen as a solution. Rather, it will transfer decision-making power from the MTA back to the appropriate stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration.

Craig Bramley