

Lou Simms
Gorham
LD 1292

Testimony in Support of LD 1292: An Act to Codify the Maine Turnpike Authority's Contributions to the Highway Fund with Regard to the Sensible Transportation Policy Act.

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

My name is Lou Simms. I live in Gorham and I am a member of the Gorham Town Council. I am writing to strongly endorse the passage of LD1292.

As I have recently discussed with your committee, Maine's municipalities would greatly benefit from increased investment in our existing roadway networks. Maine's relatively low population density means that we all have to pay significantly to maintain our existing roads, and the harsh Maine winters add further wear & tear.

In my efforts to improve street safety in Gorham, it has been communicated to me that neither our towns nor state government have the necessary funds available to properly keep up with the extensive costs of maintaining our existing roadway infrastructure. At the same time, I have been told that the only entity that has available funding is the Maine Turnpike Authority. This means that the only way municipalities can access desperately needed funding is to allow MTA to build a toll highway that rips through our communities.

Maine Turnpike Authority charges admission to all who enter our State beyond Exit 7. Those travelers pay the toll, not for the destinations along the highway, but for the ability to access the unparalleled natural beauty that lies far beyond MTA's highway interchanges. In addition to the Turnpike, those travelers must also utilize our existing network of state routes and local roads to access the many places that are well worth the price of admission.

The current arrangement for the distribution of these toll-revenues is unjust for the people of Maine. It results in a sub-optimal pattern of infrastructure development for our communities -- which ends up creating negative tax consequences at the local level, by further subsidizing spread-out housing development that costs too much for our towns and schools to service: far more costs than the limited property tax revenues generated by these low value-per-acre builds.

When we force Maine people to spread out so far that they have no choice but to drive everywhere for every single daily need, we actually create worse traffic congestion, and we subject our citizens to higher forced costs for housing and transportation: 2023 estimates suggest that the average American pays more than \$12,000 annually per automobile. Many Mainers struggle to afford these rising costs for transportation and housing -- and many of these Mainers could otherwise be more productive members of our workforce, if only we provided our citizens more freedom of choice, in their options for transportation & housing.

The Maine Turnpike Authority operates with an unacceptable lack of oversight and accountability to our taxpayers, and MTA creates costly, duplicative administration that other states across our country manage to execute in a more cost-effective manner, commonly through their State Departments of Transportation. MTA sits on an enormous amount of funding that is generated by the natural beauty and unique offerings provided by the people of Maine. The people of Maine deserve more equitable stewardship of these toll-revenues, to make more efficient investments that generate more value for the communities of Maine.

I urge you to vote in support of moving LD1292 forward. I thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Lou Simms