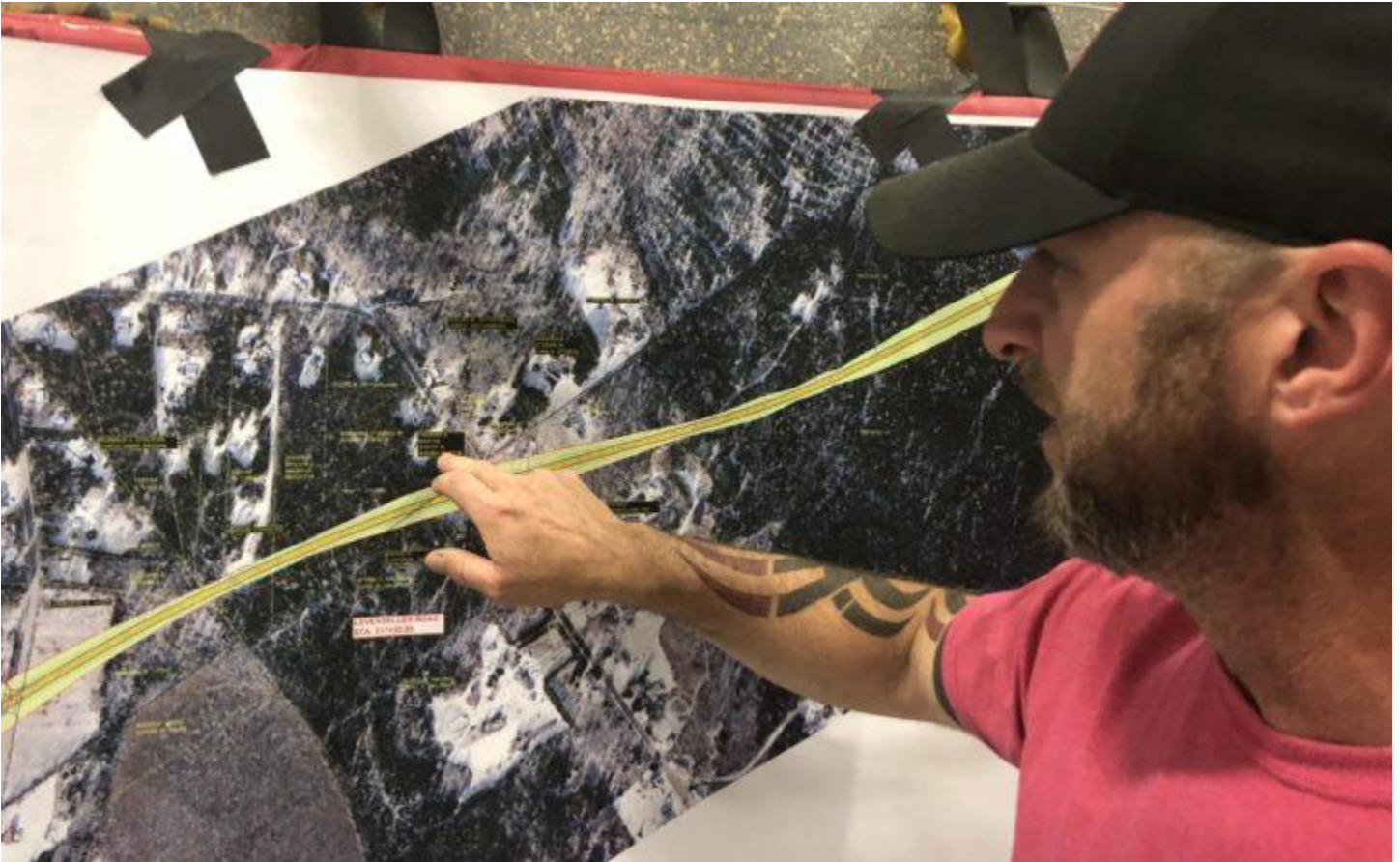


Residents pack MDOT meeting to question I-395 extension plan



Callie Ferguson | BDN

Eddington property owner Troy Stubbs points out where the proposed two-lane road that will link Interstate 395 in Brewer with Route 9 in Eddington is slated to cut through his property on a map displayed at a June 27 public hearing.

By [Callie Ferguson](#), BDN Staff • June 28, 2018 1:00 am | Updated: June 28, 2018 6:09 am

State officials on Wednesday unveiled a preliminary design and timeline for a controversial six-mile Interstate 395 connector road from Brewer to Eddington, sketching a rough outline that did little to appease local residents who overwhelmingly oppose the project.

More than 100 Brewer, Holden, and Eddington residents and officials packed into the gym of the Eddington Elementary Wednesday night, at what a Maine Department of Transportation official said was a public meeting to go over the preliminary design for the two-lane road that will link I-395 in Brewer to Route 9 in Eddington.

As people entered the gym, many crowded around an enlarged aerial photograph of the three towns that was plastered to the wall, showing where the path would cut from Brewer to Eddington, along the Holden-Brewer town line.

“The biggest thing I want you to walk away with from tonight is what this plan is not,” said Luther Yonce, a DOT property officer, when the meeting started.

He referred to the superimposed lines on the photography where the proposed road sliced through many of their properties. He called that the “worst case scenario” — or the route the road would generally take, but wouldn’t be finalized until surveyors completed design work that is slated to wrap up during the summer of 2019. That work began a year ago, when MDOT announced a [three-year, \\$7.25 million plan to begin construction](#).

The project is estimated to cost \$79 million, a number that climbed from a previous \$61 million estimate. The federal government will shoulder 80 percent of the cost, with the state paying 20 percent.

“At this point, the biggest thing is, I can’t answer a lot of impact questions tonight because the design is not completed,” he said.

But that didn’t seem to matter to the majority of the crowd, which largely opposed the project.

“What do you plan to give back to us after you take back our taxes to build this monstrosity?” said Rusty Gagnon, a local resident and chair of the RSU 63 school board.

She was one of several people to complain that the proposed highway cut through their neighborhoods — potentially devaluing their properties and disrupting their peaceful backyards — and to question the need to build the road in the first place. The construction will affect about 60 property owners and displace 8 homeowners, and require gaining the right of way to nearly 200 acres. Property owners will be compensated at market value, officials said Wednesday.

Project advocates say it will alleviate heavy truck traffic on Route 46 and Route 1A, streamlining a route to the Canadian border and reducing congestion that most agree has made some local roads unsafe. Starting on Wilson Street in Brewer, it will cut along the Brewer-Holden town line and meet Route 9 in Eddington.

On Wednesday, DOT officials outlined a potential timeline of construction, which is slated to be complete in 2025.

After the design work wraps up midway through 2019, impact on properties will be determined the following spring, officials said. The project will likely go out to bid by the fall of 2021. Some construction could start then, but likely will begin full-fledged in the following years.

While some residents came out on Wednesday to repeat their dissatisfaction with the road, many agreed with officials that trucks making their way along local roads cause dangerous congestion. One farmer who lives along Route 46 praised the project for its potential to safen the roads.

But the majority reiterated that the road would mostly benefit people passing through their towns, not the people who lived there.

Feeding their frustration, many town residents and officials said they have felt left out of the loop. Earlier this month, 2nd District U.S. Rep. Bruce Poliquin announced the project had s [ecured \\$25 million](#) in federal grant money — news that again took local officials by surprise.

“I’m just upset that they haven’t been answering my questions,” said Eddington resident Troy Stubbs. Surveyors had staked portions of his property over the last year, but he wasn’t sure what that meant — was it the centerline of the road, or the edge of it?

Either way, he said, “I’m going to live next to a highway, listening to 18 wheelers instead of the deer passing by, and birds chirping.”

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