

Testimony of Maria Fuentes  
Maine Better Transportation Association  
Joint Standing Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

*LD 2266 - An Act Regarding Offshore Wind Terminals Located in Coastal Sand Dune Systems*

March 18, 2024

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Maria Fuentes, Executive Director of the Maine Better Transportation Association (MBTA), and on behalf of MBTA, am testifying in support LD 2266.

Our organization 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 and marine and port interests, and others committed to investing in our transportation infrastructure to boost the state's economy and quality of life.

Sears Island certainly has a long history in transportation in our state. It was purchased by the state of Maine, including through two general obligation bonds in 1981 and 1983 that voters supported, under the administration of Governor Brennan. The state purchased the entire island, 941 acres, with taxpayer funds. MaineDOT built the causeway later in the 1980s in anticipation of having a marine port in Searsport, one of the three areas that were deemed part of the state's three-port strategy, with the other two being Portland and Eastport.

There was no way to access the island until the causeway was built. Once the causeway was built, there were many people who began to enjoy the island that, like many dozens of other islands in Penobscot Bay, was only accessible by boat. This brought in more opponents of a marine port, who wanted to keep the island as it was. While it is often described as "pristine," in addition to the causeway there is a rock jetty, a paved road large enough to allow two 18-wheelers to pass, a communications tower, a gravel road, cleared meadows, and cellar holes.

After other administrations were unsuccessful in getting the port built, the island was divided up through a stakeholder process under Governor Baldacci, so that two-thirds would remain conserved, and one-third would be slated for transportation purposes. Those representing conservation interests agreed to the deal at that time. The current proposal for the wind port facility was made after much deliberation, with many stakeholders in a process created by Governor Mills and would help Maine reach its clean energy goals. The proposed facility would impact about 10% of the acreage on the island.

MBTA understands the importance of coastal sand dunes to our natural environment. We hope that an agreement can be reached that is a win for environmental stewardship and is also a win for this vital renewable energy project.

Thank you for the work you do and for considering our testimony.