

Lake Marshburn-Ersek
Resident of Gorham
LD 1451

Testimony of Lake Marshburn-Ersek, resident of Gorham

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

April 22, 2025

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

My name is Lake Marshburn-Ersek and I am a resident of Gorham. I support LD 1451 and appreciate Senator Tipping and the other cosponsors for bringing this legislation forward.

Throughout my time as a resident of Gorham, I have experienced transportation challenges. These include being unable to access full work, medical, and recreation opportunities that someone with a car can access. I have greatly benefited from the Husky line since it became a public bus route, but it only goes to specific places. My doctor is located in Scarborough, and there is no bus route from Gorham to Scarborough yet. My other doctor is located in Gorham and although the bus goes right by the office there isn't a stop there or anywhere nearby. One of my other doctors is located in South Portland, and to take the bus there would take hours and many transfers even though it takes 30 minutes or less by car. Learning to navigate the public transit system has been character-building for me, but also frustrating. I have empathy for people who can't easily access everything they want and need all the time because I have been there myself.

It is discouraging to cancel and delay medical appointments due to a lack of transportation. Aside from medical needs, when I apply to jobs I have to first look at whether the bus stops near the workplace I am considering. I have only applied to jobs on the bus routes which has limited my economic opportunities. Even though I am capable of full-time work, I have not been able to access it. Lastly, in terms of recreation: You cannot take the buses to many outdoor recreation areas or natural areas. You can't currently take a bus from the center of Gorham to a beach in Scarborough or from the center of Gorham to Sebago Lake. I think this is a travesty considering how much natural beauty there is to experience right in our backyard. But currently, it's only for people with cars or car access. Is that acceptable?

I challenge anyone who has always had a car since embarking on their professional/career life or adult life to try to live a week or a month without a car. If you don't live in Portland, you will probably realize within week 1 that you can't live without a car, and you will start asking for rides from friends, family, and neighbors. By week two you might realize that asking them for so many rides is an inconvenience. Then you will have to wrestle with the reality that being a non-driver or even a driver who doesn't own their own vehicle will be viewed as a burden to most people around you, even if they are nice about it for a while. Then you will offer to pay them gas money, and you will cancel some things when rides aren't available or when you don't have the money to pay a friend gas money, or for an Uber, which is likely much more expensive than you can afford regularly. You will walk a long walk from work to the bus stop in the rain because bus stops aren't close enough and because not all of them have roofs to wait under to stay dry. You will get cold and soaked by rain and snow. This will happen either because no one is available to drive you during inclement weather or because you don't want to bother them. While having some buses is better than no buses, I am tired of making that comparison. Yes, a metro area with no public transportation would be worse, but that is a low bar to try to exceed.

The situation of someone with a driver's license is a bit more accessible than someone who cannot drive at all. But whether you have a driver's license or not, if you do have

your own car, or if you share it with several other people, you are probably going to struggle in many areas of Maine - even in urbanized Southern Maine. The quality of life of non-car owners in Maine is not always good and involves complicated logistics and arrangements to make life work, stay healthy, meet personal and family obligations, and make a living financially. And honestly, even with all of the time and effort spent coordinating, you could miss out on a lot. I don't represent everyone's experience, but this is my overall impression from my own experience and conversations with other bus riders and non-drivers.

The oft-presented solution "Just move to Portland!" is one I am tired of hearing. So far, I can't afford to live in Portland. And while it is easier for Portland residents to access work, healthcare, and recreation by bus, it is not always going to work out. Because again, we need stronger regional transportation and increased transportation options. On-demand rides are something that are just starting and have a lot of potential to help more residents of Southern Maine. We need flexible transportation options for where the bus doesn't go. If you live in Portland and your medical specialist is in Cape Elizabeth, you are screwed because there are no buses to Cape Elizabeth. And I want everyone to consider why it is that many wealthy Maine communities with beautiful natural recreation, specialized grocery stores, alternative wellness practices, and medical specialties don't have buses to get to them. I think it's creating different classes of people, by design. The times I have ridden the bus successfully to my desired destination have been empowering to me. In contrast, the times when I lack access to sufficient transportation or waiting areas, such as when I feel very cold standing at the outdoor Pulse bus hub at night in the middle of winter can be depressing and even degrading experiences.

Having a mobility manager would allow different unique transportation agencies to work together in a more coordinated way. They could figure out areas where Metro, ModivCare, RTP Rides, and other ride providers need to work together to improve services. They could coordinate schedules and fill in the gaps finding where riders are falling through the cracks between existing routes and available pickup times. They could fill in those gaps better when they can coordinate between different agencies. It also helps the riders to have centralized communication about gaps in service, schedule changes, and ride availability.

It would be helpful if there was a number to call when you need a ride, or a centralized app or website to use. This would allow a person like myself to find a ride to a medical appointment where the buses don't go, and choose my preferred option more easily. It would also be helpful if there was a more centralized and organized way to provide feedback and brainstorm transportation options; maybe even to search for rideshares or carpools.

Thank you for listening to my perspective on transit access in Southern Maine. Please vote Ought to Pass.

Sincerely,
Lake Marshburn-Ersek