



**Testimony of María Fuentes
Maine Better Transportation Association**

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

An Act to Repeal the Laws Providing for the Construction of a Connector to Gorham and to Resell the Land Taken Under Those Laws to Previous Property Owners

April 3, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation: My name is María Fuentes. I live in Hallowell and am testifying today on behalf of the Maine Better Transportation Association in opposition to *LD 1020: An Act to Repeal the Laws Providing for the Construction of a Connector to Gorham and to Resell the Land Taken Under Those Laws to Previous Property Owners*.

MBTA represents over 700 members who plan, design, build, maintain, or use our transportation system including transportation contractors, engineers and suppliers, bus and rail companies, airports, marine and port interests, and others committed to investing in our multimodal transportation infrastructure to boost the state's economy and quality of life.

We are opposed to this bill for several reasons. First, repealing the original law does not make sense. It is unnecessary, even for interest groups, local businesses, and others who may want to kill a potential road project. To remind the committee, the Maine Turnpike Authority did not set out to build a connector; it wasn't part of any capital plan. Instead, some of the surrounding communities asked them to look at ways to manage traffic and propose a plan after MaineDOT had indicated they didn't have sufficient funding. The limited access highway was one of two options proposed from the Gorham East-West Corridor study. The study stakeholders chose this option after reviewing both. We understand that the limited access highway is still the most prudent way to ease congestion in the area west of Portland. However, further study is needed to ensure the best possible infrastructure improvements are constructed.

These communities are not only impacted by the increase in traffic, but they are also hindered by the inability to make their downtowns more livable. Instead of spending so much energy on managing traffic and the safety issues that come with that, they would prefer to focus on better sidewalks, transit, and providing more opportunities for safe streets, and potentially trails or other opportunities for active transportation (i.e., bicycle/pedestrian transportation).

Secondly, we do not understand the timing of this effort. The MaineDOT has agreed to do a study to examine transportation needs west of Portland. This process will determine whether a connector is needed and whether it is wanted by the people in the communities and the region that have been cursed with increasing traffic in Gorham and beyond. This bill would interfere with that effort, which should be completed so that all transportation options are thoroughly investigated, and so that they can gather public input relative to not only the traffic and safety concerns of the region, but also to look at transportation holistically in the context of other societal needs, including clean air, housing and workforce challenges.

Lastly, the property owned by the Maine Turnpike Authority could enhance transportation options for the region, including potential bus lanes, rail lines, trails, a roadway, or a combination thereof. The authority's continued ownership of the land would ensure it would be preserved for transportation purposes, potentially allowing for investments in non-highway modes. So, we believe it doesn't make sense to force them to sell it for other purposes when transportation options are needed.

We believe the prudent way to move forward is to allow the Department to collaborate with stakeholders and regulatory agencies as they embark on their study. Suppose a solution that includes new highway capacity is pursued. In that case, it will be subject to all the requirements that any major project would be subject to, including studying alternatives as required by NEPA and the Maine Sensible Transportation Policy Act. And wouldn't it be great if it resulted in more transportation options for the communities?

We hope you will vote Ought not to Pass on LD 1020. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill and for your work in moving transportation forward in Maine.