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Maine's Rural Development Council

## Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine in support of LD 1020 An Act to Repeal the Laws Authorizing the Construction of a Multi-Lane Highway Connector to Gorham and to Return the Land Purchased under those laws to the Prior Property Owners

April 3, 2025

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

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth.

We partner with Build Maine to co-host a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy proposals that has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine and beyond. [Policy Action 2025](#) follows [Policy Action 2023](#) from the 131st Legislature. Each session we strive, ***“to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas.”***

GrowSmart advocates for transportation policy that ties in land use, housing, environmental and economic goals to contribute to a sense of community vitality. This bill presents key strategies to achieve this goal and is a part of Policy Action 2025. I've attached a copy of the current bill listing for your information.

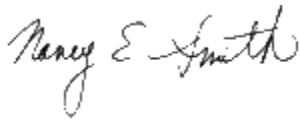
When the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA) announced the proposed route for this multi-lane highway expansion from Gorham to Portland, we [announced our opposition](#) that acknowledged the need to address the traffic congestion in Gorham and surrounding towns and the consequences of a five mile, \$300 million highway.

Simply put, any short-term benefits that might come from this project would not offset the permanent ecological, economic, and community damage it will do. Our position remains the same, as outlined in [this opinion piece](#) published in the Press Herald this week (also attached).

Scarborough and Westbrook, two of the five towns that had originally requested MTA look into solving their traffic congestion problem, recently withdrew their support for the project in response to strident community opposition. These Council votes represent a meaningful evolution in how communities think about solving their traffic problems, and make it clear that more lanes of highway is no longer seen as the solution. To their credit, MTA listened and has pulled back from the project.

However, highway projects like these have a tendency to stick around. Transportation advocates have nicknamed them “[zombie projects](#)” for their propensity to resurface when opponents return to living their lives.

Passage of LD 1020 would shut down this zombie project finally and completely, protect Smiling Hill Farm and the natural trout populations of nearby Red Brook from this threat, and ensure that future transportation and economic investments offer long term and cost effective solutions. Productive farmland, busy village centers and downtowns, local places to work and enjoy the outdoors are the core of communities where people feel safe, that they belong, and that they can thrive. Gorham and surrounding towns deserve nothing less than that and passage of LD 1020 will go a long way toward that vision.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Nancy E. Smith". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with the first name "Nancy" being the most prominent part.

# Build Maine + GrowSmart Maine

a collaboration between

# POLICY ACTION 2025



**PROBLEM STATEMENT** Maine's current uncoordinated approach to building places is causing real, unintended, and significant social, environmental, financial, economic, and cultural challenges and requires the creation of a cohesive approach to land development, redevelopment, and placemaking.

**THE GOAL** of Policy Action 2025 is to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas. We do so acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may/may not be a fit and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities.

**FOR TALKING POINTS AND MORE:** [Public Folder for PA25](#)

## Policy Action 2025 Priority Bills Supporting the Above Problem and Goal Statements

Working Group	BILL TITLE + Fact Sheet	SPONSOR	Bill # + Text	Committee and Status
1. Improved Transportation Funding	<a href="#">Resolve, to Implement Recommendations of the Public Transit Advisory Council</a>	<a href="#">Rep Crafts</a>	<a href="#">LD 1359</a>	
1. Improved Transportation Funding	<a href="#">An Act to Strengthen the the Sensible Transportation Policy Act</a>	<a href="#">Sen Stacy Brenner</a>	<a href="#">LD 1292</a>	Transportation: <b>PUBLIC HEARING 4.8</b>
1. Improved Transportation Funding	<a href="#">An Act to Repeal the Laws Authorizing the Construction of a Multi-Lane Highway Connector to Gorham and to Return the Land Purchased under those laws to the Prior Property Owners</a>	<a href="#">Sen Stacy Brenner</a>	<a href="#">LD 1020</a>	Transportation: <b>PUBLIC HEARING 4.3</b>
1. Improved Transportation Funding	<a href="#">Resolve, to Establish a Working Group to Create a Plan to Reorganize the Maine Turnpike Authority Under the Department of Transportation</a>	<a href="#">Sen Stacy Brenner</a>	LR 1890	
1. Improved Transportation Funding	<a href="#">An Act to Improve the Economy, Safety and Stewardship of Taxpayer Dollars by Prioritizing the Selection of Transportation Projects</a>	<a href="#">Rep Adam Lee</a>	LR 1653	
2. Modernize the Growth Management Law	<a href="#">An Act to Revise the Growth Management Program Laws</a>	<a href="#">Rep Melanie Sachs</a>	LR 289	
3. State Regulations for Development in the Right Places	<a href="#">Resolve, Convene Stakeholder Group Tasked with Comprehensive Overhaul and Modernization of State Subdivision Statutes</a>	<a href="#">Rep Jack Ducharme</a>	<a href="#">LD 161</a>	Housing: <b>WORK SESSION 3.11</b>
4. Strengthen Historic Rehab Tax Credit	<a href="#">An Act to Expand the Historic Property Rehabilitation Tax Credit</a>	<a href="#">Rep Tavis Hasenfus</a>	<a href="#">LD 435</a>	Taxation: <b>WORK SESSION 3.25</b>
5. Tax Policy to Reduce Sprawl	<a href="#">An Act to Incentivize Improvements to Land by Providing for an Alternative Municipal Property Tax Assessment Rate</a>	<a href="#">Rep Marc Malon</a>	LR 2265	
6. Improve Municipal Capacity	<a href="#">An Act to Restrict Municipal Ordinance Requirements Regarding Housing Developments</a>	<a href="#">Rep Traci Gere</a>	<a href="#">LD 1247</a>	
6. Improve Municipal Capacity	<a href="#">Resolve, to Require the Preparation of Preapproved Building Types</a>	<a href="#">Rep Traci Gere</a>	<a href="#">LD 546</a>	Housing: <b>OTP-AM</b>
6. Improve Municipal Capacity	<a href="#">An Act to Create the Statewide Housing Appeals Board</a>	<a href="#">Rep Traci Gere</a>	LR 2140	
6. Improve Municipal Capacity	<a href="#">An Act To Reduce Housing Costs By Not Requiring Fire Sprinkler Systems For Single-Family Homes And Duplexes</a>	<a href="#">Rep Crafts</a>	<a href="#">LD 659</a>	Housing: <b>PUBLIC HEARING 3.6</b>
6. Improve Municipal Capacity	<a href="#">An Act To Prohibit Mandatory Parking Space Minimums In State And Municipal Building Codes</a>	<a href="#">Rep Roeder</a>	<a href="#">LD 427</a>	Housing: <b>WORK SESSION 3.27</b>
7. Government Coordination	<a href="#">LD 1673 from last session, Thriving Corridors (no new bill)</a>	<a href="#">Rep Traci Gere</a>	<a href="#">Pending</a>	
7. Government Coordination	<a href="#">An Act to Require and Encourage Safe and Interconnected Transportation Construction Projects</a>	<a href="#">Rep Adam Lee</a>	<a href="#">LD 287</a>	
7. Government Coordination	<a href="#">An Act to Protect Rural Highway Capacity and Promote Long-term Economic Development</a>	<a href="#">Rep Traci Gere</a>	LR 2369	

For an overview of Policy Action 2025, visit [GrowSmart Maine website > Public Policy](#) or [click this link](#) · **Version 03.28.2025**

**Portland Press Herald**<https://www.pressherald.com/2025/04/02/opinion-its-time-to-move-on-from-the-gorham-connector>

# Opinion: It's time to move on from the Gorham Connector

This 'zombie' project should not be revived. Let's put it to rest for good.

Posted 4:00 AM

**Nancy Smith**



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Can we agree that just about everyone wants to live in a community where they feel safe, that they belong, and where they can thrive? This sense of community is part of living in a lot of places in Maine. It is made better or worse depending on where we build our neighborhoods and infrastructure like roads and sidewalks, water and sewer lines, parks and libraries.

The Maine Turnpike Authority's proposed highway expansion through Gorham does just the opposite of this, cutting across farmland to create "nowhere" space that diminishes the economic and community values of surrounding areas. Smart growth is sustainable growth, and infrastructure projects of this scale just don't make sense.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Nancy Smith** is CEO of GrowSmart Maine.

If you live in the suburbs and rural places west of Gorham, you have an opportunity to demand that we invest in the infrastructure that keeps residents safe and with a sense of belonging to a community, while also creating opportunities to thrive. The Legislature's

Transportation Committee will be hearing a bill to repeal state authorization for the construction of the highway expansion in Gorham on April 3.

LD 1020 would also require the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA) to return property it has acquired in pursuit of this ill-conceived project to the prior owners at the same cost MTA acquired the property, or if that is unsuccessful, to transfer ownership at no cost to the municipality where it is located. The municipality can then choose to keep the property or donate it to a local land trust at no cost.

While we celebrate the news that the MTA recently announced that it would no longer pursue the Connector project and instead work with the state's Department of Transportation on alternative solutions to commuter congestion, our work is not done. Passage of LD 1020 will ensure this highway expansion does not come back to life, as can happen with "zombie projects" that are backburnered but then zapped back to the headlines year later — "refreshed" or "renewed," but with the same faulty philosophy at their core. Moving more cars more quickly is not an effective approach to soothing traffic congestion long term, while building infrastructure for that sole purpose leads to irreparable damage to communities in the long run.


If MTA commissioners and staff are sincere in their claims that they are "committed to exploring innovative solutions that not only improve mobility but also support affordable housing, workforce development, sustainability and efficient transit options," they'll embrace this bill. In Westbrook and Scarborough, the public process worked. It was responsive to community feedback that made clear residents wanted longer-term and more cost-effective solutions than a four-mile highway at the cost of over \$300 million.

According to a recently published report from the Public Transit Advisory Council, Maine's public transportation system meets only 11% of need in the state. In addition to targeted infrastructure improvements west of Portland (roundabouts to replace traffic lights, modest road widening in places it makes sense, improved buffers to allow for safe active transportation), let's find a way to bolster public transportation.

The process for providing your thoughts on a bill is pretty straightforward, and there's a way to share your ideas and concerns ahead of time, online, ahead of the public hearing. Visit our

Policy Action webpage to find tools to help you write and submit testimony and keep up to date with this bill and others.

We can put this zombie project finally and completely to rest with the passage of LD 1020, protecting Smiling Hill Farm from this threat, and ensuring transportation and economic investments are offering long-term and cost-effective solutions. Productive farmland, busy village centers and downtowns and local places to work and recreate are the core of communities where people feel safe, that they belong, and that they can thrive. Gorham and surrounding towns deserve nothing less than that and passage of LD 1020 will go a long way toward that vision.

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