



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Adam Lee

Phone: (207) 312-4057
Adam.Lee@legislature.maine.gov

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*Testimony of Rep. Adam Lee presenting
LD 287, An Act to Require and Encourage Safe and Interconnected
Transportation Construction Projects
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development*

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Adam Lee. I represent House District 89, which is a part of Auburn that was once a bustling downtown, unfortunately and tragically destroyed during urban renewal in the 60s and 70s.

Our downtown was divided by an arterial highway and saw many of its traditional downtown buildings demolished in favor of suburban-style development and modes of transportation that privilege vehicular travel over all other modes of transportation. Our four-lane Court Street so discourages pedestrian and bicycle travel that people who would walk in Portland, Boston or virtually any other city instead choose to drive. Our prime real estate, which should garner outdoor cafes, mixed retail and badly needed safe and affordable housing, instead serves as unsightly drive-through ATMs, chain restaurants and unused, unneeded parking lots.

We know this form of transportation and development makes us less safe — pedestrian fatalities are on the rise,¹ in 1969 49% of children walked or biked to school; today that number is around 10%.² It deprives us of value — complete streets increase employment, new business, property values and private sector investment.³ It also harms our environment and general standard of living.

¹ www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Pedestrian%20Traffic%20Fatalities%20by%20State%20January%20%20June%202021%20Preliminary%20Data_0.pdf

² www.activetrans.org/sites/files/cs.pdf

³ smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/safer-streets-stronger-economies.pdf

The bill also takes the important step of prioritizing state Department of Transportation funding for those projects that provide for multimodal transportation, encourage mixed land use, encourage infill development, facilitate dense housing, provide walkable neighborhoods, preserve open space, wetlands, parks, farms and woodlands, and encourage community and public participation.

This committee knows better than any that the type of development encouraged by this bill is highly beneficial to the State's economic development and resolving the State's housing shortage. The priorities that this bill outlines are precisely the priorities that the housing policies advanced by the last two legislatures have encouraged. Unfortunately, our transportation funding decisions seem to provide no consideration for advancing these housing policies. Our housing and transportation policies need to be more effectively aligned. This bill is an opportunity to do that.

MDOT will offer testimony that this legislation is somehow simultaneously duplicative of the work it already does and that it somehow will preclude it from doing its work. Both of those things can't be true. I appreciate that MDOT has, to its credit, created a number of internal documents that voice support and mechanisms for implementing complete streets and multimodal transportation. That's great. The issue I see is that those values and policies are not visible in the project funding decisions made by MDOT. I trust that MDOT shares the values articulated in this bill. I look forward to working with them to create a bill or series of bills that provide accountability to those values.

This bill seeks to make a modest and important impact on the safety, health, economic strength and environment of the city I love. It seeks to improve the safety, health, economic strength and environment of the state we all love. I hope you vote ought to pass. I look forward to answering any questions you have and contributing anything you need for the work session.