



Natural Resources Council of Maine

3 Wade Street • Augusta, Maine 04330 • (207) 622-3101 • Fax: (207) 622-4343 • www.nrcm.org

Testimony 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

**To the Committee on Transportation
by Josh Caldwell, Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator
April 25, 2023**

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Josh Caldwell. I am the Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM has been working for more than 60 years to protect, restore, and conserve Maine's environment, on behalf of our 25,000 members and supporters. I'm here today to testify 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.

LD 1559 is a response to a chronically underfunded statewide transit system that is facing yet another setback as federal operating funds through the American Rescue Plan come to an end this year. This legislation provides the immediate operating support needed by transit agencies to better serve residents throughout the state and establishes a pathway toward a cleaner, more affordable, equitable, and accessible transit system for all Mainers.

Maine's bipartisan Climate Action Plan identifies reducing emissions from the transportation sector as "Plan A," citing that 54% of greenhouse gas emissions come from cars and trucks in Maine.¹ The Clean Transportation Roadmap, commissioned in 2021 to establish a pathway for reducing emissions from the transportation sector, identifies transit expansion and transit-oriented development as key recommendations to reduce vehicle miles traveled and diversify Maine's transportation system.²

The 2021 Transit Cooperative Research Report found that riding a mile by bus in this country, on average, contributes 30% less to climate change than riding in a gas car alone. Further, robust transit infrastructure enables denser development and reduces car dependence, and these changes to our communities can reduce vehicle travel 5-12 times as much as the benefits from directly replaced car trips.³ Sustained investment in our transit system is an essential component of our climate response, and this legislation represents the best opportunity to move forward this year.

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/>

² <https://www.maine.gov/future/initiatives/climate/cleantransportation>

³ <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26103/an-update-on-public-transportations-impacts-on-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

Through 2021, on average, 8% of Maine DOT's budget went to multimodal investments.⁴ Those investments are further split between ferries, rail, ports, aviation, and transit, leaving a small proportion available for our transit system. New federal funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act is helping to boost immediate support for transit agencies, but that support must be leveraged by state investment in order to take full advantage of newly available funding opportunities.

In addition to addressing the immediate operating needs voiced by transit operators throughout the state, this bill provides a foundation for a future of a statewide public transit network that features robust, reliable, and equitable service for Mainers regardless of their geographic location, income level, age, race, ethnicity, or ability level. By strengthening the Public Transit Advisory Council and establishing representation on that body from a broad cross section of Maine's population, LD 1559 will help ensure that our transit system will be responsive to the needs of all Mainers. Through this legislation, the renewed Council will improve statewide transit planning and coordination by studying the transportation needs throughout Maine and presenting appropriate solutions that meet those needs. Their work will be supported by appropriations in this bill that will first allow for the continuation of existing operations for transit operators that are about to lose a significant portion of federal funding at the end of the year, followed by an additional appropriation in FY24 to support the smart growth of our statewide transit system.

This bill is the product of the concerted efforts of dozens of stakeholders brought together through the Build Maine + GrowSmart Maine Policy Action 2023 process. These stakeholders range from transit operators, environmental groups, youth groups, transit advocacy groups, municipal governments, community action groups, and more. It is one of the most concerted efforts I have seen to pull together knowledgeable voices from all over the state to build a better Maine through smart development. Our transportation system is central to that mission, and this bill represents a significant opportunity to improve transit access for all users and begin building the climate-smart, equitable, connected transportation system of the future.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on this important transportation legislation. I welcome any questions you may have.

⁴ <https://legislature.maine.gov/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=142583>