**Testimony of GrowSmart Maine
in support of LD 1756 An Act To Establish A Statewide Transportation
Project Selection Prioritization Process**

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 1756 is one of seventeen Policy Action 2025 bills.

GrowSmart advocates for transportation policy that ties in land use, housing, environmental and economic goals; there's just no other way to approach transportation than as part of broader systems. This bill presents key strategies to achieve this goal and for advancing more equitable and accessible transportation systems in rural, suburban, and urban Maine.

LD 1756 establishes a transparent project selection process for all new transportation projects funded by the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA). This process is known as the SMART SCALE in states like Virginia, which has appropriated over $7 billion in the nine years since adopting this framework. LD 1756 uses the same language that passed with unanimous bipartisan support in Virginia and has enjoyed continued support due to its transparency, flexibility, and efficiency in spending of limited taxpayer dollars on projects that solve transportation problems while achieving community goals related to accessibility, equity, and multi-modality.

The project selection process is where the rubber meets the road, so to say, when it comes to allocation of public dollars for expanding transportation

infrastructure. The current approach is too opaque given the gaps in our transportation system as a whole – while a five-mile, $330 highway expansion was greenlit last year, a recent study found that our [current public transit system is meeting just 11% of the demonstrated need](#), while the state only provides $3 million in funding per year to public transportation. Repair and maintenance are unaffected by this framework, as the process entailed by LD 1756 is aimed at infrastructure expansion.

Creating a system that mirrors the SMART SCALE system would be beneficial to the state along these lines:

- Accountability: Transparent sharing of the prioritized list of projects enables industry, advocates, and the public to review and align investment decisions with the state's overall priorities, which will produce better project proposals.
- Transportation Safety and Choice: Current project selection relies only on reducing vehicle travel delays, which may not equate to the overall benefit of a project. Connecting people to jobs and services efficiently should be our top priority.
- Climate Action: Our current system has no way to compare the environmental costs to the mobility benefits of a new investment when allocating scarce funds. Creating a consistent standard will help us develop transportation systems while minimizing environmental costs.
- Fiscal health: Politically-prioritized projects cost the state more over time, as our investments fail to meet our goals for safe, affordable, accessible mobility for all.

Why does this matter? Because transportation infrastructure is a primary factor in development patterns. If you build more lanes, you'll get more cars, more traffic, less safe streets and more sprawl. Sprawl is unsustainable not just economically and environmentally, but has profound implications on our social and personal lives. Maine has a rich history of solving problems with active community engagement and input – decision-making regarding our shared transportation infrastructure should be no different.

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