

January 28, 2003

Ray Faucher
Maine Department of Transportation
16 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0016

Dear Ray,

I am writing this to clarify what I would like to see presented as a reasonable replacement for the dropped Alternative 4B at our next PAC meeting. While I am not per se advocating a 4B variant as the best route, I am concerned that 4B was eliminated without the same diligence and care that was spent on other, patently less feasible alternatives. It is my opinion that some variant of 4B at least has the POTENTIAL to meet the purpose and needs established by the I-395 PAC better than either of the remaining two options, 2C-1 and 2C-1/2B-1. However, I believe that any of the three is still far superior to the no-build option, and I remain open to all the alternatives pending more detailed analysis.

Personally, I do not at all support Rick Bronson's spur-of-the-moment route suggestion at the January PAC meeting that the former 4B be tied into the 3A-EIK route. To my mind, this combination combines the worst points of both rejected alternatives, rather than their best points. And as Jim Ring pointed out, a very similar alternative has already been studied and rejected. I certainly do not want to waste any more MDOT funds studying alternatives that are, by inspection, dead from birth. However, I DO believe there are some variations along the existing corridor (perhaps with minor changes, e.g., to avoid or minimize impacts at Camp Roosevelt) that could make this project feasible and affordable.

Earthwork requirements on 4B could be greatly reduced by relaxing the standards on maximum grades and allowing reduced speed zones as necessary to permit additional horizontal/vertical curvature, as has been done routinely on other sections of the reconstructed Route 9 corridor between Clifton and Calais. On the Wesley project, the final grade was 14% --over double the recommended AASHTO maximum for a high-speed rural arterial, but a marked improvement over the original 18%, and the best that could be done given other project considerations. And with the addition of a truck lane, that section of Route 9 has functioned well despite the steep grade. Innovative construction techniques, such as the compacted tire chip fill used to raise the grade almost 40 feet on Route 9 in Wesley, could leverage solid-waste funding from DEP which might also help to reduce project costs. In terms of overall benefit to the state, the Wesley project removed 300,000 waste tires from Maine's solid waste stream -- approximately 3000 tons' worth. The Eddington and/or Dedham MDOT maintenance lots could be used for stockpiling and chipping operations. There are probably other cost-savings methods available as well, and I would like to see MDOT look more closely at how to minimize earthwork costs before a 4B-type alternative is eliminated entirely.

Even with increased earthwork costs compared to other alternatives, I believe that a relaxed-standards 4B would save money for the State of Maine in the long run:

- *Construction of 4B will alleviate Acadia-bound congestion along Route 1A, thus postponing the need for an additional major highway improvement project along 1A for at least 5-10 years according to MDOT's transportation model.

- *Route 4B will provide travelers with a choice between Route 1A and the I-395 connector between Brewer and Holden, very useful for congestion management when either road is blocked due to a crash, road work, or just heavy seasonal traffic. Intelligent transportation system (ITS) technology makes it possible to post variable message signs on either side of the connector, advising travelers of the best route to take under prevailing traffic conditions (and perhaps even approximate travel times via each route).

- *Contrary to the belief of many in the town of Holden, rather than serving as a "bypass," both Belfast and Brewer illustrate the truism that businesses located along an arterial within 2-3 miles of a limited-access highway have the best of BOTH worlds: fast connections to the entire region and beyond, yet with easy, uncongested access to all local businesses. My own anecdotal evidence from friends and colleagues (regular commuters from Ellsworth to Bangor along 1A) is that they would be much more likely to patronize Holden businesses if the road were less congested during the times that they typically traveled. They also commented that it would be a more pleasant and more direct route to Bangor and Brewer than taking the limited access road to the south, so they would probably NOT take the "bypass" route on their daily commute.

The original 4B route was eliminated by the study team after a series of meetings held outside the PAC with the Town of Holden and some of its more influential citizens, many of whom feared a drop in commerce along Route 1A if 4B were selected as the preferred alternative. The justification provided to the PAC was that the earthwork costs for 4B were high, and that the route lacked public support. This seemed contradictory, given the high yet apparently acceptable environmental and neighborhood costs associated with remaining alternatives, and the very strong REGIONAL support for 4B because of its unique status as a regional connector to both the Downeast-Acadia region and Route 9. Route 4B also presented reduced residential and "proximity" impacts compared to other alternatives. Even more disturbing, Rick Bronson's proposed 4B variant was never seriously examined at the same level of detail as the other alternatives -- it, too, was rejected out of hand due to the aforementioned earthwork costs. This was a renege on a previously stated commitment to consider variations to eliminated routes as separate alternatives, in direct comparison to other remaining alternatives. Indeed, this had been the justification for studying eight different Route 1A upgrades, plus the recent resurrection of two variants in the previously discarded 2C corridor and one for the unpopular 2B corridor. At this point variants to these previously "dead" routes are now the only remaining corridors under consideration other than the no-build option. I consider my role on the PAC to be that of a steward for the interests of all Maine citizens who will be using this connector (and paying for it), and I think the selected route needs to be justifiable to all the people and not just those of a particular small constituency. The people whose lives and property will be disrupted by our final decision deserve nothing less.

In my opinion, ANY alternative is better than the no-build option, in which Route 46 is being subjected to loads and volumes that it was never designed to handle, and neighbors can't even cross the street to visit or let their children play together. I spoke up for 4B at the last PAC meeting primarily because I am concerned about maintaining fairness in the overall process. Whichever route is chosen, some people in our community are going to be affected -- either directly or by the proximity of the new road. We in the PAC owe it to those individuals to demonstrate that the selected route was truly the best alternative for the State of Maine, and why. Given the widespread regional support for 4B, I do not believe that MDOT has yet made an effective case to the PAC for eliminating it from consideration as the best alternative, albeit one with consequences for those whose properties it will affect -- as is true of all remaining alternatives as well. I appreciate MDOT's consideration for these concerns, and I look forward to reviewing a reduced-standards alternative to 4B at the next PAC meeting.

Ray, I would appreciate it if you would distribute this letter to the rest of the PAC and include it in the public record of the PAC proceedings. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sandi Duchesne