



Testimony of Maria Fuentes, Maine Better Transportation Association

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

In Opposition to

LD 1292 – An Act to Codify the Maine Turnpike Authority’s Contributions to the Highway Fund with Regard to the Sensible Transportation Policy Act

April 7, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation: My name is Maria Fuentes. I live in Hallowell and am testifying today on behalf of the Maine Better Transportation Association in opposition to *LD 1292 – An Act to Codify the Maine Turnpike Authority’s Contributions to the Highway Fund with Regard to the Sensible Transportation Policy Act*.

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.

LD 1292 appears to be part of a suite of bills aimed at stopping a connector project that is already on hold, while simultaneously tearing down the Maine Turnpike Authority.

MBTA is opposed to this bill because it would:

1. Create unnecessary chaos in a revenue-sharing process that is working well in serving the people of Maine and the agencies, staff, consultants, and contractors who maintain our transportation infrastructure.
2. Result in higher costs for passengers and freight vehicles and undermine safety on Maine’s most important.
3. Compromise the work that MTA and MaineDOT do to promote active transportation and non-highway modes.

LD 1292 would create chaos and unpredictability not only for the two agencies but also for municipalities, regional planners, workforces, and private companies that help plan, design, build, and maintain the turnpike.

Sweeping money from the Maine Turnpike Authority to MaineDOT would compromise the MTA's ability to plan and fund its capital program and maintenance work, which is at the heart of its existence. It could also lower its bond rating, meaning higher costs for the traveling public.

The bill would compromise safety if passed. Passengers and shippers pay a premium to use the turnpike. As the most important road in the state, MTA is able to put more money into keeping the corridor safe. We as a state don't provide MaineDOT with the funding to manage our vast transportation system better, so they do the very best with what they have. And they do it well. But studies and drivers' experiences show that MTA is a better maintained road, as indicated in the recently released Report Card for Maine's Infrastructure, by the Maine Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers. I have always told our two kids – and their friends – that they should take the turnpike in a snowstorm or other inclement weather. If you pay a premium, you should expect a safer, more well-maintained road.

Finally, the notion that the turnpike is only a highway undercuts its partnership with MaineDOT in which they have collaborated to fund non-highway projects and programs. Over the last 40 years, the MTA has provided upwards of \$240 million in revenue sharing, and while every project must have a nexus or be related to the road, there are examples of funding non-highway projects or programs such as GOMAINE. Another is the \$1.3 million investment the MTA made to fund a bridge for the immensely popular Eastern Trail in southern Maine.

One of our members, the Eastern Trail Alliance, had this to say when the bridge opened more than ten years ago. "The bridge, solely for pedestrians and cyclists, is the first of its kind spanning the turnpike. It completes a 6.2-mile section of trail from Kennebunk to Biddeford." Former Alliance Director John Andrews called it "the biggest challenge" in building the trail, noting that the \$1.3 million funded completely by the Maine Turnpike Authority is a "key element in the alliance's mission to complete a 65-mile stretch of off-road trail from Kittery to Casco Bay."

More recently, MTA spent \$30 million on the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge connecting Maine to New Hampshire, with much of that going to the rail bridge underneath it, since neither New Hampshire nor MaineDOT had the funds to pay for it. One could imagine many more such partnerships in the future for active transportation projects to further grow Maine's extremely popular trail network.

LD 1292 creates a complicated, difficult-to-understand process as a solution to a problem that does not exist. Therefore, I respectfully ask that you vote "Ought Not to Pass." Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill and for all you do to advance transportation of all modes in Maine.