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I-395 bridge replacement part of controversial connector

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BREWER – The Maine Department of Transportation’s new [three-year work plan](#) includes a multi-million dollar project in the city that is part of the [controversial I-395/Route 9 connector](#).

The state is about to start construction on the first major part of the connector even though they haven’t secured the funding for the second half — and most expensive — part of the project.

“We expect to put the bridge part of it out to bid this spring, hopefully beginning construction in summer,” Paul Merrill, MaineDOT spokesman said Wednesday. “And that work should be finished by the end of 2021.”

The connector is a 7-mile limited-access highway that will link the federal highway system to Route 9 in Eddington. In the recently released work plan, the state set aside

\$13.5 million to replace and redesign the bridge at the junction of Wilson Street and I-395.

“The bridge is the first of two parts of the connector project,” Merrill said. “The rest is the road itself, which, I believe, we plan to advertise, to put out to bid in the fall of next year.”

He added later, “The bridge part is in this work plan. The funding is there. The funding is not entirely nailed down for the second part but we have made the commitment to do it.”

The total estimated cost of the connector is \$80 million.

Brewer City Manager Steve Bost said the money could be spent on current needs.

“We are painfully aware as communities are all across the state, that there are many, many needs we think more important than this and a real lack of available funding,” Bost said. “It seems this would be a time to reallocate those funds to other projects.”

He said, “Route 1A continues to be a high accident stretch of road that needs real attention.”

“Here is Brewer, South Main Street, which is a key artery for the city, was supposed to be done last year,” Bost said. “Now, it’s been pushed off another year and it’s been scaled back.”

“And we’re not alone,” the city manager added. “There are many communities facing the same situation.”

The MaineDOT adjusted their current work plan, Bost said, because of a “lack of funds.”

Work on the connector began in 2000 when residents along Route 46 expressed concern about the number of big rigs on the road.

“We prioritize projects, we prioritize roads,” Merrill said. “This is a high priority project because of the need to alleviate truck traffic on Route 46.”

According to information within the [2020-2021-2022 Work Plan](#), the connector is now \$100 million (the \$25 million INFRA grant was described as one-quarter of the estimated cost) – not \$80 million.