



April 8, 2025

Testimony of Erin Courtney, Maine Turnpike Authority
Before the 132nd Legislature, Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

In Opposition of LD 1292

An Act to Codify the Maine Turnpike Authority's Contributions to the Highway Fund with Regard to the Sensible Transportation Policy Act

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Erin Courtney and I'm here on behalf of the Maine Turnpike Authority to respectfully urge this committee to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1292.

While the goal of strengthening statewide transportation investment is something we support, this bill would undermine the MTA's ability to do what we were created to do: maintain, operate, and invest in a safe, efficient toll highway for the people of Maine—without taxpayer dollars.

LD 1292 Hamstrings MTA's Long-Term Financial Planning

This bill effectively strips the Authority of the ability to plan prudently for future infrastructure investments by requiring us to transfer any cash on hand deemed "excess" to the Highway Fund. In practice, that means the very reserves we count on to plan major capital improvements—such as bridge rehabs and modernizing interchanges—may be siphoned away before we can act on them. A responsible infrastructure agency must be allowed to plan, save, and invest without uncertainty about whether its resources will be redirected.

Lower Cash on Hand = Higher Costs for Maine Drivers

Credit rating agencies look closely at our liquidity—our cash on hand—when assigning a bond rating. The lower the cash on hand, the lower the bond rating. A lower bond rating means we pay more interest on future debt. The more we are forced to bond instead of fund projects with cash, the more expensive our system becomes for the very people who rely on it. LD 1292 threatens that balance.

It Forces Case-by-Case Review of Projects, Undermining Predictability

The bill introduces a new requirement that any MTA capital or planning project outside of standard maintenance be reviewed by both the Legislature and MaineDOT to determine whether it is a greater funding priority than any other project across the state. This effectively places every MTA initiative on trial, one by one, regardless of how necessary, shovel-ready, or locally supported it may be. It's an approach that slows down progress and undermines the reason the Turnpike was created in the first place—to provide a reliable, self-funded transportation system that meets the evolving needs of Southern Maine and beyond.

Safe | Reliable | Sustainable

The MTA's existing project planning process is a public one. Our Four-Year Capital Plan is updated annually, distributed to corridor communities, and posted on our website for comment. In the interest of transparency, this is a longer planning horizon than the one-year requirement in the Sensible Transportation Policy Act. In addition, MTA conducts a specific public process for every project that adds capacity, and any other project that is classified as "significant" by the Sensible Transportation Policy Act.

Importantly, these planning efforts are not conducted in isolation. MTA staff meet regularly with municipal officials along the corridor, MaineDOT staff, and regional planning organizations to understand local needs and coordinate investments accordingly. These partnerships ensure that MTA's work aligns with broader transportation goals while continuing to serve our core mission. We believe the existing planning process provides sufficient transparency and coordination to ensure that there are ample opportunities for the public, local stakeholders, and lawmakers to scrutinize and provide input on MTA projects.

It Undermines a Proven, Predictable Funding Formula

Since 2011, we have operated under a stable, percentage-based formula to support MaineDOT with MTA revenue. That formula has provided predictability for both agencies and allowed us to plan our budgets years in advance. LD 1292 replaces that clarity with vague thresholds and a shifting definition of "excess," making it nearly impossible to responsibly budget for the future.

In closing, LD 1292 takes a blunt instrument to a system that works—and in doing so, risks impairing our ability to maintain the Turnpike, honor our obligations to those who have loaned us money, and plan for Maine's future mobility needs. This might not sound controversial or flashy today, but the damage will quietly build—through reduced road quality, the need to raise tolls or defer maintenance, and more expensive debt.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge this committee to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1292.