

Smiling Hill Farm

781 County Road
Westbrook, Maine 04092
Phone: (207) 775-4818 Fax: (207) 775-5484
e-mail: info@smilinghill.com
www.smilinghill.com



April 2, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
Maine Legislature
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Ref: LD 1020 - An Act to Repeal the Laws
Providing for the Construction of a Connector to Gorham

Dear Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportations;

My name is Warren Knight and I am a member of the family that owns and operates Smiling Hill Farm. Smiling Hill Farm is located in the communities of Westbrook, Scarborough and Gorham, Maine. I am writing to express my family's support for LD 1020.

LD 1020 will repeal 2017 legislation that should have included a sunset provision when it was first enacted. All enabling legislation based upon predictive data should recognize the cruel inevitability of time. Time exposes the fallibility of even the most sophisticated modeling. The Gorham Connector suffers from the fate of erroneous predictions, false assumptions and overly optimistic data models. The original enabling legislation, which should have expired on its own, now needs to be repealed. In the intervening eight years the circumstances have changed dramatically. Even in 2017 flaws in the data were being revealed and harbingers went unnoticed or worse, disregarded, by Maine Turnpike Authority officials and engineers.

Sustainable agriculture since 1720



Smiling Hill Farm makes the Earth smile by utilizing recycled & reusable products.

Twenty years ago when this project was conceived VMT (vehicle miles traveled) per/capita in Maine were increasing, commuter traffic along Routes 114 and 22 was growing with population, the hub & spoke Portland centric model was dominant and the Maine Mall was a thriving retail destination. None of these circumstances exist today. Data reveals that an unanticipated declines occurred in the metrics that the Gorham Connector relied upon to justify its existence. Close examination shows that the decline was evident even as the enabling legislation in question was sought and obtained in 2017.

VMT per/capita has been decreasing in Maine since the high-water mark in 2004 of 11,443. Mainers for many reasons are not driving as much as they used to. Habits, lifestyles, expenses, and transportation choices have all contributed to this decline.

Maine Dept. of Transportation data shows that commuter traffic has also inexplicably decreased or remained flat in the Route 114 & 22 overlap section since 2015. This decrease occurred despite population growth in Gorham and communities west and north of Gorham. These communities include Buxton, Standish, Hollis, Baldwin, Cornish and Sebago. The population in each of these communities has increased in the preceding 20 years but the predicted traffic has not materialized.

Portland has ceased to be the singular primary destination for commercial activity in the region. Economic development in North Windham, Biddeford-Saco, Sanford and Scarborough has attracted many businesses. Surrounding municipalities are no longer restrained by the bedroom-community model that funneled commuter traffic down historic corridors into Portland. Economic development has dispersed traffic in new directions to new destinations.

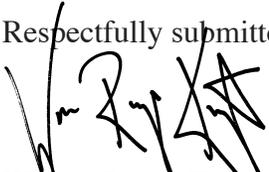
New residents in the Portland suburbs have availed themselves of employment, retail and recreation opportunities elsewhere. These new residents have upended the predicted traffic models of ever increasing numbers of vehicles headed for the Maine Mall and into Portland. Online shopping habits have changed the traditional retail drive, park & shop patterns. Remote employment opportunities and flexible work schedules have likewise decreased or eliminated commuter traffic vehicles. A divided highway from Gorham to the Maine Mall (and onto Portland) no longer satisfies resident's needs or makes economic sense.

Our transportation options continue to evolve. We now realize that an over-reliance on a car-centric lifestyle has not been healthy for ourselves or the environment. Personal transportation technology is advancing (e-bikes, e-scooters and have you seen moonwalkers?). Who can predict what the next 10 years will bring. We know that using a 3,500 lb vehicle to transport a 160 lb person 5 miles is not sustainable long term. No one enjoys a long commute regardless of the reason, work, school, retail or recreation. Commutes are costly; in unproductive time; in energy resources and in depreciation of transportation infrastructure. Maine needs to do a better job of offering employment, goods and services locally to encourage fewer VMTs by our residents. Building highways to send future citizens to distant locations to satisfy their needs is not in the best long-term interest of Maine. No visitor has ever left our great state and lamented, "Maine was beautiful but I wish they had more pavement."

The time has come to repeal the original enabling legislation and require all parties to gaze afresh upon the new conditions that exist in 2025. Anything less than repeal leaves an outdated 2017 solution available in statute that future engineers will use as a target and guide. Allowing this old enabling legislation to exist will discourage unique, unconventional and technologically modern solutions to be embraced to satisfy our transportation needs. Unless this old legislation is repealed, future solutions will be undoubtedly be tailored to accommodate the old legislation that has already been shown to be inadequate.

Please repeal LD 1020. Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Roger Knight
Smiling Hill Farm
mobile: (207) 831-1222
email: warren@smilinghill.com

WRK/ac