



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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Augusta, Maine 04333

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation,

My name is Mike Tipping. I represent Senate district 8 in Penobscot County and I'm proud to present LD 1451, An Act to Strengthen Coordination of Community Transportation.

Last year, I learned that Penquis, our local CAP agency, along with partner organizations in other counties, had lost their state contract for non-emergency medical transportation services to a large for-profit company based in Georgia.

Because Penquis uses the same transportation infrastructure and volunteer network to provide a variety of transportation services through a number of different grants, including for seniors, disabled people, veterans and Mainers needing cancer or dialysis treatment, the awarding of this one contract could undermine transportation in our region much more broadly. It could mean thousands of people are denied access to transportation and that we lose \$273 million in transportation investments over the next ten years.

As Penquis' director put it, "Our transportation infrastructure is a three-legged stool. [It's] strong and sturdy when all three legs are in place, but removing one leg will make the stool fall. This stool has just collapsed."

As I learned more about this situation and we began questioning state officials and investigating the awarding of contracts through the Government Oversight Committee, I began to realize that this is a much larger issue. The state isn't always following the statutory requirement to coordinate across agencies on transportation, nor is it necessarily following the law in taking into account the best interest of the state in awarding transportation contracts. This bill isn't about that single situation or changing one MaineCare transportation contract, but about the broader issue.

In 2023, the state of Maine invested more than \$123 million in public transit, \$73 million in MaineCare non-emergency medical transportation and another \$10 million on similar transportation projects through the Departments of Labor, Education and HHS.

And yet, we're not meeting the mobility needs of Maine people. The report from the Public Transit Advisory Council presented to this committee in March, concludes that public transportation services are meeting only 11% of the current need. Moving Maine Network's 2024 survey reveals that 40% of Maine adults experience transportation insecurity, the inability to access needed services or destinations comfortably, conveniently, and affordably.

This bill and the proposed amendment are meant to help us answer the question of how we can coordinate this spending, achieve the greatest return on investment for Maine's transportation dollars and provide the best access for people and communities across the state.

I believe that coordination is the answer, and I'm far from alone. Improved coordination between MaineDOT and other state agencies is a top recommendation of MaineDOT's 2023 Strategic Transit Plan. The need to coordinate better on transportation access has also been named as a priority issue in reports issued by other state departments and state-level initiatives including the Maine Cabinet on Aging, Maine CDC's State Health Improvement Plan, Ending Hunger 2030, Maine Council on Aging, Maine State Independent Living Council, and others.

LD 1451, as amended, would create the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility and a Coordinator of Mobility Management to increase interdepartmental coordination, ensure state resources are being used efficiently and support the adoption of regional Mobility Management Hubs, which would allow the better recognition and addressing of local needs.

Similar cost-sharing and mobility management coordination programs are already in place in many other states, including Massachusetts and New Hampshire. It's time for Maine to adopt best practices for coordination of community transportation, including regional mobility management programs, an interagency council, and strengthened state leadership.

We should never have a situation, as we sometimes do now, where two half-empty vans, funded by different departments, are travelling the same route. And we should never have people in rural Maine who are stranded, without any transportation they can access and afford.

I appreciate your consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions.