



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

LD1750 “Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Complete a Service Plan and Determine the Scope of Work for the Restoration of Rail”

February 1, 2024

Senator Chipman, Representative Crafts, and Honorable Members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Rae Sage, and I am the Policy Coordinator for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. The Permanent Commission’s role is to examine racial disparities across all systems and advise Maine State Government on ways to improve the status and outcomes of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations.

The Permanent Commission supports LD 1750 because the expansion of public transportation options is long overdue. In order to accommodate Maine’s shifting economic, social, and environmental landscapes, more flexibility is needed in its transportation infrastructure.

Transportation systems heavily reliant on personally owned vehicles embody both institutional and structural racism. Institutional racism involves the financial institutions that approve or deny individuals for car loans. Historically, Black and Hispanic applicants are more likely to be denied car loans than white people with the same credit scores and incomes. They are also likely to pay higher interest rates if and when they are approved.¹ This makes car ownership a financial barrier, leaving racial communities susceptible to the predatory lending practices that create long term economic disadvantage.

On the other hand, structural racism involves practices, policies, and norms that are an advantage to one group while harming another. Consistent access to a

¹ Racial Discrimination In the Auto Loan Market [cfpb_mayer_racial-discrimination-in-the-auto-loan-market.pdf](https://cfpb.mayer_racial-discrimination-in-the-auto-loan-market.pdf) (consumerfinance.gov)

functional, cost effective, personal vehicle is an easy privilege to take for granted but for many Mainers of color, the struggle to find, afford and maintain a personal vehicle is a financial and social burden that defines all dimensions of their everyday life. Access to transportation determines our ability to work. It defines where our children go to school and who we come to call our community members.

The Permanent Commission also recognizes Maine DOT in their efforts to better serve Maine communities of color. In their attempts to increase equal access to transportation, they have identified the following underserved transportation users:

- low-income individuals or households
- People of color, including Maine's Indigenous peoples
- New Mainers
- commuters/workers and potential workers
- individuals and households without access to a vehicle and/or for whom a driver's license is unattainable
- individuals in substance use recovery
- individuals with physical or mental disabilities and
- individuals for whom English is a second language²

Maine's historically disadvantaged populations embody all of these underserved users. Transportation touches every element of our lives, and consistent and safe access to public transportation creates better outcomes for all who call Maine home. The development of a rail corridor between the most racially diverse communities in Maine, would improve the health and economic power of racial, indigenous, and tribal populations in the state. Thank You!

² [MaineDOT Equity Statement](#)