Why Maine voters will be asked to let the state borrow another $200 million

By Alex Acquisto, BDN Staff • October 19, 2018 1:00 am   (excerpts of original article below)

On Nov. 6, Maine voters will decide four questions asking to borrow a total of $200 million. The borrowing would pay to mitigate wastewater pollution in coastal watersheds, for upgrades to the state's aging transportation infrastructure, and for facility and programming improvements at public higher education campuses.

The bond questions, however, generally mirror past efforts to find capital needed to maintain aging infrastructure. The secretary of state's office chose the ballot order by lot.

The transportation bond would support maintenance of Maine's crumbling transportation systems on land and water. Question 3 would invest $106 million into maintenance of the state's roads and bridges, including a $1 million remediation of Maine Maritime Academy's waterfront pier in Castine.

Of the total, $20 million would be directed to enhance ports, harbors and marine transportation, along with passenger railroads and pedestrian trails.

Another $5 million would be administered by the Department of Environmental Protection to upgrade culvert projects around the state to improve fish and wildlife habitats, specifically where they intersect with towns and cities.

The bulk of the money — $80 million — would be directed to reconstructing high-trafficked roadways in Maine in most dire need of repair. This includes parts of Route 1 in Aroostook and Washington counties, Route 201 from Fairfield to Canada, Route 9 from Bangor to Calais, Route 2 west of Newport, and Route 14 from Gorham to Naples. If approved, the state expects approximately $88 million in federal funds to match any bond proceeds.

Bonds tend to perform well with voters in Maine, especially during midterm elections. Mainers have approved 21 transportation bonds since 1990 and rejected three, so Melcher [a University of Maine at Farmington political scientist] expects this year's to pass handily.