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LD 1138

LD 1138, while well-intentioned in its aim to reduce transportation-related emissions, raises significant concerns about its economic impact, feasibility, and potential unintended consequences for Maine's residents and businesses.

1. Increased Costs for Mainers and Businesses

- The bill requires the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maine Turnpike Authority to develop and implement plans, rules, and mitigation measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT). These new regulatory requirements could lead to increased administrative and compliance costs, which are likely to be passed on to taxpayers and businesses.

- Maine already faces some of the highest electricity rates in the nation, driven in part by aggressive renewable energy mandates. Further mandates and requirements on transportation infrastructure could exacerbate these costs, particularly if the state pushes for rapid electrification of vehicles or restricts necessary road expansions.

2. Threats to Transportation Flexibility and Rural Mobility

- The bill's emphasis on reducing VMT and restricting road capacity expansions unless paired with mitigation measures may disproportionately impact rural Mainers, who often lack access to public transit and depend on personal vehicles for daily life. Policies that prioritize urban-style solutions may not be practical or fair for a predominantly rural state.

3. Risk of Delaying or Blocking Critical Infrastructure Projects

- By requiring impact assessments and mitigation for any new capacity expansion project, LD 1138 introduces new layers of bureaucracy that could delay or even halt essential road improvements. This could hinder economic development, emergency response, and the maintenance of safe, reliable transportation networks.

4. Uncertain Effectiveness and Overly Prescriptive Approach

- While the bill seeks to align with the state's climate goals, it prescribes specific processes and mitigation strategies without clear evidence that these measures will achieve the desired emissions reductions in Maine's unique context. The requirement to offset any projected increase in emissions or VMT may result in arbitrary project denials, regardless of broader transportation or economic needs.

5. Potential for Legal and Administrative Challenges

- Imposing strict climate-related criteria on transportation projects could expose the state to legal challenges, especially if stakeholders argue that the requirements are arbitrary or conflict with other statutory obligations³. The added complexity may also strain the capacity of MDOT and other agencies, diverting resources from their core missions.

Conclusion

While addressing climate change is a critical priority, LD 1138 risks imposing costly, one-size-fits-all mandates that may not account for Maine's rural character, economic realities, or transportation needs. A more balanced approach would prioritize voluntary incentives, flexible strategies, and robust stakeholder engagement rather than rigid new mandates and bureaucratic hurdles. For these reasons, I urge lawmakers to reject LD 1138 in its current form.