

To: Transportation Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Clean Transportation Advocate

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1359, Resolve, to Direct the
Department of Transportation to Develop Practices Regarding
Public Transit



Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and the esteemed members of the Transportation Committee: My name is Cole Cochrane, I am the Clean Transportation Advocate for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), an organization representing over 400 young working Mainers from all sixteen counties. I am also a member of the Public Transit Advisory Council, serving on its steering and research & policy committees, as well as a student studying economics and public policy at Harvard. I am delivering testimony on MYCJ's behalf to encourage the Transportation Committee to vote "ought to pass as amended" on LD 1359, a resolve to direct the Department of Transportation to develop practices regarding public transit.

First and foremost, I would like to recognize the yearslong effort that led to this legislation. Starting in 2023, former Representative Maggie O'Neil and I, alongside local transit operators, businesses, municipalities, environmental groups, and Mainers who are generally dismayed with the failures of our transportation system, introduced and advocated for LD 1559, a bill that reinvigorated the Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC), a long dormant advisory group. In our advocacy efforts to pass LD 1559, we clearly conveyed to the Transportation Committee and MaineDOT officials our long-term objectives, which included:

- Increasing agency transparency and optimizing MaineDOT support for local transit operations;

- Raising state-funded transit operating subsidies;
- Implementing long-term revenue sources to support the Highway Fund; and
- Diversifying transportation options, prioritizing affordability, reliability and accessibility.

Consequently, PTAC now comprises engaging members from an array of constituencies, ranging from York to Aroostook county. Members of the Council have worked diligently to comprehensively understand the state of Maine's transportation system, informing the suite of policy solutions found in the 2025 PTAC report. Although I am willing to elaborate on the astonishing accessibility and affordability figures the Council discovered, for the purposes of my testimony today, the report underscores:

- Major gaps in accessibility, jeopardizing tens of thousands of Mainers' opportunities to access employment, education, and their communities;
- Currently unaffordable transportation options, with average car ownership costs reaching over \$12,000 per year; and
- The significant decline of Highway Fund revenue, paralyzing MaineDOT's ability to maintain our transportation system, let alone improve it.

The contextualization of both the PTAC report and previous advocacy efforts is to state the important and pragmatic nature of LD 1359. This legislation aims to increase bureaucratic transparency, as well as develop a tangible plan to address fiscal shortcomings of our transportation system. In doing so, LD 1359 will effectively promote a more productive and directional relationship between critical stakeholders and the Department of Transportation. This enhanced working relationship, with clearly articulated objectives from the legislature, will

position the state to fundamentally address some of the pressing fiscal and operational challenges in future legislative sessions.

I have attached to this testimony an amendment to LD 1359, which was drafted by Josh Caldwell and I, to achieve the aforementioned goals of the PTAC, MaineDOT, key stakeholders, and members of the Transportation Committee. Key provisions include:

- Publishing annual transit funding distribution and rationale;
- Standardization of state and local match requirements;
- A plan to finance transit funding increases; and
- A commitment to strengthening interagency coordination of transportation services.

Given how meticulous and thorough the Council has been to reach a short-term solution for this session, as well as the overall benefits of bolstering our transportation system, I encourage members of the committee to vote “ought to pass as amended” using the attached amendment. Thank you for your time and consideration.

NOTE: Here is a [PPH Op-Ed](#) highlighting transportation issues.

LD 1359 - Committee Amendment

Sec. 1. Department of Transportation to develop practices regarding public transit. Resolved: That the Department of Transportation shall develop practices regarding public transit, including:

1. Increasing transparency in the allocation and distribution of funding for public transit operators by publishing annual transit distributions, including the total amount made available for operations, capital and innovative project support, and the amounts allocated to each recipient.
 - a. Formulas, data inputs, and discretionary rationale used to determine operation and capital funding amounts for transit purposes by the Department shall be readily accessible to the recipient and included in regular progress reports.
 - a. Final project selection criteria used for transit operation and capital funding awards shall ensure advancement of goals outlined by the Maine State Transit Plan and the most recent Public Transit Advisory Council report.
 - b. Engagement from relevant stakeholders is required in determining formulas and decision-making processes for transit operation and capital funding awards are aligned with agency, statewide, and other stakeholder goals.
2. Convening a stakeholder group including transit operators from all transit regions and members of the Public Transit Advisory Council who are not affiliated with transit operators to establish standardized levels of local and state match requirements for operating and capital expenditures of public transit operators, which must include a proportional decrease in local match and a proportional increase in state contribution; and
3. Increasing the level of state operating funding for public transit operator including a plan to increase operating funds for transit providers to \$8.9 million per year in the next biennial budgets; and
4. Implementing a reporting system for transit projects in collaboration with transit providers that provides an analysis of outcomes relating to ridership trends, obstacles, population demographics serviced, and implementation of accessibility measures.
5. Increasing collaboration and coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services and other state agencies that fund transportation – including DOT, DOE, DOL, and DOJ, to improve public transit services between agencies, including by establishing an interagency compact and coordinating council to advance coordination and establishing the position of Coordinator of Mobility Management within state government who is tasked with supporting the implementation of statewide mobility management and staffing the inter-agency coordinating council; and
6. Supporting volunteer driver needs by establishing a scope of service and working to identify a plan for statewide volunteer driver coordination that includes establishing incentive programs for volunteer drivers.

Sec. 2. Report. Resolved: That, by December 3, 2025, the Department of Transportation shall report on its progress in carrying out this resolve and resulting practices to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation **and to the Public Transit Advisory Council.**

SUMMARY

This resolve directs the Department of Transportation to develop practices regarding public transit, including:

1.

The resolve directs the Department of Transportation, by December 3, 2025, to report on its progress in carrying out this resolve and resulting practices to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation.

