



May 1, 2025

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

In Opposition to LD 1756

An Act to Establish a Statewide Transportation Project Selection Prioritization Process

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Erin Courtney, and I am here today on behalf of the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA) to respectfully testify in opposition to LD 1756.

While we appreciate the intent of strengthening statewide transportation coordination, we respectfully believe that LD 1756 would undermine the proven success of the MTA model, creating unnecessary risks to project delivery and financial stability.

Maine Turnpike Authority was created to provide a self-funded, efficient, and reliable transportation system without reliance on taxpayer dollars. Over decades, this model has worked successfully to deliver critical infrastructure projects, coordinated with municipalities and regional planning organizations.

LD 1756 would insert a new external Transportation Project Selection Council into MTA's project decision-making, diminishing the Authority's ability to prioritize projects based on operational need, corridor demand, and financial stewardship.

MTA already operates a transparent and cooperative planning process, updating its Four-Year Capital Plan annually, soliciting public input, and coordinating with MaineDOT, municipalities, and regional organizations. LD 1756 would force MTA projects into a new, statewide prioritization process that could delay essential investments, introduce uncertainty into our project schedules, and make it harder for the Authority to respond to evolving transportation needs.

Financial institutions and bond rating agencies carefully scrutinize MTA's planning stability, liquidity, and self-reliance. If project approvals become delayed or uncertain through the council's new review process, it could weaken confidence in MTA's ability to deliver capital improvements efficiently. This could ultimately affect MTA's bond ratings and borrowing costs, making our system more expensive for Maine drivers.

LD 1756 also introduces a duplicative layer of bureaucracy over an already robust planning process. MTA projects are already subject to public review, federal environmental reviews, regional transportation planning coordination, and compliance with the Sensible Transportation Policy Act.

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Adding a council to re-rank and potentially override these efforts will lead to unnecessary delays and could politicize project selection, rather than keeping it driven by technical needs and corridor priorities.

The MTA's long-range planning already supports Maine's transportation goals: promoting safe travel, managing infrastructure condition, supporting economic vibrancy, and fostering environmental stewardship. We recognize the importance of equitable access and climate resilience, and we are already integrating these principles into our planning. LD 1756, while well-intentioned, would hinder rather than help these efforts by shifting decision-making authority away from those closest to project implementation.

In closing, LD 1756 risks impairing the MTA's ability to maintain the Turnpike, responsibly plan for the future, and continue providing Mainers with a reliable, self-funded transportation system. For these reasons, we respectfully urge the committee to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1756.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.