

March 3, 2017

The Honorable Regina Birdsell, Chairman
Senate Transportation Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 103
Concord, NH 03301

Re: HB 154

Dear Chairman Birdsell,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 154, which would exempt public transit operators from the prohibition on using a device to change, disrupt, or interfere with the operation of a traffic signal. As you know, New Hampshire's Regional Planning Commissions coordinate with and provide technical assistance to the public transit providers in our respective regions. The NHARPC believes that HB 154 has many positive merits that the Transportation Committee should consider.

Developing robust local and inter-regional public transportation options is a goal shared by Regional Planning Commissions in New Hampshire. Our public transportation providers not only enhance the mobility of our citizens, but help to sustain our state's good air quality and mitigate traffic congestion on arterial roads.

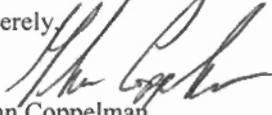
Public transportation ridership in New Hampshire has grown substantially in recent years, and now exceeds 4,000,000 riders statewide. This growth is occurring in many parts of the state, including urban areas like the Seacoast (served by the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation) and rural areas like the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Region (served by Advance Transit). Moreover, this growth in ridership is fueled by "choice riders" (i.e. those who have their own vehicle available for a trip but choose to ride public transportation instead). For instance, studies routinely show that nearly half of Advance Transit's ridership occurs by choice.

Despite this ridership success, our state's public transportation providers are facing mounting challenges. Residential and non-residential development across the state is resulting in additional congestion on key corridors, and capacity concerns are prompting municipalities and the NHDOT to install new traffic signals. In some locations around the state, like I-89 Exit 18 in Lebanon, congestion has resulted in substantial safety concerns as traffic routinely backs up onto the interstate travelway during the morning peak hour. These conditions are making it difficult, if not impossible, for some public transportation providers to run an on-time schedule.

When someone decides to use public transportation, their decision is based on two key factors: 1) The convenience of the service (in terms of time and cost); and 2) The reliability and comfort of the service. If present conditions continue to develop, our public transportation providers will struggle to provide reliable and convenient service, and ultimately, this situation could result in substantial ridership losses. With ridership losses, we would lose the mobility, air quality, and congestion mitigation benefits that our public transportation services provide.

Traffic Signal Prioritization is a proven technology that has been utilized around the United States to help public transportation operators maintain a reliable schedule as congestion increases. The NHARPC views HB 154 as important enabling legislation that would allow municipalities and the NHDOT to implement a system that considers public transportation vehicles. The benefits of HB 154 are substantial and compelling, and we encourage the Committee to consider the future viability of our state's public transportation systems in the context of this legislation.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about this correspondence. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Glenn Coppelman
Chair

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