

Testimony of The Maine Municipal Association

In Opposition To

*LD 1634 - An Act to Grant Municipalities the Authority to Set Certain Lower Motor Vehicle Speed Limits Without a Department of Transportation Speed Study*

April 25, 2023

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Sen. Chipman, Rep. Williams and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am offering testimony in opposition to LD 1634, An Act to Grant Municipalities the Authority to Set Certain Lower Motor Vehicle Speed Limits Without a Department of Transportation Speed Study on behalf of MMA's 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC) who are elected by their selectboards and councils in Maine's 35 senate district to establish positions on legislation impacting municipalities with the broadest understanding of the difference in impacts of policy on these vital services in all areas of the state.

Our LPC was split between north and south experiences on this issue, but the majority supported the position to oppose LD 1634. Many communities shared that they worked well with the Department of Transportation around the changing safety needs in their communities. Those officials expressed that the speed studies conducted in their community were very informative and assumed a holistic approach that looked at the road systems spilling into the areas of concern and the effect of traffic flows, possible bottlenecks which could lead to more crashes. Those officials advised that slower limits didn't equate to slower operators and the best results seemed to come from the traffic calming measures in those communities that actively slowed traffic, rather than rely on an operator's willingness to comply with a lower limit and not always available enforcement when they did not.

Other officials explained that locally elected officials may not be appropriate for making such decisions due to the lack of expertise, and changeable nature of the role, limits may be changed during each election cycle initiated by political desire, over a data informed decision process.

In some southern and western communities, officials shared a lack of response from the department when trying to access services DOT provides to address significant safety issues in their communities. Those communities shared that they felt both stonewalled when seeking solutions, or entirely ignored and only to later receive a sudden request to meet the department's timeline around projects they were not informed about in advance. They felt costs were part of the factors particularly when projects did not fit in a DOT work plan, or may outstrip available resources, leaving communities feeling that pedestrian fatalities were necessary for prevention measures not an abundance of near misses.

Some communities felt they would like the option to lower speeds to levels that exist on main thoroughfares at a minimum for residential feeder roads coming off them. In a couple of instances, the speed on Business Route 1 cutting through coastal communities is lower than the residential roads feeding

off the main artery, but municipal officials have been unable to rationalize this for their residents who complain about the use of such roads as alternate ways around tourist traffic.

Despite these issues, the majority of officials believe there is merit in the review conducted by their state partners and would rather ask that the department be endowed with greater resources to address the disparity in some communities, or perhaps develop a feeder street policy that allows officials to lower the traffic speeds on feeder roads to the same level as main DOT compact roads at a minimum. Overall, officials also agree that locally elected officials might produce more inconsistent and ever-changing limits in response to groups outside the community, at the cost of community residents who may or may not share the same desires and feel the data informed policy making process remains important to balance all of these shared uses.

To that end the Association and officials ask that you vote ought not to pass on LD 1634, but we would be happy to work with the department and additional stakeholders to address all of the concerns held around speed limits and encouragement of safe driving practices.