

To: Transportation Committee
From: Cole Cochrane, Clean Transportation Advocate
Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1756, An Act to Establish a
Statewide Transportation Project Selection Prioritization Process



Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and esteemed members of the Transportation Committee: My name is Cole Cochrane, I am the Clean Transportation Advocate for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), an organization representing over 400 young working Mainers. I am also a current student at Harvard studying public policy and economics. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1756.

As I have reiterated in my previous testimonies to this committee, fundamental transportation reform is necessary. Our organization, alongside a robust variety of stakeholder interests, remain steadfast to the goals of ensuring our transportation system is resilient, affordable and accessible. We understand shaping our transportation system to work for Mainers is a long-term, collaborative effort. However, there are basic preconditions to implementing reform that need to be immediately addressed. One of these preconditions come in the form of project selection prioritization, a measure that is, at its core, about transparency, accountability, and strategic investment.

LD 1756 is pragmatic in nature. Currently, our decision-making process lacks standardization and transparency necessary to ensure that investment decisions are made in an optimal manner. The lack of standardization has left many communities and funding recipients uncertain about

how decisions are made, jeopardizing the stability of crucial operations like rural community transportation or larger, fixed-route services. Furthermore, the lack of a Smart Scale system has led to evident consequences. The most glaring example, which led to public outcry and ardent opposition, was the Gorham Connector, a \$331 million 5-mile highway. As we face mounting demand for critical repairs and maintenance of current infrastructure, the Gorham Connector has served as the epitome of poor planning and investment decisions. By formally integrating key stakeholder input through the Transportation Project Selection Council, as well as statutorily articulated objectives guiding future MaineDOT project assessments, will greatly align the state's current work plan and funding priorities to long-term goals of the department and stakeholders.

The only recommendation I would like to offer to the committee is the inclusion of a representative for young workers on the Transportation Project Selection Council under §4209-B subsection 1. The plight of young workers is unique and acute. The particular challenges we face—specifically regarding accessibility and affordability issues—should be grounds for representation as the council advises Maine Turnpike Authority and MaineDOT on how to prioritize projects across the transportation system. I am happy to provide further rationale at a later date if it is within the committee's interest.

