



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Marybeth Richardson, Hearing Officer
Maine Department of Environmental Protection
312 Canco Road
Portland, Maine 04103

RE: York Toll Plaza Project

Dear Ms. Richardson:

Please consider this letter as you deliberate on the permit applications filed by the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA) to replace its barrier toll plaza at Mile 7.3 with an Open Road Tolling (ORT) plaza at Mile 8.8 in York. As you will see, I support the improvement to Maine's transportation system that this project will make.

I represent House District 27, which includes half of Gorham and part of Scarborough. I am also the House Chair of the Joint Standing Committee in Transportation. In that capacity, I have been following the long process of analysis and communication by the MTA on this project over the years, and have three observations.

First, the project is clearly needed. In my view, the current plaza is an embarrassment to the State, especially in light of the economic importance of I-95 to the Maine economy. Located at Maine's primary connection to the rest of the country, the existing plaza is old, in disrepair, and frustrating – especially for visitors. It needs to be modernized to include high speed electronic tolling. A modern, high speed tolling facility will reduce, and potentially eliminate, miles of traffic backups during the summer and fall, improving air quality and decreasing travel time for businesses and visitors. As tolling technology has improved, ORT has expanded across the country, and visitors and businesses alike expect this modern convenience.

Second, the process has been open, fair and thorough. I understand that some good people in York believe that the MTA should eliminate the toll booths and implement a back office, pay-by-mail system in order to keep the toll plaza where it is. However, I am convinced that the MTA has fully considered this idea in good faith and properly determined that it would not be feasible. In the end, the MTA reasonably concluded that eliminating roadside cash collection would allow many more people to not pay their tolls, cause toll increases, erode faith in the fairness of this transportation funding mechanism, and cause motorists looking to avoid higher tolls to divert to other state and local roads. The MTA's proposed ORT plaza avoids those drawbacks.

Lastly, the MTA's proposed ORT plaza will provide substantial transportation system benefits with few environmental impacts. Located on the top of a hill on a straight away, it will be safer, easier, and more efficient. With about 70% of traffic not having to stop, air quality will be improved and noise will be reduced. I understand that wetland impacts are small and that no takings by eminent domain are required. In addition, several acres of wetland at the current tollbooth site will return to their original state after the it is dismantled. When complete, it will be a much more welcoming and functional entry for the State.

For all these reasons, I believe the MTA's proposed ORT plaza is good for Maine's transportation system, and I hope that you will allow it to proceed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew McLean". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "A".

Representative Andrew McLean, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Transportation