

Maine to fund fewer road projects over 3 years amid 'slow decline' of transportation system



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Crews work on a sewer upgrade project on Main Street in Madawaska in this June 2019 file photo. The Maine Department of Transportation released a three-year road and bridge funding plan on Tuesday that will use more money to fund fewer projects.

By [Michael Shepherd](#), BDN Staff • January 14, 2020

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AUGUSTA, Maine — The Maine Department of Transportation released a three-year road and bridge funding plan on Tuesday that **will use more money to fund fewer projects**, a symptom of rising construction costs and chronic underfunding of the state system.

Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note struck a dour tone [upon the plan's release](#), writing in an introduction that it “largely consists of spreading what used to be two years of capital projects over three years” and saying his department is “competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system until bipartisan funding solutions materialize.”

The plan for the 2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years is funded to the tune of nearly \$2.6 billion. That’s \$150 million more than the last three years because of an influx of one-time federal grants, though **142 fewer projects are expected to be funded amid rising costs.**

Notable projects that will be funded over the period include the replacements of the International Bridge between Madawaska and the Canadian province of New Brunswick, the Station 46 Bridge in Woolwich and the Veranda Street bridge over Interstate 295 in Portland.

The transportation department took many shortcuts to put together the plan, including \$3.8 million in patching work on high-priority roads that will stand until long-term repairs can be made. The state will maintain \$76 million for light paving on lower-priority roads.

Maine's transportation system has long been embattled and [reliant on annual borrowing](#) to fund routine work, but those existing problems were exacerbated last year when construction costs rose sharply and forced the state to [cancel tens of millions of dollars](#) in road work.

The state's annual road and bridge funding shortfall — the gap between what the Transportation Department can spend and what it thinks it needs to maintain the system — now stands at \$233 million. A Maine commission is [examining funding solutions](#) that could include a politically fraught gas tax increase, transfers from the state budget or fee increases.

"It is time to address state transportation funding in Maine," Van Note wrote in the introduction to the plan. "Our safety and economic prosperity are at stake."

WHAT—No mention of the I-395/Route 9 Connector project even though the Wilson Street/I-395 Bridge is being funded for \$13.5 million to be bid this spring and the connector project has \$57.3 million in the "bank".