



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
16 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0016

Paul R. LePage
GOVERNOR

David Bernhardt
COMMISSIONER

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Testimony of David Bernhardt, PE
Commissioner, Maine Department of Transportation
Before the 127th Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

In Support

LD 1415

An Act To Authorize Two General Fund Bond Issues To Improve Highways, Bridges and Multimodal Facilities

Senator Hamper, Representative Rotundo and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, I am David Bernhardt, Commissioner for the Maine Department of Transportation. I appear before you today in support of LD 1415, the Governor's proposed general obligation bond for transportation.

This proposal represents a two-year bonding plan totaling \$175 million, with \$85 million going out to the voters in November of this year, and \$90 million in November of next year. As a licensed professional engineer, I am proud to say that MaineDOT is first and foremost an engineering organization – as such, we plan, we execute, we deliver. We rely on bonding to keep our transportation system together, and if funding is unreliable, we are unable to plan and deliver the infrastructure our customers deserve.

LD 1415 is part of a 10-year bonding plan for infrastructure; it establishes predictability for transportation planning purposes. It is critical for us to deliver on our '15-16-17 Work Plan commitments, published in January, which assumed a \$40 million per year bond. Approval and passage of these bonds will enable us to put out \$95 million *more* in work than currently scheduled. That increase will be used to address some of the needs identified in MaineDOT's *Keeping Our Bridges Safe Report*, released earlier this year that calls for \$70 million more a year for Maine's bridges. If bond funds or other funding components (state Highway Funds, federal funds, etc.) do not become available, this Work Plan, and the projects found within, will need to be reduced to meet available resources.

The bond proposal breaks down the funding as follows: in the first year - \$68 million for highway and bridge projects, \$17 million for multimodal projects for a total of \$85 million; in the second year, \$72 million for highway and bridge projects, \$18 million for



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multimodal projects for a total of \$90 million. The Highway and Bridge funds will be used for bridge work, upgrades to our Priority 1, 2, and 3 highways as well as funding for our Municipal Partnership Initiative (a 50-50 program aimed primarily on lower priority roads). Multimodal funds will be used for ports, harbors, marine transportation, aviation, freight and passenger rail, transit, and bike and pedestrian trails.

There are several various bond measures before you, others even transportation related. This leads to the understandable question, “does Maine really need this bond?” By at least three important measures, the answer is YES.

First, on a geographic and demographic level, the need for transportation funding is clear. Maine has a relatively low population spread out over a large land area. For example, although our populations are roughly equal, the land area of Maine is about 3.5 times that of New Hampshire (NH).

Accordingly, Maine has roughly double the number of state highway miles of roads as NH, yet their federal transportation funding is about the same. This means Maine has about double the number of miles per capita to maintain, and about half the funding per mile to do it. Obviously, these basic facts are not going to change, but it may be helpful to remember this when assessing transportation needs.

Second, on a basic, intuitive customer-service level, I believe we all know transportation bonding is necessary. All of us have their own personal “worse road” visual – or more importantly a visual of the travelers impacted by that road. In the end, anyone driving in the spring in Maine has had a bone jarring experience. This experience costs money. Driving on roads in need of repair costs Maine motorists \$529 million a year in extra vehicle repairs and operating costs – \$525 per motorist, according to a report released this spring by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation organization. Perhaps it is for this reason that Maine voters usually approve transportation bonds with around 70% approval.

Lastly, based upon statutory capital goals established to provide basic maintenance of the system, this bond is clearly needed. In 2011, the Maine Legislature endorsed MaineDOT’s easy-to-understand prioritization system for highways. This system takes into account intuitive factors like how the road functions (Interstate, Arterials, Major Collectors, Minor Collectors, Local), the amount of traffic on the road relative to the region, economic importance based upon regional input, truck use, and other factors. Highways are categorized from Priority 1 (the Turnpike, Interstate, other NHS highways) to Priority 6 (Local Roads). Further, simple Customer Service Levels (A-Excellent, B-Good, C-Fair, D-Poor, and F – Unacceptable) that match these priorities were established because customer expectations are obviously different for an interstate than a country road. Armed with these basic tools, the Legislature established basic customer-focused capital goals. These goals are set forth in 23 MRSA §73(7). Three examples of these basic goals follow.

- By 2022, improve all Priority 1 and Priority 2 highways so that their safety, condition and serviceability customer service level equals Fair or better.
- By 2027, improve all Priority 3 highways so that their safety, condition and serviceability customer service level equals Fair or better.
- Continue the Light Capital Paving program on a 7-year cycle for Priority 5 highways.

It is important to note that these are not “pie-in-the-sky”, wishful, “want-to-have” goals. These are right sized, basic, “take-care-of-what-you-have” goals. For example, the third goal above essentially acknowledges that we will not have any broad-based reconstruction program on about half of the state miles – about 4,200 miles. That is, all we are trying to do is Light Capital Paving, known to some as “skinny-mix”, over these miles. As a highway design engineer and head of the largest engineering organization in the state, I wish we could do more. It is MaineDOT’s mission to responsibly provide the safest and most reliable transportation system possible, *given available resources*. Policymakers determine the amount of those resources. We then do the best we can with what we have by stretching available dollars to focus as much as we can on product, as opposed to process, and to prioritize. This requires hard decisions. The result of these hard decisions was these new capital goals, which dropped the unmet capital need for core highway and bridge programs from about \$280 million per year, to about \$119 million per year. If this bond proposal is approved, the unmet need will be about \$72 million per year.

In conclusion, we believe that the question of whether this bond should be approved is clearly “YES”. Maine’s geography and demographics point to “YES”, common sense and Maine voters say “YES”, and the shortfall of statutory capital goals indicates “YES”. We hope this Committee will say “YES” as well. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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