

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

**To the Committee on Transportation
by Duane Scott, Member, Maine Public Transit Advisory Council
April 23, 2025**

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Duane Scott, Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC) member and retired Director of Multimodal Planning, MaineDOT. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 1359, Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Develop Practices Regarding Public Transit. As the Augusta Age-Friendly PTAC member, I represent one of more than 80 communities in Maine that are a part of the Age-Friendly network.

Before I share PTAC's position, let me share my firsthand experiences with public transportation related to medical appointments. Since my retirement 9 years ago, I have been a volunteer at MaineGeneral Medical Center and the Harold Alford Center for Cancer Care. I welcome patients and, if requested, transport them by wheelchair to their destination in those medical facilities. On many occasions, I have observed patients waiting, sometimes hours, for their ride home and this is after the rigors of a medical procedure. On some occasions and at their request, I have called their transportation provider only to hear the phone ring endlessly or to be put on hold. Seeking and receiving medical treatment is supposed to improve their health, not diminish it.

As you know, the Public Transit Advisory Council is a voluntary board established in statute to advise the State Legislature and the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) on public transit service in the state. This year, the PTAC released its 4th biennial report on March 1st, which you all received a briefing on a few weeks ago.¹ The legislation before you today intends to advance the recommendations that emerged from that report, each of which was adopted on a consensus basis by the 29 members of the PTAC, who represent transit interests from each of the 8 transit regions statewide.

Throughout the course of a year, the PTAC received presentations from each of the transit regions, plus the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), the Maine State Ferry Service, and the GO MAINE program at MaineDOT to inform report development. The report was also aided by research conducted simultaneously by the John T. Gorman Foundation and the Moving Maine Network, who released their respective reports on transportation barriers in Maine earlier this year.

¹ Public Transit Advisory Council, March 1 2025, 2025 Biennial Report to Legislature, <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/transit/ptac/>

Several persistent themes emerged from these presentations and reports. First, the need for public transportation services statewide is not currently being met. In fact, reporting shows that only about 11% of the demonstrated need for public transportation is being met in Maine. The pandemic had a significant impact on transit operations statewide, and federal pandemic relief has come to an end. Transit ridership is rebounding from pandemic lows, and growing demand for services is running up against operational budget constraints. Transit operators statewide need more funding to be able to run consistent, reliable service that meets the needs of their communities. Increasing operations funding and working to reduce local match for transit operators to better access federal dollars are clear priorities for Maine.

Next, our transportation system is becoming increasingly more expensive and inaccessible for families, with the average Maine family now paying more than \$1,000 per month to own and operate a vehicle. More than 10,000 Mainers are currently not employed due to lack of access to reliable transportation, and more than 40,000 households in Maine do not have reliable access to a vehicle. Increasing public transportation options for Mainers is essential for those who cannot or do not drive but would also be a major benefit to families struggling with transportation costs and for local economies in dire need of a reliable workforce.

Finally, transparency and inter-agency coordination continue to be sticking points for transit users and operators alike. Each of the four PTAC reports has recommended improvements on these fronts, and we look forward to working with MaineDOT and other agencies that offer rides to ensure that operators understand how funding decisions are made and what they can expect year over year — and that transit users understand the options available to them.

The current Resolve language does address these themes, but as you saw earlier this year, the 2025 PTAC report is substantive and includes several recommendations that are not reflected in the current Resolve language. To clarify the intent of this Resolve and to ensure that the full breadth of the recommendations is carried forward, the PTAC recommends the following items for the Committee to consider during work session.

There are two items deserving of clarification in the current Resolve language:

- To reduce local match for transit operators, we recommend that MaineDOT work with operators to establish standardized levels of local and state match requirements for operating and capital expenditures, which should result in a proportional decrease in local match and a proportional increase in state contribution;
- To increase coordination between state agencies that provide transportation services, we recommend including DOT, DOE, DOL, and DOJ, and improving coordination as is recommended in LD 1451 by establishing an interagency compact and coordinating council to advance coordination and establishing the position of Coordinator of Mobility Management within state government.

There are a few recommendations that are not currently reflected in the Resolve language that we recommend adding:

- Making a plan to sustainably increase the level of state operating funding for public transit operators over time to meet growing demand and increasing costs, including a plan to increase operating funds for transit providers to \$8.9 million per year in the next biennial budget;
- 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;
- Supporting volunteer driver efforts throughout the state by pursuing a model for statewide volunteer driver coordination. This is particularly important to the Age-Friendly communities in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration.