



**Testimony of Becky Smith, Director of Government Relations, Maine  
American Heart Association/American Stroke Association  
In support of specific portions of LD 638, LD 743 and LD 1552  
Transportation Bonds**

Senator Hamper, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, I am Becky Smith, the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association in Maine. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of portions of LD's 638, 743 and 1552. We also seek more specificity in the language contained in these bills, or in any transportation bonds you approve this session.

The American Heart Association's goal is: By 2020, to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent while reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent. We all know how vital physical activity is to healthy hearts. Maine is a very rural state with an elderly population and we have the highest obesity rate in New England. In order for all of us to be able to get the activity we need, we need safe spaces to walk, bike, run and play. Transportation bonds, especially those that specifically mention bicycle and pedestrian facilities can vastly improve the ability for Mainers, and our visitors, to get outside and get moving. They also have the side benefit of being fantastic for economic development and are key indicators used by tourism experts as well as real estate analysts and businesses seeking to relocate or open new facilities.

The American Heart Association advocates for at least \$6,000,000 be specifically earmarked to bicycle and pedestrian initiatives. Less than that amount, though helpful, will not have the population reach needed to affect Maine's health status and start to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease. We also hope that when the Department of Transportation is considering proposals to utilize these funds, that they look at the impact on our communities with lower socio-economic status and prioritize those municipalities or counties.

We are pleased that three of the transportation bond proposals specifically mention bicycle and pedestrian efforts. However, they lump those initiatives with other transportation systems including marine, aviation, rail etc. We would suggest that these line items be separated so that it is clear how much of the bond amount will be dedicated to each effort.

Nearly 80% of U.S. adults and 75% of adolescents do not currently get the recommended amount of physical activity each week. To compound the problem, traditional transportation and community planning often overlooks the effect on health. Research consistently shows that how communities are built influences whether or not people drive, walk, bike or use public transportation. The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association encourages all Mainers to walk or bike if feasible. We hope you will join us in making it possible for all Mainers to enjoy our beautiful state while receiving the benefits of physical activity.

I can be reached at the number and email below if you should have any questions as you work through these bonds. Thank you.