



Dear Authors of the Statewide Active Transportation Plan,

The Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization with more than 25,000 supporters statewide and beyond. For 60 years, NRCM has been protecting, restoring, and conserving Maine's environment, now and for future generations. We work statewide to:

- Protect the health of Maine's rivers, lakes, streams, and coastal waters;
- Promote sustainable communities through initiatives that reduce toxics pollution and waste;
- Decrease air and climate-changing pollution through energy efficiency and renewable sources;
- Conserve Maine lands and wildlife habitat, including our treasured North Woods; and
- Defend the federal environmental policies and programs that help protect Maine.

NRCM is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector and to providing more opportunities for people to enjoy the Maine outdoors, and investment in active transportation works to achieve both of these aims. We are excited to see the first ever Statewide Active Transportation Plan and commend the authors on pulling together an important framework outlining the state's active transportation needs and vision.

This plan builds a strong argument for the need to improve safety for pedestrians, increase on- and off-road multi-use path networks, improve multimodal connections for all Mainers, and to pursue new funding mechanisms for continued active transportation improvements. Building out active transportation infrastructure aligns directly with the aims of the Maine Climate Action Plan and the Maine Economic Development Strategy, and we look forward to seeing the vision for Maine's active transportation network actualized through committed and continued investment.

There are many strong elements of the plan. The section outlining the benefits of active transportation shows that infrastructure supporting walking, biking, and rolling leads to direct economic, health, and environmental benefits for Maine. The public engagement overview reinforces that Mainers want to see more separated bike lanes, better sidewalks, and safer pedestrian interactions with roadways. The needs assessment is thorough and clearly shows that Maine has work to do to provide pedestrians with safe and appealing options around the state. We are also really encouraged to see consideration of the Maine Active Transportation Arterials plan assembled by the Maine Trails Coalition, which we feel to be an exciting and achievable vision that would bring a multitude of health, climate, and economic benefits to Maine.

However, there are some elements of the plan that should be strengthened. The plan does not sufficiently identify next steps for implementation or identify measurable goals that will allow for accountability over time. The plan should include more specificity around how the Complete Streets policy will be updated and applied to all new projects, further clarification regarding what funding sources are being considered and leveraged specifically for active transportation, and how local match is

being reconsidered for active transportation projects. We would like to see an increase in state contribution to active transportation to assist regional and local governments in implementing needed active transportation improvements, and hope to see active transportation increasingly prioritized in MDOT projects moving forward.

Additionally, recommendations regarding widening shoulders and increasing traffic signals for cars have questionable merit. While wider shoulders may be a step in the right direction in rural areas, stretches of road that merely have slightly wider shoulders should not be considered completed sections of a safe, connected, and accessible statewide active transportation network. Increasing shoulder widths must be paired with visual, or even better, physical barriers between pedestrians and vehicles to increase user safety and utilization. We would prefer to see investment in separated active transportation lanes to ensure the highest degree of safety for users. Further, more traffic signals for vehicle users at intersections are not proven to be as effective as alternatives such as roundabouts for pedestrian and vehicle safety.

Overall, a greater degree of focus on pedestrian safety, separated active transportation lanes, and active transportation prioritization in MDOT decision making processes including implementation accountability measures in goal setting would make this plan stronger.

Thank you to all those who contributed to this project. We look forward to continued collaboration moving forward.

Sincerely,

Josh Caldwell

Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator

Natural Resources Council of Maine