



**Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of  
The Maine Council on Aging  
To Joint Standing Committee on Transportation**

**In Favor of LD 1258 - An Act To Increase Access to  
Transportation for Workforce and Other Essential  
Transportation Needs**

Submitted in Person on April 30, 2019

Senator Diamond, Representative McLean and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Transportation:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 80 organizations, businesses, municipalities and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 1258.

Transportation is one of the core social determinants of health because it is a foundational beam to all of our economic and social structures. Access to transportation not only ensures people can get to medical care when they need it, it also helps people stay healthy and sometimes avoid the need for medical care altogether. That's because, in order to stay healthy, we need reliable and consistent access to employment, financial resources, healthy food, exercise and socialization. Socialization is especially critical for older people because social isolation is now associated with increased rates of falls, coronary heart disease, stroke, suicide and depression.

According to Maine's 2025 Strategic Transit Plan, ***72% of older Mainers live in communities without access to fixed route transit or one of the larger flex route transit systems.*** This means that only 28% of older Mainers have access to public transportation of any kind to fall back on if they can no longer drive. In 2016, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety estimated that about 19% of people 70 and older did not have a driver's license. In Maine, this translates to about 31,200 people age 70 and older who do not hold a current driver's license.

Older adults who can't drive and don't have access to public transportation have to rely on others to get to medical appointments, the grocery store, social interaction, and the bank. If they don't live with a spouse or have a close family member, they have to rely on friends and neighbors to meet their basic transportation needs. If they don't have a solid network ready to help, an older person who cannot drive can deteriorate quickly due to a lack of socialization and inadequate nutrition. Because of these realities, older people often drive much longer than they feel comfortable driving, increasing the risk that they or someone else will be injured in an accident.

As Mainers, we have an abiding belief that a just society ensures everyone can equally participate in community life. This is true even if they cannot drive. To make sure we can all remain active, healthy members of our communities long into old age, we must increase access to public transportation by making necessary investments in the public transportation system in Maine.

The Maine Strategic Transit Plan 2025 concluded that it would cost between \$7.4 and \$14 million each year to reach the modest goal of providing 20% of the unmet transportation need in Maine. LD 1258 proposes to operationalize this recommendation. It also targets a small portion of these investments to our best “last mile” option – volunteer driver networks.

There are complex challenges and barriers to providing transportation in a rural state. Older residents tend to live outside of service areas and expanding public transit to every part of Maine is not a feasible strategy. Meeting the transportation needs of rural Mainers requires a creative and multi-pronged approach that maximizes available resources of both human and other capital.

The Strategic Transit Plan *"encourages the development and use of volunteer networks to serve rural and remote rural areas."* Last year, the MCOA helped to reach out to the nearly 20 well-established volunteer driver programs around Maine as part of an initial conversation to discover how best to operationalize this recommendation. These programs are in places like Ellsworth, Bethel, Brunswick, Bar Harbor, Mount Vernon, Cumberland, St. George, and Kennebunk. Here's a summary of what we found from the 11 organizations who completed our survey.

Some of these organizations are relatively new while some have been in existence for more than 20 years. Some are stand-alone programs while others are part of a community or senior center. Some have staff; some are run only by volunteers. Most serve rural communities. Some have rider age restrictions; most do not. Most provide rides for all purposes.

All of the programs rely on volunteers using their own vehicles. The volunteers are not compensated, even by mileage reimbursement. The programs all have written procedures that govern their programs. They all provide training to their volunteer drivers and all do a background check that involves a driving check. All drivers are required to have a valid driver's license and a registered and inspected vehicle.

With LD 1258, we have a terrific opportunity to expand these kinds of programs and to build a robust network that connects them to our formal transit system. Maine is home to more than 125 local, community-based “aging in place” initiatives that are aimed at helping older people live healthy, engaged lives at home. Many of these communities are interested in starting volunteer driver programs to fill gaps in the existing public transportation system. The additional funding in LD 1258 would support this happening.

Passing LD 1258 will not solve Maine's transportation challenges but it certainly helps us take a step in the right direction and we urge your support. We also stand ready as partners to advance the important work of this legislation after it is enacted.

Thank you.

Jess Maurer  
207-592-9972