



Testimony in Support of LD 1674, An Act to Require and Encourage Safe and Interconnected Transportation Construction Projects

**To the Committee on Transportation
by Josh Caldwell, Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator
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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). 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 in support of LD 1674, An Act to Require and Encourage Safe and Interconnected Transportation Construction Projects.

Maine's bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is behind the curve. The 2022 Bicycle Friendly State Report Card gave Maine's bike and pedestrian infrastructure a C- rating, ranking Maine 10th out of 11 states in the Eastern region.¹ 2021 was the most dangerous year on record for pedestrians in Maine despite reduced traffic rates from the pandemic, pointing to a system that prioritizes cars over people's safety.² Despite our history of not adequately investing in infrastructure for people who walk, bike, or roll, 2023 has the potential to be an inflection point for Maine. An unprecedented amount of funding is available from the federal government for improving bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and the creation of the first ever Maine Statewide Active Transportation Plan earlier this year shows promise for a more connected, safe, and environmentally friendly system for Maine pedestrians. LD 1674 represents an opportunity to continue on this recent trajectory and improve safety for people who bike and walk all across the state.

In addition to directly improving the safety of Maine's pedestrians and bicyclists, LD 1674 would also improve transparency in the Maine Department of Transportation's (MDOT) project prioritization process and would encourage coordination between MDOT and local governments. The prioritization criteria outlined in this bill would make sure that MDOT pursues projects that would provide safety and access for all users, not just cars and trucks. This bill would also advance smart development more broadly by prioritizing projects that contribute to walkable neighborhoods, infill development, and land preservation, amplifying the impact of this legislation beyond immediate pedestrian infrastructure needs.

¹ https://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/BFS_Report_Card_2022_Maine.pdf

² <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2022/04/15/news/pedestrian-deaths-increased-in-maine-last-year-joam40zk0w/>

A sustainable transportation future for Maine features safe, affordable, and accessible alternatives to driving – including walking and biking infrastructure throughout the state. 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.³ The Clean Transportation Roadmap, commissioned in 2021 to establish a pathway for reducing emissions from the transportation sector, identifies improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure as a key recommendation to reduce vehicle miles traveled and diversify Maine’s transportation system.⁴

People will not use alternative modes of transportation unless we build convenient, safe, and reliable infrastructure for them to do so. This investment in bike and pedestrian planning and infrastructure for all new transportation projects will result in long-term dividends for our state from an economic, public safety, and environmental vantage. Ensuring that this infrastructure is included in the design for all new transportation projects costing more than \$500,000 will put pedestrian safety at the forefront and reduce costs associated with retrofitting unsafe sites that were not built to accommodate people not in cars safely in the first place.

Safe biking and walking infrastructure is a key facet of our statewide transportation system, for which MDOT has primary responsibility. We would like to see this effort around safe biking and walking infrastructure for all new projects incorporated into the implementation of the MDOT Statewide Active Transportation Plan developed earlier this year.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on this important legislation.

Thanks, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.

³ <https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/the-plan>

⁴ <https://www.maine.gov/future/initiatives/climate/cleantransportation>