



May 1, 2025

RE: **Testimony of Build Maine IN SUPPORT of LD 1632**, An Act to Provide Incentives and Amend Laws Regarding Access to Protect Rural Highway Capacity and Promote Long-Term Economic Development

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

My name is Kara, and I am the Chair of Build Maine. We are a statewide group working to align fiscal, economic, environmental, and quality of life goals within our state through pragmatic and common-sense solutions that strengthen villages, towns, and cities across Maine.

Build Maine supports LD 1632, which proposes to tamp back highway sprawl that is creating congestion along our rural highways, which are oftentimes the only way to get from point A to B. We simply can't afford to continue the self-destructive pattern of widening rural roads, which then unlocks low-density commercial and residential development, which in turn creates more traffic, which then requires more spending to address dangerous intersections caused by the increased traffic. This is the pattern that has led to countless flights over invasive and expensive transportation projects proposed to address the congestion fundamentally caused by sprawl, which is so often induced by transportation projects with the intent of easing congestion, but ultimately creating more traffic.

1991 Sensible Transportation Policy Act Failed Attempt to Reduce Sprawl

In 1991, the people of Maine were also fed up with the highway expansion projects that proliferated across Maine in the 1970s and 80s, such as the projects identified in the 1997 report, [The Cost of Sprawl](#). In response, The Sensible Transportation Policy Act (STPA), [a citizen's initiated bill](#), was brought forward to fight back against runaway highway sprawl-inducing projects, like the widening of the Turnpike that was [approved by the Legislature](#) in 1987. The STPA was initially voted ought not to pass by the Transportation Committee of the Legislature, but was ultimately moved to citizen referendum and was approved by 59% of voters, repealing the authorization to widen the Turnpike. Similar to 1991, the people of Maine overwhelmingly support limiting highway expansion, the facilitation of sprawl that comes with widening roads, and the loss of rural lands from a low density pattern of development. Unfortunately, the STPA didn't strictly limit highway expansion and enabled projects to navigate the loose set of criteria adopted as part of rulemaking.

1999 Act Failed Attempt to Reduce Sprawl

This bill proposes to address the damaging impacts of low density rural highway development by restoring the original text in the 1999 Act to Ensure Cost Effective and Safe Highways in the State. This Act was recommended by the [1999 Sprawl Task Force](#) to fix a shortcoming with Maine's 1988 [Growth Management Act](#) (GMA). The GMA was a response to the urban sprawl that expanded outwards from Maine's traditional community centers along state highways at a rapid pace in the 1980s. Unfortunately, despite the GMA, the trend of highway sprawl continued into the 1990s, and

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the 1999 Act was passed with the intent to slow the spread of highway sprawl and preserve rural highway capacity. Unfortunately this Act was undermined by other bills that removed the teeth so that only a handful of land owners could continue to build sprawl.

2007 Act Failed Attempt to Reduce Sprawl

LD 1632 will also restore the 2007 Act to Promote Transportation Planning, Increase Efficiency and Reduce Sprawl, which was intended to provide financial incentives for regional transportation planning to help communities purchase rural lands adjacent to state highways, to stop sprawl before it starts. This Act also provided planning funds that enabled local communities to plan Complete Streets improvements in their locally designated growth areas. This bill was intended to advance the goals of Maine's GMA and the STPA, so that local communities could control growth, rather than be controlled by it. This Act was repealed in 2013.

Growth Management Act Failed Attempt to Reduce Sprawl

The final GMA enacted in 1988 was the result of a bipartisan compromise between a [bill](#) Governor Brennan's administration submitted to the 113th Legislature in 1986 and a similar [bill](#) Governor McKernan [submitted to the Legislature](#) in 1987. These bills had their differences, but they shared the goals of protecting Maine's environment and quality of place by empowering the people of Maine to plan the future of their communities at the local level, where land use planning is most effective.

The GMA was based on feedback the Commission on Maine's Future heard when they held public hearings in every corner of the state in 1987 and 1988, and the final law required every community in Maine to eventually complete a comprehensive plan that is consistent with the consensus vision for the future of Maine, as outlined in [Maine at the Millenium](#).

Unfortunately, the GMA did not do enough to resolve the inevitable conflicts that happen when local goals, like preserving community character and protecting working lands, conflict with state transportation goals, like increasing vehicle throughput, which also then interact with outdated 1970s-vintage zoning to promote sprawl despite local priorities that don't support that outcome.

Maine has a long history of the public working to limit the damaging development patterns that provide short-term financial benefits for a handful of landowners at the expense of the State as a whole. LD 1632 will empower rural communities to do regional transportation corridor planning, so they can control development decisions along these routes, and also provide the state with the ability to limit access and ensure that these critical regional corridors can move traffic efficiently between Maine communities far into the future.

Sincerely,

Kara Wilbur, Chair
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