



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Joint Committee on Transportation
From: Matt Cannon, Sierra Club Maine
Date: March 31, 2025
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 1020: An Act to Repeal the Laws Providing for the Construction of a Connector to Gorham and to Resell Land Taken Under Those Laws to Previous Property Owners**

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

I write on behalf of Sierra Club Maine Chapter, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nationwide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. To that end, we urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on L.D. 1020.

Though we appreciate that the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA) has decided to not proceed with the unnecessary Gorham Highway project at this time, it is still authorized under the law. It was authorized at a time before our Climate Law was signed, and the communities affected have since determined that they do not want this highway. The MTA's own studies said a highway would only barely benefit commute times, perhaps 4 minutes on average.¹ For at least \$330 million, we should be able to do a lot better than that. And, we know that building more roads/highways leads to induced demand. The more you build, the more people use the road. The short term benefit of brief traffic reduction is soon replaced by more traffic.²

Instead, we should be focused on building a new future, one that supports people's choice to move around in whatever way suits them: not only automobile dependence. More than 90,000 people of driving age do not have a driver's license in Maine, and more than 40,000 households across the state don't have access to a personal vehicle.³ We need to pivot our state policy to be more inclusive of other modes of transit, ensuring people have more choice. This doesn't mean cars will disappear. There is a critical role for personal motor vehicles, especially in rural Maine. But, what we absolutely do not need, is to lock ourselves into extremely costly personal vehicles and road infrastructure. This project in particular is not worth the cost, and we should officially make it disappear, returning the land back to our local communities.

We have other options than more highways, including more regional planning and development around smart growth compact development principles that encourage more economic activity and more sustainable land uses, instead of sprawling asphalt and disconnected communities. Instead of

¹ <https://m4st.org/resources/>

² <https://shift.rmi.org/faq>

³ <https://www.jtgfoundation.org/2025/01/data-brief-shows-gaps-in-maine-families-access-to-transportation/>

this highway, we could focus on more buses from Gorham to Portland. There are many other alternatives to consider that are outside of the scope of this particular bill, but worth reading up on.⁴

Last, there's no route for this highway that would not cut through Smiling Hill Farm, a rare surviving local dairy farm, one of the oldest family-owned small businesses in the country and a community staple.

The MTA has said they are stepping back from this project, but only the Legislature can stop them and ensure that this project is truly cancelled. We urge the committee to align itself with the communities who would be impacted by this expensive and irresponsible project and support L.D. 1020.

Sincerely,

Matt Cannon
Sierra Club Maine Chapter
State Conservation & Energy Director

⁴ <https://m4st.org/resources/>