

Date: April 11, 2023

To: Transportation Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Maine Youth Action

Re: Testimony in support of LD 1170, Resolve, To Promote Passenger Rail for Commuters



Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and the esteemed members of the Transportation Committee,

My name is Cole Cochrane, I am a senior at Thornton Academy in Saco, and I am here on behalf of Maine Youth Action, a statewide youth advocacy group that represents hundreds of young Mainers across the state from varying backgrounds. We are here to testify in support of LD 1170, a Resolve to Promote Passenger Rail for Commuters.

[I wish I could be up in Augusta today, but I am currently in class at the moment. However, I felt the need to call in to testify, for many young Mainers have found this bill to be quite important to them.] Young Mainers have a major stake in the future of our transportation system. When the state did its planning decades ago regarding transportation, it expanded our highways, encouraged the use of the private automobile, and reduced our access to public transportation. Those changes did not immediately affect the decision makers of that age; instead, those decisions affected future Mainers, which are us. We now face a multitude of problems from those decisions. Private automobiles are now a necessity to mobility. We no longer have viable alternatives, and the extensive public transit networks in Maine, which were historically known to be reliable and convenient, have been greatly diminished. This has posed challenges to young Mainers. Due to cars being the only viable option for transportation, we face many barriers to mobility around our state. For example, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the costs of owning a car can be [between 25-38% of one's income](#). That very same agency defines “affordability” as housing and transportation costs accounting for 45% of income. These high transportation costs have created barriers for young Mainers. This applies to job opportunities, access to basic amenities, and overall general mobility.

However, that is not the only problem resulting from these past decisions. There is also the climate crisis. [54% of greenhouse gas emissions](#) in Maine come from the transportation sector. It is also no coincidence that [78% of Mainers drive to work alone](#). The dependency on cars and the push for car centric infrastructure has driven **[no pun intended]** the increase in our state's emissions. The problems we are facing require transformative solutions. Even the Maine Climate Council's transportation working group has called for increased investment in public transportation and transit oriented development, which is why LD 1170 is so important. The bill would create a visionary roadmap for significant improvements to passenger rail service from Brunswick to Wells and Sanford. This would mean that commuters will have an affordable, reliable and environmentally friendly mode of transportation. It would also have benefits for young Mainers, who desperately need transportation alternatives like passenger rail. I mentioned earlier in my testimony how decision makers back then planned the transportation system we have today. Well, you are the decision makers now, and you have the power to direct the state of transportation in Maine's future, the future young Mainers will have to live with. We are calling for investments in our public transportation system, and LD 1170 is a pragmatic step to take in order to get there. I urge the committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1170. Thank you for your time and service.