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**Testimony of Nate Moulton
Maine Department of Transportation
Before the 131st Legislature, Joint Standing Committee on Transportation**

In Opposition

LD 860

An Act to Identify the Railroad Lines from Portland to Bangor as a Major Corridor and to Fund a Feasibility Study

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, I am Nate Moulton, Transportation Planning Division Director at MaineDOT. MaineDOT is in opposition to LD 860, *An Act to Identify the Railroad Lines from Portland to Bangor as a Major Corridor and to Fund a Feasibility Study*. This bill in its current form is a concept draft. While it is difficult to take a position on a bill with no language, MaineDOT has concerns with what the title implies the bill is trying to accomplish.

Last legislative session this committee passed legislation which directed MaineDOT to conduct a transit propensity study to assess the demand and viability for new or enhanced transit service, including passenger rail, between the communities of Portland and Bangor. The resolve called for a review of relevant traffic counts, population, and employment data, all reasonably feasible corridors of service, and primary trip generators that could significantly affect demand. It also required that MaineDOT submit a report of the findings to this committee, which you all should have recently received.

A Project Advisory Group was established to help oversee and guide the study. The Advisory Group consisted of representatives from the Cities of Augusta, Waterville, and Bangor as well as a representative of the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS), the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), AMTRAK, and Concord Coach Lines.

The corridor between Portland and Bangor has effective parallel highway routes that are uncongested, predictable, have traffic speeds of up to 70 mph and provide for efficient travel times for personal vehicles and existing bus services in the corridor. The corridor is served by existing private intercity bus services, totaling five round trips a day that continue to the Boston market and connect with intercity bus and AMTRAK Downeaster passenger rail service in Portland.

Results of the transit propensity study show that passenger rail expansion to Bangor would involve a very high initial capital cost. Estimated capital costs would be between \$375 million to \$902 million depending on the rail lines and routes used. Further, there would be an ongoing annual need to subsidize the operation of a new passenger rail service. The proposed service would add approximately 70 percent more track miles to the Downeaster route for significantly fewer riders. By way of example, the current Downeaster service, which has a farebox recovery of around 50 percent, requires an annual public subsidy over \$17 million per year. Assuming a similar fare structure, the lower ridership and significant length of such an extension would mean farebox recovery in this segment would be significantly lower, requiring more subsidy.

Given the relatively low transit demand, low population densities, high capital and operating costs, low climate and equity benefits, and extensive transportation needs statewide, MaineDOT has determined that it would be imprudent to continue the study of extending passenger rail to Bangor at this time. Based upon the information from the Transit Propensity Study, we have determined that the cost-effective, timely, equitable, and climate-friendly way to improve public transportation in the study area is to work with the current intercity bus operators in the corridor to advance a 2-year pilot to provide additional round trips and/or add additional stops or route deviations. This will provide more service to more customers in intermediate municipalities in the corridor. Further, better connections to the existing local bus services within the corridor could also be accomplished by working with local transit operators to meet workforce and other equitable needs by providing more frequent and well-timed connections to existing intercity bus stops. This solution best fits the needs and the corridor at this time. It has a low barrier to entry, in terms of cost and time, provides the flexibility to adjust to changing needs, can be implemented quickly, and can be used to gauge the need for additional transit service in the future.

This path forward has been endorsed by BACTS in a letter dated February 24th, 2023. BACTS is a nonprofit focusing on improving transportation in the greater Bangor region. It is also the organization designated by federal and Maine state government to carry out transportation planning in the greater Bangor urbanized area. BACTS evaluates and approves proposed transportation improvement projects and facilitates communication between its member communities and state and federal transportation agencies.

MaineDOT is statutorily charged to consider all transportation needs statewide in a balanced, comprehensive, and objective manner and seek reasoned, cost-effective solutions to demonstrated needs. In accordance with this statutory charge, MaineDOT's guiding principles call for being responsible stewards of public funds by seeking the most cost-effective solutions to demonstrated transportation needs, making reasoned, fact-based decisions that consider long-term benefits and costs, and pragmatically using pilot programs in implementation when feasible. A pilot program to enhance existing intercity bus service and local connections between Portland and Bangor meets this statutory charge and guiding principles.

It is for these reason that we recommend the committee vote ought not to pass on LD 860.

Thank you.