OPINION

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Pump the brakes on new highways

Maine lacks the capital to maintain our infrastructure. Gov. Mills tasked the blue-ribbon commission, now deadlocked, to deliver a viable solution to fund infrastructure repairs without relying on annual bonding.

Eleven projects, 11.6 percent of the value of projects ($45.5 million) planned to be bid in 2019, were removed from the bidding schedule in May. Deferred repair costs are significantly higher than regular, timely repair costs.

The annual shortfall for road and bridge maintenance "now sits at $232 million, a 46 percent increase from a March estimate," the Bangor Daily News has reported.

Now the Press Herald reports that the Gorham Connector will cost as much as $237 million, almost 60 percent more than expected, exceeding the $150 million approved by the Legislature just two years ago.

In like fashion, the I-395/Route 9 Connector, a controversial project that fails to meet original purpose and needs and unanimously rejected by Brewer's City Council, may surpass the benefit/cost decision point where cost outweighs benefits and thus project viability upon updating the $79.25 million 2017 cost estimate.

Unlike the Gorham Connector's solution of raising tolls to pay for the increased construction cost, "Tolling would not be used to supplement the funding for construction of one of the build alternatives [I-395/Route 9 Connector] due to the low traffic volumes (HNTB, 2010)."

As the shortfall balloons to nearly a quarter of a billion dollars annually, new infrastructure, priced out of viability by increased construction costs with no chance of the project paying for it, should be suspended and funds reallocated to meet Maine's current unmet transportation needs.

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John Patriquin/Staff Photographer

Maine is not keeping up with maintenance on existing roads, so it should not commit to new projects, a reader says.