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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine
In support of LD 1559 "An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems
by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing
Funding"**

April 25, 2023

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and Honorable Members of the Joint
Standing Committee on Transportation

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

We have partnered with Build Maine to guide a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy proposals that began a year ago, and has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine and beyond. This testimony represents the view of Build Maine as well as GrowSmart Maine.

Policy Action 2023 has resulted in sixteen proposals from eight working groups, all addressing this goal, ***"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. We do so acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may or may not be a fit and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities."***

LD 1559 is the outcome of a months-long collaborative process within the working group focused on reworking transportation funding to address unmet needs across Maine, in urban and rural communities. As you can see in the attached Fact Sheet, there are many arguments in favor of this legislation, because it will add value throughout Maine in economic development, climate action, fiscal health, transportation safety and choice, and quality of life.

We realize the fiscal note will be significant, but we also believe this to be a sound investment in all those aspects of living and working in Maine.

GrowSmart Maine and Build Maine will assist the committee in any way that is helpful.

LD 1559

**An Act to Advance the State's
Public Transit Systems by
Reinvigorating the Public
Transit Advisory Council and
Increasing Funding**

Action Working Group #2:
**REWORKING
TRANSPORTATION FUNDING**

Point person: Cele Cochrane
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Sponsor: Rep. Maggie O'Neil

OVERVIEW: What does the bill do?

The proposal will reinvigorate and invest in Maine's public transit system. It overall improves and strengthens the role of the state in order to support local transit operators, employers, commuters and our climate goals. There are numerous measures, which include the following:

- **The bill strengthens the Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC).** The PTAC is a statewide group intended to assess current level of service and recommend improvements. This bill expands the role of the PTAC, while also diversifying its representation by adding members in labor, immigrant communities and youth climate activism. It also calls for an additional transit operator. Additionally, the bill expands the role of the PTAC to develop a statewide plan, address how to achieve the standards of adequate access; develops a statewide mobility management program, improve coordination of transit systems for mobility needs; and submit a report to MeDOT for anticipated statewide transit funding.
- **The bill provides a one time appropriation of \$25M.** This investment will supplement the operating and capital needs for transit operators within the current transit plan, create a mobility management program, and expand transit planning assistance for rural communities.
- **The bill provides a one time appropriation of \$13.6M.** As federal operating subsidies for transit expire this year, this appropriation will make sure that transit operates at its current level of service.
- **Amends the Sensible Transportation Policy Act.** This act guides MeDOT decision-making on transportation planning, capital investment and project decisions. The act is amended to include commitments to expanded public transit, as well as Maine's climate goals.

PROS:

- Makes transit accessible, affordable & convenient.
- Advances climate goals by reducing GHG emissions.
- Promotes equity, as it expands job opportunities and addresses mobility issues.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:

- The fiscal note is bold when compared to the status quo. This will be a hurdle in budget negotiations and may be a deterrent for folks that advocate for reduced government spending.

IMPACTS: Why does it matter?

Equity: Expands access to job opportunities, basic amenities, and places around the state. It also decreases car dependence, which is a major barrier to transportation access.

Transportation Safety and Choice: Public transit commuters face far lower crash rates and have a traffic casualty rate about a tenth of the automobile's rate.

Climate Action: Public transit use reduces emissions significantly, especially with the rise of electric buses.

Fiscal health: Public transit is significantly cheaper in comparison to a car. Car expenses can be on average \$894 monthly, while bus transit monthly passes on average cost \$58.53.

Economic Development: Public transit expands access to local downtowns and businesses. It connects commuters to better job opportunities, which benefits both employers and employees..

Quality of Life: Improved public transit means that people have access to healthier foods, vital services, better employment, and recreational activities. This means more socioeconomic mobility, a key to better quality of life. Moreover, public transit further connects people to others in their community.