

To: Transportation Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Clean Transportation Advocate

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1020, An Act to Repeal the Laws Providing for the Construction of a Connector to Gorham



Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and the esteemed members of the Transportation Committee: My name is Cole Cochrane, and I am presenting testimony on behalf of Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), an organization representing 400 young working Mainers, to express ardent support for LD 1020, An Act to Repeal the Laws Providing for the Construction of a Connector to Gorham.

Our constituency is composed of young, hard-working Mainers from all across the state, including in neighborhoods affected by the Gorham Connector, as well as in districts of this committee's members. The young workforce is the face of Maine's economic vitality, and requires policies reflective of their needs and interests. After all, the investments of today form the system of tomorrow, a system young workers will inherit. With respect to the transportation system, young Mainers are seeking investments that bolster freedom of choice, accessibility, affordability and reliability. The Gorham Connector is the *opposite* of these interests. Instead, it is a bloated, inefficient \$331 million fiasco perpetuated only by the slighted interests of bureaucrats. It is emblematic of everything wrong with Maine's transportation agencies, a sign indicating that meaningful transportation reform is much needed. In the meantime, however, let LD 1020 serve as a meaningful initial measure in holding MaineDOT and MTA accountable to their wrongful convictions.

Despite the serious environmental and public health threats this highway proposal poses, MYCJ is in fact presenting testimony to express how the Gorham Connector is an egregious abuse of public funds; significantly deteriorates trust and integrity in MaineDOT and MTA; and leads to major cost increases young Mainers simply can not afford.

First and foremost, the Gorham Connector would cost the state \$331 million, which is a relatively hefty price tag for a project that only received 40% support from local residents.¹ To place this figure into perspective, the current MaineCare budget shortfall, as of March 21, is estimated to be \$120 million.² The cost of this unpopular highway expansion could cover the MaineCare shortfall *nearly 3 times over*. Mainers, both young and old, agree that the state should not only be fiscally responsible, but direct investments that foster long-term growth and resilience. Our constituents are not entirely convinced a 5-mile, four-lane toll road is worthy of \$331 million from hard-earned taxpayers. This is not just the opinion of MYCJ- even the Maine Turnpike Authority's own poll agrees. According to a poll paid by MTA, 86% of respondents believe it "doesn't matter" that the Gorham Connector could shave 10 minutes off morning and evening commutes. If MTA and MaineDOT pursue this, especially given glowingly apparent public disapproval, it would be a misuse of public funds. Not to mention, out of the number of transportation's priority investments, it certainly would not be a toll road attempting to shave a mere 10 minutes off peak commutes.

As if the \$331 million could not be burdensome enough, commuters would also have to experience significant toll increases, at a time when working Mainers are experiencing rising costs and stagnant incomes. According to a bond rating agency, MTA would have to raise tolls by 29% on I-95 drivers in the next few years to finance this unnecessary project.³ Given the critical

¹ <https://www.pressherald.com/2025/02/01/poll-shows-more-residents-oppose-gorham-connector/>

² <https://www.mainepublic.org/politics/2025-03-21/breaking-down-whats-in-the-new-11-3-billion-state-budget-and-the-political-tensions-around-it>

³ <https://www.pressherald.com/2021/12/03/rating-agency-expects-maine-turnpike-to-raise-tolls-by-29-in-2028/>

role of I-95, with traffic reaching over 91 million and affecting hundreds of thousands of Mainers, it would be unreasonable for the state to force a toll increase, especially at a time when car ownership costs have surpassed \$12,000 annually.^{4 5}

Moreover, the Gorham Connector has become emblematic of rapidly deteriorating public trust in the state's transportation agencies. MaineDOT and MTA have not been transparent with the public; whether it be initially refusing to reveal polling results, or understating costs of the project by over \$100 million, there has been a worrying pattern of misleading the public on this particular issue.⁶ Although our transportation agencies already have a troubling history of misusing public funds and pushing forward with unpopular projects, the Gorham Connector has become one of the most nefarious examples. This opinion not only comes from my 5 years of experience with transportation policy in Maine, but from my learning experiences with former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx, who made me realize the abnormality of MaineDOT's opaqueness. The Gorham Connector is systemically flawed in relation to its transparency, so it would serve both the administration and the public to restore trust by ending the Gorham Connector.

One of the most important notes I can not stress enough, however, is the sheer influx of public discontent with the current practices and policies of MaineDOT. It would be wise of the committee and the department to not only heed the calls of repealing laws pertaining to the Gorham Connector, but legitimately consider meaningful transportation reform in light of this. As such, I encourage the members of the Transportation Committee to consider voting "ought to pass" on LD 1020.

⁴ <https://www.maineturnpike.com/about-mta/traffic-statistics/traffic-by-year>

⁵ <https://newsroom.aaa.com/2023/08/annual-new-car-ownership-costs-boil-over-12k/>

⁶ <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/09/16/gorham-connectors-estimated-cost-is-up-traffic-counts-down/>