
**Testimony in Support of LD 1359, Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to
Develop Practices Regarding Public Transit**

To the Committee on Transportation

by Josh Caldwell, Climate and Clean Energy Policy Advocate for NRCM

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Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Josh Caldwell, and I am here on behalf of the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) in support of LD 1359, Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Develop Practices Regarding Public Transit. NRCM is Maine's leading nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting Maine's environment, with nearly 20,000 supporters statewide and beyond.

I am the Vice Chair of the Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC), which is a voluntary board established in statute to advise the State Legislature and the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) on public transit service in the state. This year, the PTAC released its 4th biennial report on March 1st, which you all received a briefing on a few weeks ago.¹ The legislation before you today intends to advance the recommendations that emerged from that report, each of which was adopted on a consensus basis by the 29 members of the PTAC, who represent transit interests from each of the 8 transit regions statewide.

Throughout the course of a year, the PTAC received presentations from each of the transit regions, plus the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), the Maine State Ferry Service, and the GO MAINE program at MDOT to inform report development. The report was also aided by research conducted simultaneously by the John T. Gorman Foundation and the Moving Maine Network, who released their respective reports on transportation barriers in Maine earlier this year.

Several persistent themes emerged from these presentations and reports. First, the need for public transportation services statewide is not currently being met. In fact, reporting shows that only about 11% of the demonstrated need for public transportation is being met in Maine. The pandemic had a significant impact on transit operations statewide, and federal pandemic relief

¹ Public Transit Advisory Council, March 1 2025, 2025 Biennial Report to Legislature,
<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/transit/ptac/>

has come to an end. Transit ridership is rebounding from pandemic lows, but growing demand for services is running up against operational budget constraints. Transit operators statewide need more funding to be able to run consistent, reliable service that meets the needs of their communities. Increasing operations funding and working to reduce local match requirements to allow transit operators to better access federal dollars are clear priorities for Maine.

Next, our transportation system as it is, is expensive and too often inaccessible for families, with the average Maine family now paying more than \$1,000 per month to own and operate a vehicle. More than 10,000 Mainers in communities across the state are currently not employed only because of a lack of access to reliable transportation, and more than 40,000 households in Maine do not have reliable access to a vehicle. Increasing public transportation options for Mainers is essential for those who cannot or do not drive but would also be a major benefit to families struggling with transportation costs and for local economies in dire need of a reliable workforce.

Finally, transparency and inter-agency coordination continue to be sticking points for transit users and operators alike. Each of the four PTAC reports has recommended improvements on these fronts, and we look forward to working with MDOT and other agencies that offer rides to ensure that operators understand how funding decisions are made and what they can expect year over year — and that transit users understand the options available to them.

The current Resolve language does address these themes, but as you saw earlier this year, the 2025 PTAC report is substantial and includes several recommendations that are not reflected in the current Resolve language. To clarify the intent of this Resolve and to ensure that the full breadth of the recommendations is carried forward, the PTAC recommends the following items for the Committee to consider during work session.

There are two items deserving of clarification in the current Resolve language:

- To reduce local match for transit operators, we recommend that MDOT work with operators to establish standardized levels of local and state match requirements for operating and capital expenditures, which should result in a proportional decrease in local match and a proportional increase in state contribution;
- To increase coordination between state agencies that provide transportation services, we recommend including DOT, DOE, DOL, and DOJ, and improving coordination as is recommended in LD 1451 by establishing an interagency compact and coordinating council to advance coordination and establishing the position of Coordinator of Mobility Management within state government.

There are a few recommendations that are not currently reflected in the Resolve language that we recommend adding:

- Making a plan to sustainably increase the level of state operating funding for public transit operators over time to meet growing demand and increasing costs, including a plan

to increase operating funds for transit providers to \$8.9 million per year in the next biennial budget;

- Implementing a reporting system for transit projects in collaboration with transit providers that provides an analysis of outcomes relating to ridership trends, obstacles, population demographics serviced, and implementation of accessibility measures;
- Supporting volunteer driver efforts throughout the state by pursuing a model for statewide volunteer driver coordination.

Improving public transit in alignment with the PTAC recommendations would provide major benefits to some of the communities and people across Maine who need it the most. This bill would implement many of those recommendations, and we hope the committee works hard on this bill to improve and pass it. Thank you for your consideration, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.