GPCOG Greater Portland Council of Governments

August 30, 2012

The Honorable Roger J. Katz, Chair
The Honorable David Burns, Chair
And members of the OPEGA Committee
Cross State Office Building, Room 203
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Senator Katz, Representative Burns, and OPEGA Committee members:

I am writing to clarify the role of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) in administering the GO Maine commuter options service and in the process offer a response to Representative Donald Pilon's letter of June 28, 2012 to Beth Ashcroft, and subsequent comments that Representative Pilon made at the August 14, 2012 meeting of the OPEGA Committee and that he continues to make to the media. Please also know that with respect to OPEGA's review of the GO Maine program, I agree that the issues before the Committee are policy issues and as such are appropriate to the Executive branch and relevant committees of the legislature. Thus I am *not* writing to advocate for or against the Maine Department of Transportation's decision to privatize the GO Maine vanpool service.

In his letter, Representative Pilon asserts that the "Maine Turnpike Authority and the Greater Portland Council of Governments were unable to execute a successful program…….there was no transparency and accountability during execution." In all due respect to what I am sure are Representative Pilon's well meaning intentions, his conclusions and subsequent comments at the August 14th meeting demonstrate a lack of knowledge about the GO Maine program and the respective roles of the MTA and GPCOG. It is unfortunate that these comments remain on the public record without response as the GO Maine Director, Carey Kish, and I attended the August 14th meeting and came prepared to offer a response and address any other relevant questions that members of the Committee raised. I believe we could have provided constructive input to the Committee's deliberations if given the opportunity.

On the issue of our respective roles, the GO Maine Commuter Connections program is administered by GPCOG and funded by MaineDOT and the MTA. GPCOG administers the program but does not set policy. In fairness to the Maine Turnpike Authority, they do not have a formal role in executing the program other than providing important financial support and input through the collaborative relationship involving MaineDOT and GPCOG. While operating procedures and policies have been developed through this collaboration, final policy decisions such as the phasing out of the state's role in the vanpool service, funding levels for the operations budget, and vanpool rider fees have appropriately been the prerogative of MaineDOT.

With respect to Representative Pilon's assertions regarding transparency and accountability throughout the ten years that we have administered the GO Maine program, we have submitted monthly status, statistical, and financial reports to both the MaineDOT and MTA with backup information as appropriate. As with most public agencies, GPCOG is annually audited with a financial report submitted to our Board of Directors. Additionally, our overhead rate is annually approved by MaineDOT.

At the August 14th meeting it was also stated by Representative Pilon that GPCOG has an annual budget of $400,000 for 2.5 staff positions. The current annual budget of $415,000 ($200,000 in MaineDOT funds and $115,000 from MTA) supports **3.5** positions, two of whom are senior level. About 60% of the budget pays for personnel with the balance covering technology assets, marketing and outreach and various pass-through programs as approved by MaineDOT. And while much of the focus of the OPEGA discussion has been on the vanpool, it is important for others to understand that the vanpool service is but one of six modes promoted by GO Maine. The others being carpool matching, biking, walking, transit and telecommuting.

I am proud of the work and commitment that Carey Kish and the GO Maine staff have made in building the program to one that has received a number of national and New England-wide awards for excellence, marketing and outreach, and creativity. Since 2002 and with support from MaineDOT, the vanpool service has increased from 9 to 28 van routes stretching from York to Aroostook County. Of greater significance than the recognitions by professional peer groups, the GO Maine program has been successful in helping Maine commuters and has been a plus to the state's economy.

Through 2010 GO Maine has resulted in the following:

- Savings of $19,656,126 in commuting costs
- Eliminating 62,836324 vehicle miles traveled
- Eliminating 3,8779 parking spaces
- Eliminating 971.8 tons of CO, 127.4 tons of VOx, 156.5 tons of NOx

I appreciate the opportunity to offer these comments and information and please know we continue to stand ready to provide you with additional information if requested.

Sincerely,

Neal W. Allen
Executive Director

cc. David Bernhardt, Commissioner, Maine Department of Transportation
Peter Mills, Executive Director, Maine Turnpike Authority
Beth Ashcroft, Director, OPEGA
Carey Kish, Director, GO Maine Commuter Connections Program