

Testimony of Sarah Cushman, Resident of Portland

Supporting: LD 1451 An Act to Advance Coordination of Community Transportation - Sponsored by Senator Mike Tipping

April 21, 2025

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

I support LD 1451 and appreciate Senator Tipping and the other cosponsors for bringing this legislation forward. Thanks also to everyone on the committee for your work on this bill.

I serve as the Faith Representative on the Moving Maine Network's Board of Directors. I'm also a transportation planning consultant specializing in public transportation, carpool, pedestrian, and bicycle projects.

In my personal life, we are a one-car family with four drivers in the house now, because of our teens – our daughter, and our goddaughter who lives with us. We save a ton of money by not having a second vehicle. And the competition for the car has pushed all of us to walk more, take the bus, and be year-round bike commuters. We also put our bikes on the bus to travel longer distances, like to Lewiston-Auburn, Biddeford, Bridgton and Brunswick. Originally, I was born and raised in rural Midcoast, and growing up, we carpooled often with friends, co-workers, and neighbors. We still do.

The bottom line is that shared community transportation options are important to me and my family, but we are fortunate to have choices. For example, it's not a financial burden if one of us needs to take an Uber somewhere in Greater Portland. For Mainers who are experiencing transportation insecurity - people who cannot drive or have a hard time affording transportation (and that's 40% of us!) - there is little or no choice.

From my experience, **this bill is about access to opportunity for the wellbeing of all Mainers.** Access to jobs and financial security, access to healthcare and essential services, access to connect with the community. For years we've said in the transportation world, "If only we could knock down some of the bureaucracy and silos of money, we could do so much more to provide transportation options for the people in our community who are (literally in some cases) dying to get out of the house and to medical appointments, work, the grocery store, and connect with community." It's a basic fairness issue.

This bill is also about making every dollar we already have stretch further – thus increasing the transportation options available for all the people of Maine. We always think that federal regulations on various streams of transportation funding are what's keeping state agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services, MaineDOT, the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, and the Attorney General's Office from pooling together their resources.

Now, however, the cost allocation model for splitting payment between payers has been developed and is already in use by other states. Why would we leave Maine behind and not do the same?

And why would we not do something that would help the state financially across the board – to reduce the labor shortage and boost the economy, reduce healthcare costs, and increase volunteerism and active participation in our communities?

This bill also rewards local efforts to help people navigate existing transportation services – and to knit together creative on-the-ground partnerships and transportation solutions. A more limited version of this already exists in Maine, with a couple Mobility Managers at local transit agencies.

Soon we'll have a pilot Mobility Management Hub example to work from here, too. Moving Maine has already put together state and regional partners to secure a Federal Transit Administration grant. This project will build a full mobility management hub in York County, that will encourage and inform other hub efforts across all of Maine.

Here are some examples of where local and/or state coordination has been crucial - or where there is a strong need:

- Beginning at minute 6:15 of the Moving Maine Network's bi-monthly Mobility Learning Community from February, you'll get [a great example of creative and compelling local transportation efforts from Lisa Smith, who is the Mobility Manager at Aroostook Regional Transportation System.](#)
- My 18-year-old daughter and goddaughter and their peers are incredibly fortunate to be able to get to their after-school jobs and learning activities via the year-round METRO bus pass that they receive from the Portland Public Schools. Those passes came after years of effort at community coordination of transportation.
- The Maine Community College system's Workforce Development Program does excellent short-term training modules to get participants ready for entry-level jobs – for example, welding jobs at Bath Iron Works or medical jobs at Eastern Maine

Medical Center. These month-long programs essentially guarantee a job at the end of them for people who actively and competently participate the whole way through to completion. And the pay from those jobs often enable the participants to buy a car to get to their new job on a regular basis. But the Community College system has found that *transportation to the training itself is one of the key barriers* to people being able to participate, and thus they aren't able to access the training or the subsequent job opportunity.

- The Community Caring Collaborative and Downeast Community Partners (the local CAP agency) did extensive work to identify significant barriers to transportation for people living in Washington County. One of the key findings was people in the recovery community who lacked transportation to get back into the workforce and pursue new jobs - and local businesses interested in partnering to fill much needed vacant positions. The agencies are still interested in finding a way to provide community transportation options for these folks and need help with putting together additional funding and capacity to build out these creative local solutions.
- The Lewiston-Auburn Metro Chamber is working on employer-led transportation solutions to help fill local entry-level manufacturing and health care jobs - and improve the lives of workers with low incomes, who face significant transportation barriers. This includes coordination with Western Maine Transportation's creative workforce transportation efforts. However, a Mobility Management Hub would greatly increase support and capacity for the Chamber's efforts.

Thank you very much for listening, for your thoughtful discernment on these critical issues, and for doing what's best for *all* the people of Maine this legislative session.

Please vote Ought to Pass.

All best wishes,

Sarah Cushman