



**Testimony of Marge Kilkelly on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the
Committee on Transportation**

In Favor of LD 1359 Resolve, to Direct the Department of
Transportation to Develop Practices Regarding Public
Transit

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Thank you Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Members of the Committee on Transportation.

My name is Marge Kilkelly, and I am a Policy Consultant for the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) which is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. The MCOA is a unifying force across sectors that is creating a new narrative about aging and older people in Maine with the goal of building local, statewide, and national support for the systemic changes needed to support our new longevity.

I am testifying in Favor of LD 1359 Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Develop Practices Regarding Public Transit

Rural Maine is rugged, beautiful and home to more than 300,000 hearty Mainers who are over the age of 65. These are people who have built communities and worked hard their entire lives, often at physically demanding jobs that were not well paid. Older Mainers are often determined to stay in their rural homes and communities where they have family, friends, and other social networks. Unfortunately, they are finding it increasingly difficult to meet this goal and access to transportation is often key to their ability to age in their own homes or communities.

Transportation is one of the core social determinants of health because it is a foundational beam to all of our economic and social structures. Access to transportation not only ensures people can get to medical care when they need it, it also helps people stay healthy and sometimes avoid the need for medical care altogether. That's because, in order to stay healthy, we need reliable and consistent access to employment, financial resources, healthy food, exercise and socialization. Socialization is especially critical for older people because social isolation is now associated with increased rates of falls, coronary heart disease, stroke, suicide and depression.

According to Maine's 2025 Strategic Transit Plan, 72% of older Mainers live in communities without access to fixed route transit or one of the larger flex route transit systems. This means that only 28% of older Mainers have access to public transportation of any kind to fall back on if they can no longer drive. In 2022, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety estimated that about 13% of people 70 and older did not have a driver's license. In Maine, this translates to about 29,031 people age 70 and older who do not hold a current driver's license.

Older adults who can't drive and don't have access to public transportation have to rely on others to get to medical appointments, the grocery store, social interaction, and the bank. If they don't live with a spouse or have a close family member, they have to rely on friends and neighbors to meet their basic transportation needs. If they don't have a solid network ready to help, an older person who cannot drive can deteriorate quickly due to a lack of socialization and inadequate nutrition. Because of these realities, older people often drive much longer than they feel comfortable driving, increasing the risk that they or someone else will be injured in an accident.

There are complex challenges and barriers to providing transportation in a rural state. Older residents tend to live outside of service areas and finding ways to increase access to transportation services is critical. Meeting the transportation needs of rural Mainers requires a creative and multi-pronged approach that maximizes available resources of both human and other capital. The Maine Strategic Transit Plan 2025 concluded that it would cost between \$7.4 and \$14 million each year to reach the modest goal of providing 20% of the unmet transportation need in Maine. In these times of difficult budget constraints, we need to be creative.

LD 1359 will provide increased transparency in transportation funding, improve coordination between DHHS and MDOT, and reduce the match for rural providers. We believe that these changes have the potential to better manage the cost of transportation and increase access for rural Mainers.

Passing LD 1359 is a significant step forward to address Maine's transportation challenges and we stand ready as partners to advance the important work of this legislation after it is enacted.