



PORTLAND
Regional Chamber
of Commerce

93 Exchange Street Portland, ME 04101 • (207) 772-2811
chamber@portlandregion.com • PortlandRegion.com

Cape Elizabeth • Cumberland • Falmouth • Gorham • Scarborough • South Portland • Portland • Westbrook

**Testimony in Support of LD 1559-An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by
Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisor Council and Increasing Funding**

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
April 25, 2023

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

I am Eamonn Dundon, the Director of Advocacy of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce, representing 1,300 businesses that employ over 65,000 Mainers in our region. We are submitting this testimony to express our organization's strongest support for LD 1559.

As I stated when I came before this committee a few weeks ago in opposition to many of the passenger rail bills before you, our organization highly values a frequent, reliable, and sustainable public transportation system. In fact, public transportation is one of our top three policy priorities. I spend a lot of my time in our region working with municipal, agency, and non-profit partners through the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) to advance this goal. While we do not see promise in massive state investments in expensive rail expansion projects, we do see a state imperative to step in and contribute to the operations and expansions of our passenger bus operators, as proposed in this legislation.

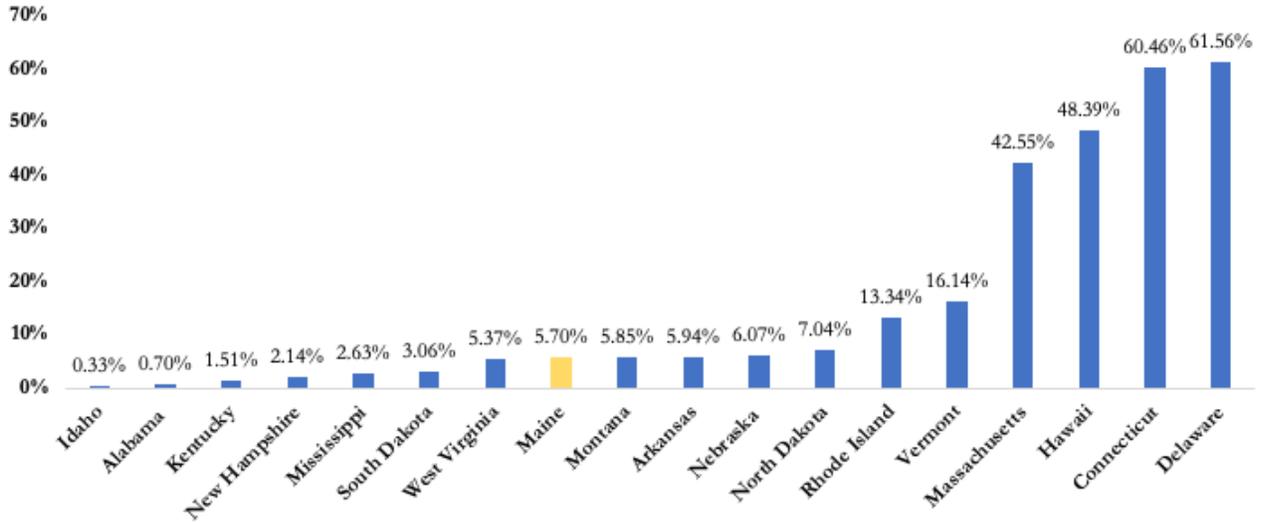
The success of our state goals in the *Maine Won't Wait* climate plan and the 10-year *Maine Economic Development Strategy* depend on our ability to make bus service viable in many communities in our state. In *Maine Won't Wait*, there is a deep commitment to reducing emissions from transportation. As this committee well knows, this is a challenging goal to meet in a state as rural as Maine. It will be decades until Maine can eliminate transportation emissions in rural areas and for commercial, heavy-duty users. Thus, the burden needs to be on our most urban areas to encourage mode-shift among commuters towards low-to-no emission modes, including public transportation. Similarly, in the *Maine Economic Development Strategy* we aim to add 75,000 people to the workforce by 2030. This will be accomplished primarily through the addition of the younger, more diverse populations that are driving our in-bound migration. These are populations that are uniquely primed to be users of transit, and this investment will catalyze their ability to participate in our workforce.

In preparing testimony on this bill, we examined the public transit investments at the state level among the closest cohort of peer states around the country, as reflected in the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Transit Database (charts below). These are primarily rural states, states with small populations like Maine, and/or our fellow New England states. The data are clear: Maine lags far behind our closest neighbors in New England and barely meets the average among all peer states nationwide. Only 5.7% of all our public transit agency budgets in Maine are funded from state coffers, with the majority of dollars going to support the less than half a million riders of the Maine State Ferry Service, and only \$170,000 dollars going to support our largest bus operator in the state, Greater Portland METRO, which transports over 2 million riders annually.



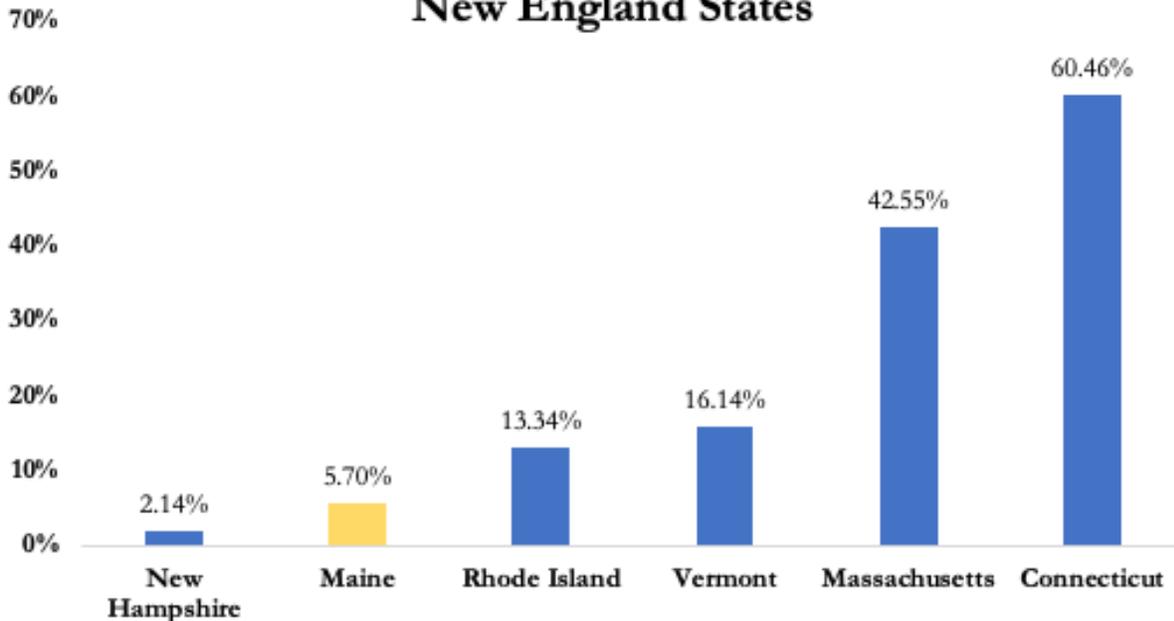
Maine lags most peer states when it comes to state share of public transit funding:

State Share of Public Transit Funding Among Maine's Peer States



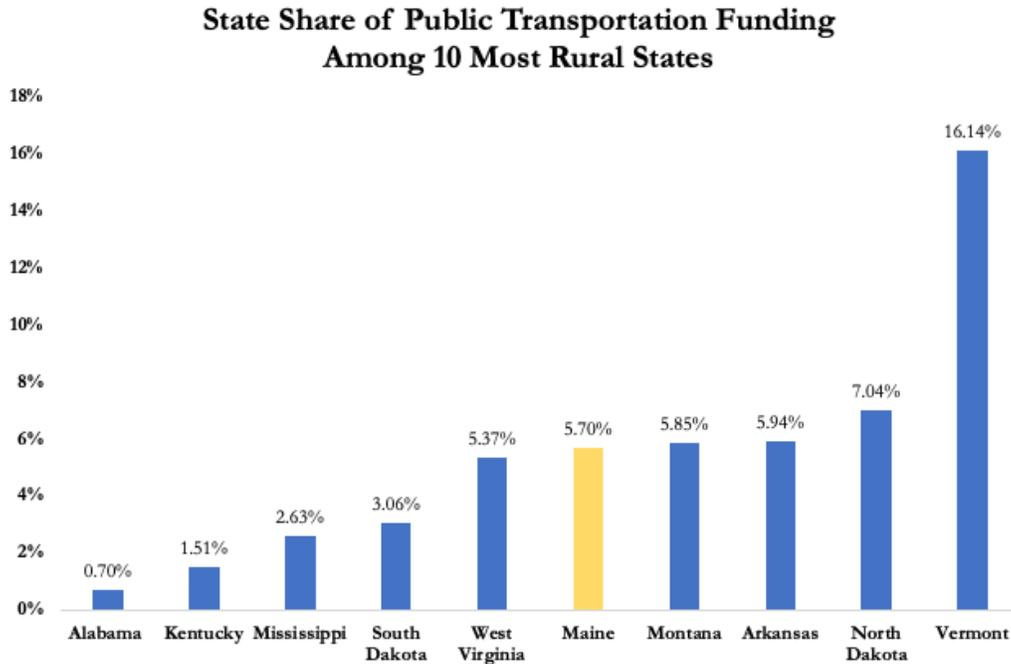
Breaking this down into groups of peer states, Maine lags all but one New England state when it comes to state share of public transit funding:

State Share of Public Transit Funding Among New England States





Among the 10 most rural states, Maine is barley exceeding the average of 5.39% for state share of public transit funding among these peers:



Finally, I want to highlight the important planning initiatives in this legislation that are worthy of advancement, even without the larger investments in operating assistance. The expansion and reinvigoration of the Public Transit Advisory Council is a long overdue measure to ensure that Maine DOT consults a broad range of voices when it comes to their work on public transit. I have the pleasure of serving a similar body in the PACTS Regional Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC), and we brought new voices to the transit planning process in our region that advance innovative thinking to build out our regional services in a cost-effective, growth-focused manner. We believe the PTAC can accomplish that same type of vision if the voices stipulated in this legislation are included in the process. This, along with the amendments to the Sensible Transportation Policy Act and the addition of two staff positions in Maine DOT focused on transit planning, are essential ingredients to improving the public transit infrastructure of our state.

We thank you for your time and commitment to all Mainers, and we ask for your expeditious approval of this important legislation.