



## Maine Chapter

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### Testimony In Support of LD 721: "An Act to Provide Transparency in Public-Private Partnerships for Transportation Projects"

Karen Woodsum, on behalf of the Maine Chapter of the Sierra Club

Good morning Senator Mazurek and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Karen Woodsum and I am here to represent the Maine Chapter of the Sierra Club on their support of LD 721 that would amend (?) existing law in order to provide transparency in public private partnerships for transportation projects. The scope and massive impact across northern Maine of the 220-mile East West Highway proposal now under discussion exacerbates (SP) the need for full transparency to ensure the public interest is being served at all stages of development planning.

On February 19 at a breakfast with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, East-West Highway Project Manager Darryl Brown made the following bold statement about the proposed East-West Highway, "It's been talked about since 1937, but it's going to happen." (Sun Journal, 2/19/13). "It will be built" he re-iterated.....This is an indication of the lack of concern by highway promoters as to whether Maine people actually want this juggernaut (?), and why they continue to keep details on the proposed route, investors, and profit projections out of the public view.

What he did not mention was that construction of an east west highway has been proposed and rejected six times since 1944 - due in part to the inability to insure that it would provide any significant benefits to Maine people and communities. Concerns have been raised about the impact on businesses and communities along existing east west routes due to the "bypass effect" of an alternate high speed highway. There are still many unanswered questions about this project and the public has a right to know.

It is well documented that there are significant environmental impacts from building a highway. Not only are wildlife and rivers and streams impacted during construction, but the highway itself blocks wildlife corridors, creates extensive road kill and road salt and other contaminants pollute and endanger our waterways - a public threat..

The Sierra Club is not only concerned with impacts to the environment, but also to the economic impacts to Maine citizens. In a Wisconsin study of the impacts of highway bypasses, small communities saw average traffic reductions of 72% on their old routes (The Economic Impacts of Highway Bypasses on Communities. 1998. Wisconsin Dept of Transportation). Even the Maine DOT predicted drastic bypass effects from this highway, "...a new four lane alignment east of Bangor could cause significant bypass effects of Route 1 commercial activity in the coastal communities between Bangor and Calais." (A Summary of the Findings of Studies Regarding a Maine East-West Highway. 1999. Maine Department of Transportation and Maine State Planning Office.)

While this committee does not have jurisdiction to address all of these issues, you can make a significant first step by moving LD 217 forward. By making the project documents public, Maine citizens can start to effectively evaluate this project. In a recent report on the dangers of private transportation projects, the author states,

Given the profound implications of road privatization, no deal should be approved if the public has not had the opportunity to review, question and comment upon it. Unfortunately, though many states lack legislation requiring transparency in private road projects, such as making proposals available to affected communities. This refusal to provide information is justified on the basis that private road builders and operators regard their own analysis and proposals as “proprietary” business secrets. But such rules prevent full public review of the process and undermine both transparency and the opportunity for full public participation. (Private Roads, Public Costs: The Facts About Toll Road Privatization and How to Protect the Public. 2009. U.S. PIRG Education Fund.)

Applying basic public interest principles is a given when considering a highway construction project that bisects the entire state ---and two of those key principles are that “there must be complete transparency to ensure public vetting of private (sic) proposals and there must be full accountability in which the legislature must approve the terms of a final deal, not just approve that a deal be negotiated.” (Private Roads, Public Costs: The Facts About Toll Road Privatization and How to Protect the Public. 2009. U.S. PIRG Education Fund.)

It is crucial that this committee protect the public interest and provide the public with a chance to review project documents for a project that will impact the whole state.