

OPPOSE

LD 1367 – An Act to Restore Maine’s Secondary Roads

Sponsor: Senator THOMAS of Somerset

Co-Sponsors: Representatives CEBRA of Naples, RIOUX of Winterport, ROSEN of Bucksport, THERIAULT of Madawaska, WILLETTE of Mapleton, and Senators COLLINS of York, JACKSON of Aroostook, and PLOWMAN of Penobscot

Summary: The bill establishes a Secondary Roads Fund as a dedicated account within the Department of Transportation for the purpose of financing capital improvements to state aid and minor collector roads. It directs that several revenue sources be used for the Secondary Roads Fund, including (Sec. 7) lease payments for “off-premises signs located within the right-of-way of an interstate highway, a state highway or a state aid highway. The definition of “off-premises sign” is essentially synonymous to a billboard – so Sec. 7 would have the affect of repealing Maine’s ban on billboards. Sec. 13 of LD 1367 would redirect funding that currently is supposed to go toward energy efficiency, and direct it toward the Secondary Roads Fund instead.

Explanation: This bill would essentially repeal Maine’s successful ban on billboards, which has been in place since 1977. The bill grants the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation the authority to authorize off-premises signs, and to regulate the size, shape, color, lighting, manner of display and lettering. The bill supersedes the existing ban on signs and limited allowance of directional signs. Although the current law banning billboards would not technically be repealed from Maine Statutes, Section 7 of LD 1367 states: “Notwithstanding any other provisions of law to the contrary.” This means it would override the billboard ban.

The bill would allow the Commissioner of Transportation to allow essentially all forms of advertising on billboards. Off premises signs would be signs that “advertises a business, a person, an activity, goods, products or services not located on the premises where the sign is installed and maintained.” The bill would allow signs on interstate highways, which are prohibited under current law, and LD 1367 deletes any role for the Transportation Information Advisory Council (TIAC) relating to signs – a nine-member citizen advisory board. The Commissioner would be empowered to make unilateral decisions.

NRCM strongly opposes lifting Maine’s billboard ban. Such action would damage Maine’s tourism economy by littering our scenic roadways with unsightly signs, would not generate a significant amount of funding for road repairs, and is not necessary for improved traveler information given how people receive their information in our internet-driven society. Because repair of a mile of roadway can cost \$1 million, Maine would need hundreds if not thousands of billboards (leased at \$1,000/month) to make even a small dent in repairing our more than 8,000 miles of state highways and state aid roads. The bill would create a harmful incentive for the DoT Commissioner to authorize billboards on Maine’s most highly traveled roads, where lease revenues would be the highest – thus accelerating the visual pollution and scenic damage to Maine.

NRCM Opposes Sections 7 and 13 of LD 1367