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Maine's Rural Development Council

Testimony of GrowSmart Maine in support of LD 1632 An Act to Provide Incentives and Amend Laws Regarding Access to Protect Rural Highway Capacity and Promote Long-term Economic Development

May 1, 2025

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

My name is Joe Oliva, and I am the Outreach and Communications Director for GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth.

We partner with Build Maine to co-host a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy proposals that has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine and beyond. [Policy Action 2025](#) follows [Policy Action 2023](#) from the 131st Legislature. Each session we strive, ***“to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas.”***

LD 1632 is one of seventeen Policy Action 2025 bills and will close loopholes in the Access Management law to make it consistent with The Growth Management Program and The Sensible Transportation Policy Act, as well as provide incentives for multi-municipal regional transportation planning to create thriving corridors.

We’ve all driven rural highways that feature a parade of strip malls and car dealerships, and while the financial argument against this type of sprawl is compelling enough, low density scattered development is also environmentally damaging for municipalities, negatively impacts the working and rural lands and local food systems, and degrades the unique sense of place that communities have cultivated over centuries.

Not only would this bill pull this type of development in line with growth areas as demarcated by comprehensive plans, but it would also tie incentives to community transportation plans - plans that must meet the objectives of the

Sensible Transportation Policy Act and, by extension, account for a range of community priorities.

The Sensible Transportation Policy Act requires that transportation planning decisions, capital investment decisions and project decisions (1.) minimize harmful effects of transportation, (2.) be based on an evaluation of the full range of reasonable alternatives, (3.) give preference to transportation system management, demand management, and improvements to the existing system and other modes before increasing highway capacity, and (4.) involve local governmental bodies and the public.

The Sensible Transportation Policy Act is an example of good transportation policy because it correctly recognizes that transportation infrastructure and policy is constantly in conversation with community development. The presence or absence of certain investments, policies, or regulations massively informs the type of development that occurs in rural, suburban, and urban communities and demands heightened consideration with respect to the priorities of current and future inhabitants. Connecting the Sensible Transportation Policy Act with the Growth Management Program in the manner laid out by LD 1632 strengthens Maine communities and simply makes sense.

GrowSmart Maine is willing to assist the committee in any way that is helpful.