



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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**Testimony Neither for Nor Against LD 259, An Act Making Unified Allocations from the Highway Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025**

**To the Committee on Transportation**

**by Josh Caldwell, Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator**

**March 27, 2023**

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Josh Caldwell. I am the Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator at the Natural Resources Council of Maine. NRCM has been working for more than 60 years to protect, restore, and conserve Maine's environment, on behalf of our 25,000 members and supporters. I'm here today to testify neither for nor against LD 259, An Act Making Unified Allocations from the Highway Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

The recommended Unified Highway Fund Budget for fiscal years 2024-2025 proposes a continuation of the state's regular contribution to transit operations at \$1.2 million. This number hasn't changed in five years despite significant shocks to transit agencies across the state over that period. To maintain the current level of service for wheeled transit operations and avoid cutbacks for transit users in Maine, this level of funding must be increased.

Federal funding through the American Rescue Plan has supported transit operating costs in Maine for the past two years, but that funding will come to an end this year. With the Federal Transit Administration providing fifty percent of Maine's transit operating funds, state and local governments will be forced to come up with the other half, or make significant cuts. Transit agencies are already woefully underfunded, and the current budget proposal is insufficient to meet their expressed need, especially after the pandemic significantly reduced transit ridership.<sup>1</sup> An increase in state contribution to transit operating funds will be critical to ensure continuance of existing routes and service, let alone expansion of that service.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2022/03/18/politics/the-pandemic-slashed-maine-bus-and-train-ridership-it-has-not-recovered-joam40zk0w/>

A sustainable climate future for Maine features a thriving public transit system that meets the needs of all Mainers, and we cannot hope to achieve that vision without first ensuring that transit operators have the resources to maintain baseline service.

Maine's bipartisan Climate Action Plan identifies reducing emissions from the transportation sector as "Plan A," citing that 54 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from cars and trucks in Maine.<sup>2</sup> The Clean Transportation Roadmap, commissioned in 2021 to establish a pathway for reducing emissions from the transportation sector, identifies transit expansion and transit-oriented development as key recommendations to reduce vehicle miles traveled and diversify Maine's transportation system.<sup>3</sup>

The 2021 Transit Cooperative Research Report found that riding a mile by bus in this country, on average, contributes 30% less to climate change than riding in a gas car alone. Further, robust transit infrastructure enables denser development and reduces car dependence, and these changes to our communities can reduce vehicle travel by 5-12 times as much as the benefits from directly replaced car trips.<sup>4</sup>

The Maine Transit Association has proposed a substantial step toward establishing reasonable funding equity in the state's support for public transit operations. They have asked for an increase in state contribution to public transit operating funds (not including rail and state operated ferry systems) to \$6,780,960 per year, a modest request that would represent significant relief for transit agencies across the state. Further, we hope that the \$20 million in the current budget for multimodal capital expenses be used to support wheeled transit capital needs.

LR 1777, An Act to Strategically Advance the State's Public Transit Infrastructure by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding, has not yet been printed, but will also include an ask for increased state funding for transit operations in alignment with MTA's request. We are supportive of this legislation.

We urge the Committee to include the recommendations of the Maine Transit Association in this budget and would welcome any questions you have.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/future/initiatives/climate/cleantransportation>

<sup>4</sup> <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26103/an-update-on-public-transportations-impacts-on-greenhouse-gas-emissions>