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Testimony of Rep. Maggie O'Neil presenting

**LD 1559, An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by
Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation**

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams and members of the Transportation Committee, I am Rep. Maggie O'Neil. I represent House District 129 in Saco. Thank you for the opportunity to present **LD 1559, An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding**.

Public transit has numerous and diverse benefits for Maine communities, including promoting equity, reducing carbon emissions, and supporting a robust economy.

Despite these benefits, Maine has not prioritized investment in our public transit systems. A 2020 scorecard on infrastructure by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave Maine's public transit a grade of D-, just short of failing.¹ In its explanation, ASCE stated:

"As Maine's population continues to age, and to improve sustainability into the future, transportation options will become increasingly important. However, the state only provides 86 cents annually per capita as an operational subsidy for transit services, much less than other New England states and 38th in the nation."

LD 1559 would make important investments in transit funding, improve Maine's planning process, and affirm public transit as a priority for policymakers in state government.

Saco senior Cole Cochrane led the work on this bill with the participation of a diverse group of stakeholders. Cole is co-founder of Maine Youth Action and a youth member of the Climate

¹ American Society of Civil Engineers, 2020 Maine Infrastructure Report Card.
<https://infrastructurereportcard.org/state-item/maine/>

Council's transportation working group. He engaged in an extensive stakeholder process, beginning last year. GrowSmart's Policy Action team worked to develop the bill. Stakeholders participating in Policy Action included the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce, GPCOG, MMA, Sierra Club, NRCM, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, Maine Youth Action, State Chamber, Maine Transit Association, Greater Portland Metro, Biddeford-Saco-OOB (BSOOB) Transit, KVCAP, Town of Rumford, Maine Council on Aging, Bicycle Coalition, and Western Maine Transit. DOT also participated in conversations.

I. Benefits of a strong public transit system

Well-designed, electrified public transit is more equitable for commuters; it connects workers with good jobs; it reduces emissions, and it decreases environmental impacts associated with mining.

a. Advances Equitable Access to Transportation

Every member of our communities needs to be able to get to work, to buy groceries and other necessities, and to access health care and other essential services. For many Maine families, the cost of owning and using a vehicle is a huge barrier to accessing needed transportation. For other Mainers, a private vehicle may not be a feasible option. In communities without transit options, community members are regularly unable to secure reliable and affordable transportation to their job or elsewhere.

b. Connects Employers and Job-Seekers

For the same reasons, investment in public transit increases job opportunities. Workforce is consistently the biggest concern I hear from local employers. With robust public transit systems, more Mainers will be able to access good job opportunities, benefiting community members and our families, as well as local employers. At a time when employers across the state and in virtually every sector are struggling to hire workers, providing expanded transportation options for potential employees would have enormous benefits.

c. Combats Climate Change and Reduces Environmental Impacts.

Strengthening our public transit systems is essential to reducing Maine's greenhouse gas emissions and combating climate change. Transportation is the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in our state. According to a 2021 report from the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center at the University of Maine, the transportation sector is responsible for 53% of Maine's total carbon dioxide emissions, making it an important target for emission

reductions.² Much of this is due to our dependence on private vehicles. In fact, roughly 78% of Mainers commute to and from their work alone.³

The Mills administration and the Maine Climate Council have identified the reduction of transportation emissions as a core component of our state's strategy to reduce emissions. Public transit produces significantly fewer emissions than the individual use of private vehicles. Public transit use reduces carbon emissions by 45% when compared to driving alone.⁴ For this reason, increasing public transportation investment was identified as a key goal in the *Maine Won't Wait* plan. Additionally, the Maine Clean Transportation Roadmap from the Governor's Energy Office and Office of Policy, Innovation, and the Future highlights the expansion of public transit in as a key way to reduce the total number of miles that Mainers travel in their vehicles.⁵

In addition to climate benefits, public transit reduces the environmental and health impacts of mining as we mobilize to electrify our transportation system.⁶ As lawmakers, our transportation policy decisions actively shape future lithium demand and, thus, the extent of future mining impacts. Robust public transit reduces our demand for lithium mining by reducing the total number of personal vehicles required to meet our transportation needs.⁷ If we build better public transit and walkable communities in areas of Maine with higher population density, we will need fewer total personal EVs and, thus, less lithium mining.

II. How LD 1559 improves transit in Maine

LD 1559 would revitalize Maine's public transit system through strategic investments and policy initiatives:

² "Effects of the Transportation and Climate Initiative Program in Maine: A Study of Rural and Urban Households," Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center (Aug. 2021), available at <https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/2021/08/11/new-report-on-transportation-and-climate-in-maine/>.

³ U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics: Maine Transportation by the Numbers (Jan. 2020). <https://www.bts.dot.gov/sites/bts.dot.gov/files/states2020/Maine.pdf>

⁴ <https://transportation.ucla.edu/blog/5-environmental-benefits-sustainable-transportation>

⁵ The Clean Transportation Roadmap—a specific action of Maine Won't Wait—identifies the policies, programs, and regulatory changes needed to continue decarbonizing Maine's transportation sector in coming years. Available at:

www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/Maine%20Clean%20Transportation%20Roadmap.pdf

⁶ Thea Riofrancos, et al., "Achieving Zero Emissions with More Mobility and Less Mining." U.C. Davis (Jan. 2023), available at <https://www.climateandcommunity.org/more-mobility-less-mining>. See also Sophie S. Parker, et al., Potential Lithium Extraction in the United States: Environmental, Economic, and Policy Implications (Aug. 2022), available at https://www.scienceforconservation.org/assets/downloads/Lithium_Report_FINAL.pdf.

⁷ See "The hidden environmental costs of transitioning to electric vehicles." NPR (Jan. 29, 2023).

1. LD 1559 increases Maine's investment in public transit. First, it preserves the current levels of transit in Maine by providing a one-time appropriation of \$13.6 million. This funding is necessary to replace expired federal operating subsidies for transit. Second, the bill increases our investment in public transit via an additional one-time appropriation of \$25 million to increase support for bus transit operating and capital funds. This investment will support our communities who often struggle to come up with local transit funding to match funding opportunities. For example, critical transit services such as KVCAP or BSOOB Transit struggle to find the necessary funding for their services. Municipalities lack the resources to fully fund public transportation. With expiring federal funds, they will have to reduce services significantly, restricting essential transportation to get to work, doctor appointments, and basic amenities. Throughout this process, I have heard from my own local transit provider and others across the state that a modest increase in state transit funding will enable our transit providers to access significant federal funding.
2. LD 1559 strengthens Maine's transit planning and stakeholder participation via the Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC). The PTAC is an existing statewide group charged with assessing current levels of transit services and recommending improvements. LD 1559 will broaden stakeholder participation in transit planning by adding voices representative of workers, immigrant communities, and youth climate advocates, as well as an additional transit operator. The bill also requires the council to meet at least four times annually and make an annual report to the Legislature. Finally, it would adjust the responsibilities of the council to include preparing a statewide transit plan and setting actionable goals for expanding transit throughout the state. Future state transit plans will be facilitated by the PTAC in coordination with MaineDOT, ensuring that the process includes the input of a diverse group of stakeholders. It's essential that long term planning like our state transit plan is led by stakeholders and aligns our goals with what the public needs to access affordable, reliable transportation.
3. LD 1559 clarifies that public transportation is an important part of transportation policy in Maine. It amends Maine's Sensible Transportation Policy Act, which recognizes the impact of transportation policy on Maine's people and natural resources and helps to guide the Maine Department of Transportation's decision-making. The bill incorporates our commitments to expanded public transit and to curbing greenhouse gas emissions in order to meet our climate goals, ensuring these values are a priority as we plan for Maine's transportation future.

Many of the stakeholders who helped to develop LD 1559 are here today to speak to the benefits of a robust public transit system from their various perspectives. They will share how these initiatives will markedly improve Mainers' quality of life today while laying the groundwork for a sustainable future. The common thread is that we have an opportunity to make climate-smart

investments that will help Mainers from diverse backgrounds and at all life stages so that they can fully engage with their communities.

Thank you for your consideration.