



"One angry man
with a laptop"

Welcome to the start of the 20th year of the \$79.25 million I-395/Route 9 study/project—at the same time that the shortfall in the road and bridge maintenance budget increased by 46% in just the period between March and October 2019 to an annual \$232 million. DOT reports this was due mainly to higher construction costs, but one has to wonder if the real reason is that the DOT intentionally “lowballs” construction estimates to enable project passage—knowing they would later be able to quietly pass on budget overages.

The MaineDOT reported a \$232 million shortfall in the fall of 2019; funding of our state’s existing unmet transportation needs must be priority one, not the \$79.25 million I-395/Route 9 Boondoggle...



“Repair work on roads and bridges generates 16 percent more jobs than construction of new bridges and roads and that is where the priority must be; new projects should be immediately suspended with the savings reallocated to fund Maine’s current unmet transportation needs—that’s a viable solution that can start immediately and anything short of that is disingenuous and fiscally irresponsible. Ask these people!!

REMARKS [excerpted] BEFORE BACTS MEETING 3/25/16



THE I-395 CONNECTOR PROJECT: A \$61 MILLION DOLLAR CONUNDRUM

**STEPHEN BOST,
BREWER CITY MANAGER**

“My concern is not limited to “process” issues, but extends to the need and viability of the I-395 connector itself. This project has been on the table for over 16 years. Things change in 16 years. One of the original goals of this project was to alleviate and/or divert heavy truck traffic. But look at what has happened on the way to 2016 – Millinocket mill has closed, East Millinocket has closed, Lincoln has closed, Old Town has closed, Brewer has closed, and now the Bucksport mill has closed. The logical after-effects of all of this is a decline in truck activity.

Another change in the last 5 years has been the weight adjustment for trucks on the interstate. Senator Collins championed breakthrough legislation allowing the heaviest trucks on Federal highways, specifically I-95, in November 2011. Interestingly, Federal Highway Administration engineers noted that “The collection of empirical data to measure and quantify pilot program impacts (such as the Collins law) would take 10 to 15 years.”

The impact of the mill closures on the need for the I-395 project, therefore, will take time. I believe there is an absolute need to refresh the data to reflect these changes, as no like industries are projected to take the place of the mills. This logically impacts the accuracy of current 2035 projections. It

would appear that much of the project is based upon 1998 and 2006 modeling and 2010 appears to be an estimate. That is six years ago at best. 10 years ago at worst.

Let me suggest analogy to illustrate my point. Imagine that 16 years ago MDOT and Millinocket officials determined that the corridor from I-95 to East Millinocket and Millinocket needed to be widened to 4 lanes to accommodate increased truck traffic as well as seasonal tourism activity. Discussions were held, plans and designs submitted, funding allocated, all systems go. Then before groundbreaking occurred, both mills were permanently shuttered. Does the widening project then go forward? Will it be intertwined with other unrelated development projects in that region which will die if the I-95 – Millinocket widening project is not built? Will it go forward because of some financial penalty that will be owed to the Feds if the project is mothballed?

Sounds an awful lot like a bridge to nowhere.

So, rather than leave BACTS today with simply a list of complaints, I want to suggest a path forward. MDOT and the City of Brewer are not adversaries; they have a long-standing history of partnership. I ask that the MDOT agree to separate this project from the BACTS project package, and let the other initiatives so important to our region go forward. I request that MDOT thoroughly refresh their data on the I-395 connector to determine if the need is still there. Then, I request that MDOT re-engage the stakeholders and determine a course of action.

This is 61 million dollars of taxpayer dollars at play. The need for this connector should be demonstrated with confidence by MDOT. Maine's roads and bridges are in dire need of repair. If this 61 million could be better spent elsewhere, we have a duty to explore that."

Thank you for your time and consideration. Stephen Bost



8 Investigates Maine's high-crash locations for 2019

Jan 2, 2020 | [David Charns](#)

Augusta, Maine — There were more than 34,000 crashes reported across Maine in 2019. The majority of crashes involved rear-ending, going off the road or hitting an animal.

Nearly two-thirds of crashes occurred during daylight and in clear conditions where the road was dry.

Traffic engineers rely on several factors when it comes to determining where high-crash locations are across the state.

Data, including the number of crashes, volume, pedestrian fatalities and other violations, are combined to create a critical rate factor. Locations that then have eight or more crashes and a critical rate factor greater than one over a three-year period are added to the list.

Below is a list of the top 20 high-crash locations for 2019 based on the number of crashes:

20. Auburn: Intersection of Mount Auburn Avenue and Turner Street (46 crashes)

19. Portland: Ramp off I-295 to Forest Avenue (47 crashes)

18. Bangor: Ramp off Stillwater Avenue to I-95 (48 crashes)

17. South Portland: Intersection of Broadway and Casco Bay Bridge (49 crashes)

16. South Portland: Ramp off I-295 to Westbrook Street (50 crashes)

15. Auburn: Intersection of Turner Street and Union Street 51 crashes)

14. South Portland: Intersection of Broadway and Westbrook Street (52 crashes)

13. Portland: Intersection of Franklin Street and Marginal Way (54 crashes)

12. Bangor: Intersection of Hammond Street and I-395 (55 crashes)

11. Brunswick: Intersection of Gurnet Road to Route 1 northbound (58 crashes)
10. Portland: Intersection of Riverside Street and Warren Avenue (59 crashes)
9. Westbrook: Intersection of Cumberland Street and Warren Avenue (59 crashes)
8. Saco: Ramp from Ocean Park Road to Main Street (60 crashes)
7. Portland: Intersection of Allen Avenue and Forest Avenue (67 crashes)
6. Portland: Intersection of Forest Avenue, Kennebec Street, Marginal Way and State Street Extension (74 crashes)
5. Sanford: Alfred Road-Maine Street roundabout (82 crashes)
4. Portland: Intersection of Larrabee Road off-ramp to Riverside Street (84 crashes)
3. Biddeford: Intersection of Alfred Street and Precourt Street ramp (86 crashes)
2. Augusta: Intersection of Bangor Street and Cony Street at the Cony Circle (138 crashes)
1. Augusta: Intersection of Memorial Circle at Western Avenue (146 crashes)

Not one of the top 20 crash locations included a fatality in 2019, according to state data. However, a person crossing the road was killed near the Memorial Circle in Augusta in 2019. DOT officials said they rely on the list of high-crash locations to determine where to put resources.

[Click here to view online.](#)

Maybe if the DOT wasn't wasting so much money on boondoggles like the I-395/Route 9 Connector—they could put some money towards these problems!!

Portland Press Herald

EDITORIALS

PUBLISHED
JANUARY 7, 2020



Our View: Maine Turnpike shows that tolling works

A small number of scofflaws don't offset the value of a fair and predictable revenue collection system.

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | JANUARY 7, 2020

Thousands of cars and trucks speed through the Maine Turnpike tollbooths every year without paying. Over a six-year period, they have collectively run up a bill in [excess of \\$800,000](#).

That's a lot of money, and the state rightly has gone after those scofflaws, impounding vehicles or – in the case of one Rhode Island company – impounding a fleet of trucks. It would be a mistake to give drivers the idea that they could get away with not paying a toll. But it would be a bigger mistake to exaggerate the size of the problem.

The Maine Turnpike's experiment with electronic tolling, which allows E-ZPass customers to pay their toll without stopping at a tollbooth, has been a huge success.

The unpaid tolls amount to less than one-half of 1 percent of the money the turnpike takes in from its tollbooths. The thousands of vehicles that drive through the tollbooths and never pay a bill have to be counted against the millions of vehicles that [use the turnpike every year](#).

In other words, electronic tolling works. That's an important point to consider as the state looks at how it should fund its highway infrastructure.

The gas tax, Maine's traditional source of highway funding, does not produce enough revenue to support the system that we have. Gas tax revenues fall short of needs every year, and the state has filled the gap with borrowing. **Voters have approved [\\$100 million](#)**

[transportation](#) bonds in four of the last five years, but no one thinks that it's a sustainable way to keep up with wear and tear on the roads.

Tolling, like the system on the Maine Turnpike, is fair to all users and non-users. Heavy vehicles can be charged more, reflecting their impact on the roadway. Owners of vehicles with electric motors, who pay little or no gas tax, don't escape paying their share of the system's costs. Routine road maintenance can be paid for on a pay-as-you-go basis, leaving long-term debt for one-time projects.

The Maine Turnpike's experience shows that toll revenue is steady and predictable, and you don't have to create traffic problems with long lines at tollbooths. Electronic tolling is not a futuristic pipe dream, but a technology that is available to us right now. And we know it works.

That may sound like an odd point to make when the Turnpike is holding more than \$800,000 in unpaid debt. But even there, the Turnpike is making progress.

Most of the nonpayers are out-of-state drivers, and Maine is negotiating agreements with their home states that will allow more efficient collection actions against them. Maine has a three-way agreement with Massachusetts and New Hampshire under which scofflaws won't be able to re-register their vehicles in their home state without paying any tolls they owe elsewhere. As similar agreements expand to other states and Canadian provinces, electronic tolling will become even more reliable and common.

Gov. Mills created a blue ribbon commission to look at creating a sustainable path forward for highway funding. We think the Maine Turnpike offers a good example of how such a system could work.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#)

The MaineDOT said previously that tolling was not an option in the construction and/or to defray maintenance costs of the I-395/Route 9 Connector due to low traffic numbers. HOWEVER – the DOT is famous, or infamous, in changing their minds. Will the DOT charge tolls for this new connector? Standby...

Maine will release roadmaps for road funding ... today



Chris Bouchard | Aroostook Republican & News
Construction crews with the Maine Department of Transportation work on reconstructing the storm drains on High Street as flaggers guide traffic at the road's Main Street intersection in this 2019 file photo.

By [Caitlin Andrews](#), BDN Staff, [Jessica Piper](#), BDN Staff and [Michael Shepherd](#), BDN Staff
January 14, 2020 | Excerpt of original article – [click here to view online](#).

Maine will release a three-year roadmap for road and bridge funding with fewer projects on the schedule due to an underfunded system. The Maine Department of Transportation released [its updated three-year work plan](#) — a routine occurrence setting the schedule for projects — on early Tuesday. The headline will be that it plans to fund 142 fewer projects through 2022 as an influx of one-time money gives it \$150 million more than it had the last three years.

The problems are an underfunded system [reliant on annual borrowing](#) and running a \$232 million shortfall that is [the subject of legislative negotiations](#) and rising construction costs that led the state to cancel tens of millions in projects last year. Transportation Commissioner **Bruce Van Note** will roll out the three-year plan with a news conference on Tuesday in Augusta. He's expected to press for a long-term funding solution.

AND—YET—they will continue on funding the I-395/Route 9 Connector as 142 other projects go unmet...

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



Morgan Mitchell | BDN

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

[Click here to view online.](#)

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".

Three-Year Work Plan

2020 Edition

January 14, 2020

Highlights of the 2020-2021-2022 DOT Work Plan:

\$25-million INFRA grant for the I-395/Route 9 Connector, providing a quarter of the estimated total project cost. (Page v.) Does that mean the \$79.25 million cost in 2017 will end up costing \$100 million? AND—does the project remain viable in the Benefit/Cost ratio?

“C. Unmet Needs The needs of the transportation system in Maine continue to outpace available resources. Maine’s large land area, relatively low population, high number of state highway miles, and high construction inflation have all exacerbated the extent of this challenge for Maine. At MaineDOT, we do the best we can with the funding we are provided. By using objective, data-driven, asset management principles, all MaineDOT Work Plans are designed to achieve our mission of responsibly providing our customers with the safest and most reliable transportation system possible, given available resources. The challenge of inadequate available resources was particularly acute this year. Lower levels of capital project production due to higher costs required us to prioritize even more, rely on less reliable bond and competitive federal grant funding for basic needs, and **essentially spread what used to be two years of capital projects over three years.** We focused on essential safety needs, bridges, maintaining the level of Light Capital Paving (skinny mix) program as long as Highway Fund revenues allow, and implementing low-cost holding actions to even higher priority roads. Even with these efforts, **the fiscal reality is that MaineDOT is now competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system** until bipartisan funding solutions materialize.

Thankfully, Maine has acknowledged the problem and taken the first steps to address it. The Legislature, with the support of the Governor, established the Blue Ribbon Commission to Study and Recommend Funding Solutions for the State's Transportation Systems. See Resolve 2019, Chapter 97 (formerly LD 945). This bipartisan Commission of legislators, transportation professionals, and stakeholders was charged with studying how to reform and adequately supplement funding for the state's transportation infrastructure. In December 2019, after meeting throughout the Fall of 2019, the Commission issued a report that contained the following unanimous findings to date:

Finding #1: Assuming an annual \$100-million general obligation bond package, the current unmet annual transportation funding need in Maine is approximately \$232 million.

<i>Annual Shortfall</i> (millions of \$)				
Work Group	Annual Need	Anticipated Annual Funding	\$ Shortfall	% Shortfall
Bridge Projects	\$188	\$120	-\$67	-36%
Paving Projects (including LCP)	\$141	\$120	-\$21	-15%
Safety and Spot Imp. (including Partnerships)	\$61	\$35	-\$26	-43%
Traffic/Mobility/Capacity/ITS Improvements	\$41	\$13	-\$28	-68%
Highway Reconstruction/Rehab	\$118	\$63	-\$55	-47%
Multimodal Improvements	\$91	\$56	-\$35	-38%
Totals	\$640	\$407	-\$232	-36%

Finding #2: The federal government should be challenged to continue providing one third of Maine's transportation funding need.

Finding #3: Given findings #1 and #2, the pragmatic state level funding target that Maine should address is approximately \$160 million, about two thirds of \$232 million.

Finding #4: Once the annual transportation funding need is met, Maine's reliance on bonding to supplement transportation funding should be reduced in a fiscally-responsible manner.

ID/Year	Municipality	Scope	Name	Description	Funding
018915.20 2020 HCP 1	Brewer	Highway-Bridges Bridge Replacement	Route 1A	Wilson Street/I-395 Bridge (#1564) over Interstate 395. Located 0.35 of a mile west of Dirigo Drive. FHWA INFRA Grant recipient.	\$13,500,000
018915.20 2019 HCP 1	Brewer	Highway-Bridges Bridge Replacement	Wilson Street	Wilson Street/I395 Bridge (#1564). Located 0.35 of a mile west of Dirigo Drive.	\$11,900,000

1.6 million more than last year??!!

018915.00 2021/22 HCP 1, 2, 6	Brewer, Eddington, Holden	Highway Construction/Rehabilitation Rural Highways New Construction	Interstate 395/Route 9 Connector	Beginning 0.25 of a mile west of Interstate 395 and Route 1A, roughly paralleling the Brewer-Holden town line, extending 6.00 miles to Route 9 west of Chemo Pond Road (in the vicinity of Lois Lane). FHWA INFRA Grant recipient; partial CON funding.	\$57,300,000
018915.00 2020/21 HCP 1, 2, 6	Brewer, Eddington, Holden	Highway Construction/Rehabilitation Rural Highways New Construction	Interstate 395/Route 9 Connector	Beginning 0.25 of a mile west of Interstate 395 and Route 1A, roughly paralleling the Brewer-Holden town line, extending 6.00 miles to Route 9 west of Chemo Pond Road (in the vicinity of Lois Lane). This project is only partially funded for construction.	\$31,400,000

[2020-2012-2022 Work Plan](#)

[2019-2020-2021 Work Plan](#)

“This year is not typical. Due to cost increases arising from workforce challenges, work constraints, and other factors, making the old projects whole has required an extraordinary amount of funding. Therefore, even though total estimated funding will increase (largely due to increased levels of federal competitive grant funds), higher unit costs will yield substantially lower levels of capital project production in terms of miles of paving, numbers of bridges, etc. Accordingly, **this Work Plan largely consists of spreading what used to be two years of capital projects over three years to stay within funding and cost constraints.** This fiscal challenge required us to prioritize even more and rely on less-reliable bond and competitive federal grant funding for basic needs. With lower levels of capital project production, we are focusing on essential safety needs, bridges, maintaining the level of Light Capital Paving (skinny mix) program as long as Highway Fund revenues allow, and implementing low-cost holding actions to

even higher priority roads, consisting of patching until normal treatments become fiscally possible. Even with these efforts, **the fiscal reality is that we are now competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system** until bipartisan funding solutions materialize.

The system will not fail immediately, and we will do our best to avoid any serious safety impacts. But holding actions only work for a short time, and **the reliability of the system will suffer. Maine deserves better.** Transportation is fundamental to our safety, economic prosperity, and quality of life. It is fundamental to everything we do and who we are. Not only do we need adequate funding to maintain the system we have, but we also need to improve the system. We need to make targeted capacity improvements, reduce the impact of transportation on climate, improve downtowns and villages, increase programs for municipalities, and gradually reduce our dependence upon bonding and extraordinary federal funding to meet basic needs.” Commissioner Van Note.

And, even after all of that – the DOT will be going ahead with replacing a bridge that only needs replacing because of 2B-2 – at a cost of \$13.5 million to support the \$100 million connector that many do not want – Maine does deserve better!!

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



Michael Shepherd | BDN
Maine Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note speaks at a news conference in Augusta on Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2020 alongside (from left to right) Madawaska Town Manager Gary Picard, Paul Kosiell, president of CPM Constructors, Inc. in Freeport and Dana Connors, the CEO of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce.

By [Michael Shepherd](#), BDN Staff • January 14, 2020 10:05 am
Updated: January 14, 2020 1:16 pm | [Click here to view online.](#)

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 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."

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.

"This level of funding is not sustainable," Van Note said at a news conference at the department's garage in north Augusta. "The system will not fail immediately and Maine DOT will work to avoid any serious safety impacts, but **holding actions only work for a short time and reliability of the system will suffer.**"

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 Madawaska project is a massive \$85 million rebuild in concert with the New Brunswick government. Federal funds will make up \$36 million of that project and \$25 million of the \$30 million Woolwich bridge reconstruction. Those grants were announced by U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and the state and federal transportation departments last year.

Van Note's 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.

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.** As past plans have, that assumes voter-approved borrowing of \$100 million each year.

A Maine blue-ribbon commission is [examining funding solutions](#) that could include a politically fraught gas tax increase, transfers from the state budget or fee increases. That commission was initially supposed to deliver recommendations to the Legislature in December, but it filed for an extension this month to continue work as it revolves around a potential solution.

Van Note said the commission's work has him "as optimistic now as I ever have been" on the future of funding and that "structural, transformational change is needed that will have bipartisan support allowing it to avoid political whims in the State House in an election year.

"It's a huge puzzle, right," said Rep. Tom Martin, R-Greene, who sponsored the bill to create the commission and sits on it. "When we're done, we want the whole puzzle completed."

Portland Press Herald

Maine highway work scaled back amid budget crunch

The state's three-year highway construction plan costs \$2.6 billion, but has fewer projects than in previous years.

BY [PETER MCGUIRE](#) STAFF WRITER | [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE.](#)

Maine's newest multi-year highway construction plan turns a common maxim on its head – **the state now plans to do less with more.**

At \$2.6 billion, the three-year Department of Transportation work plan is 13 percent more expensive than three years ago, but will accomplish less.

Officials say a chronic budget shortfall and [high construction prices](#) forced the department to reduce the number of expensive bridge projects and substitute durable restoration with short-term repairs on hundreds of miles of state roads.

"The reality is we are now competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system until bipartisan funding solutions materialize," said state Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note at an Augusta press conference Tuesday. **"The system will not fail immediately, and we will do our best to avoid any serious impacts, but holding actions only work for a short time, and the reliability of the system will suffer."**

The proposed work plan runs through 2022 and includes the construction of dozens of bridges and more than 170 miles of highway construction and rehabilitation.

But the department also has increased the miles slated for light capital paving – also called "skinny mix," a thin layer of pavement to temporarily hold together broken roads.

Thin paving is planned for about 1,800 miles of state roads by 2022 – one-fifth of Maine's state highways – at a cost of \$76 million, but maintaining that production could be at risk without additional highway funding, the department said in its plan.

Some heavily traveled, top-priority roads aren't scheduled for even light paving. Instead, the department intends temporary patches to keep traffic moving safely, said Andy Bickmore, director of MDOT's Results and Information Office.

"We're trying to keep good roads good and isolate the bad ones," he said.

Maine plans on less bridge work over the next three years, but 148 planned projects still will cost \$545 million, one-fifth of the entire spending proposal. Those projects include an \$84.6 million replacement of the International Bridge in Madawaska, and replacements of highway bridges in Portland, Yarmouth and Falmouth.

Competitive federal grants partially pay for some of the bridges. Although that gives the state additional funding for expensive projects, it also means Maine has to match spending and follow grant rules, which means less flexibility in an already tight budget, Bickmore said.

Portland Press Herald

Maine highway work scaled back, but not its price tag (updated)

The state's three-year highway construction plan released Tuesday costs \$2.6 billion, but includes fewer projects than in previous years.

BY [PETER MCGUIRE](#) STAFF WRITER | [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE.](#)



Trucks travel north over the Interstate 295 overpass in Yarmouth Tuesday. The state's three-year highway construction plan costs \$2.6 billion, but includes fewer projects than in previous years. *Derek Davis/Staff Photographer*

Maine's newest multi-year highway construction plan turns a common maxim on its head – the state now plans to do less with more.

At \$2.6 billion, the three-year Department of Transportation **work plan is 13 percent more expensive than three years ago—thanks to new federal grants – but accomplishes less.**

Officials say a chronic budget shortfall and [high construction prices](#) forced the department to reduce the number of expensive bridge projects planned for the coming three years and substitute durable restoration with short-term repairs on hundreds of miles of state roads. Last year, the department cut tens of millions of dollars in projects from its 2019 plan for roadway and bridge work as it struggled with bids from private contractors that came in far higher than expected.

The new plan largely consists of spreading what used to be two years' worth of capital projects over three years, Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note wrote in the plan introduction.

"The reality is we are now competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system until bipartisan funding solutions materialize," said Van Note at an Augusta news conference Tuesday. "The system will not fail immediately, and we will do our best to avoid any serious impacts, but holding actions only work for a short time, and the reliability of the system will suffer."

The proposed work plan runs through 2022 and includes the construction of dozens of bridges and more than 170 miles of highway construction and rehabilitation. But the department also has increased the miles slated for light capital paving, also called "skinny mix," a thin layer of pavement to temporarily hold together broken roads.

Thin paving is planned for about 1,800 miles of state roads by 2022 – one-fifth of Maine's state highways – at a cost of \$76 million, but maintaining that production could be at risk without additional highway funding, the department said in its plan.

Some heavily traveled, top-priority roads aren't scheduled for even light paving. Instead, the department intends 170 highway safety and spot improvements – temporary patches – costing \$122 million.

"We're trying to keep good roads good and isolate the bad ones," said Andy Bickmore, director of the transportation department's results and information office.

Maine plans to reduce bridge work over the next three years, but 148 planned projects still will cost \$545 million, one-fifth of the entire spending proposal. Those projects include an \$84.6 million replacement of the International Bridge in Madawaska, and replacements of highway bridges in Portland, Yarmouth and Falmouth.

Competitive federal grants partially pay for some of the bridges. Although that gives the state additional funding for expensive projects, it also means Maine has to match spending and follow grant rules, which means less flexibility in an already tight budget, Bickmore said.

National construction costs last year [hit the highest point](#) since the great recession, pushing the state's highway budget to the breaking point. The department cancelled [more than \\$59 million](#) worth of road and bridge projects because construction bids were higher than – in some cases double – state estimates.

In Maine, a persistent labor shortage has caused construction prices to increase dramatically. About 80 percent of members in the Associated General Contractors of Maine are hiring right now, said Matt Marks, the trade group's CEO.

"I think maybe we are at a new plateau; I don't see that changing," he said.

Competing work from the private sector and the Maine Turnpike Authority further constrains the state's small construction workforce, Marks said. Southern Maine is in the midst of a building boom, and multi-year projects already are underway to [widen Interstate 95](#) around Portland and build a [new tollbooth in York](#).

Transportation officials updated their cost estimates to avoid having to cut planned projects again this year, and they plan to work with contractors to reduce the asking price of bids. That may mean soliciting bids further in advance of projects and relaxing requirements, such as night work, that limit traffic disruption but increase costs.

Those changes are welcome, said Paul Koziell, President of CPM Constructors in Freeport, but the core of the problem is that Maine has, for years, underfunded its transportation infrastructure.

The state has a \$232 million annual shortfall between available funding and needed work, according to the department. That gap takes into account [borrowing \\$100 million annually](#) to cope with the issue.

Almost one-third of the highway budget is paid for by the state's highway fund, mostly through its 30 cents-per-gallon state gas tax. Federal highway aid accounts for one-quarter of spending, and borrowing through general obligation bonds makes up another 12 percent. Competitive grants and other sources make up the rest.

Maine politicians have debated new highway revenue sources for years without reaching a solution, a situation that shows they do not have the "political courage" to meet the challenge, Koziell said.

“There is plenty of energy to talk about this problem, but not enough energy to solve it,” he said.

A blue ribbon commission on transportation funding established by lawmakers last year issued [a final report in December](#), but asked for an extension through the spring to come up with a bipartisan compromise for new highway funding.

In its findings, the commission said the state should try to fill at least \$160 million of the funding gap, and if it did, reduce its reliance on bonding.

Democrats on the commission have suggested new revenue sources including a gas tax increase, new fees and allocating revenue from the sale of automobile parts and accessories. Commission Republicans [oppose a gas tax increase](#) unless the state significantly curbs its use of annual borrowing.

Van Note, the transportation commissioner, said he is optimistic that bipartisan progress will be made on highway funding, despite the scale of the challenge.

“I’m absolutely convinced we need structural, transformative change” in how Maine funds its highways, he said. “This is a common network that needs common-sense solutions we can all agree on.”

Maine DOT lays out three year plan while facing major budget shortages

Volume 90%

By Owen Kingsley | Jan 14, 2020

AUGUSTA, Maine (WABI) – Officials with the Maine Department of Transportation laid out their plan today for maintenance and repairs while wrestling with a tight budget.



[Click here to view online video.](#)

In the plan, they laid out 2,051 separate projects, with an estimated cost of nearly \$2.6 billion.

Officials outlined the challenges ahead, including a \$232 million dollar shortfall for this year.

Some of the larger projects outlined in this plan are the Madawaska International Bridge, and a large stretch of repaving on I-95 to and from Houlton.

Officials also applauded voters for supporting transportation bonds in recent years to help funding costs, but recognize that those have been growing.

"I do believe that the people of Maine understand that it is expensive to invest in transportation. But it's much more expensive not to. When I was commissioner there was a bond issue every other year, and it didn't even come close to \$100 million. But for the past several years, we've had \$100 million every single year," said Dana Connors, President of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce.

Even though Maine DOT says that more funds are needed to keep up with the state's transportation needs, they remain optimistic.

"We are now in a stage of constantly managing a slow decline of our transportation system. Despite the size of that challenge I am optimistic. People ask me why sometimes but I am. And that's because Maine is still a place where reasonable people with differing views can come together and get big things done for the common good," said Bruce Van Note, Maine DOT Commissioner.

The blue ribbon commission, which was founded in 2019, will continue to allocate transportation funds in the coming year.

I for one do not understand...



Tuesday, January 14, 2020 17:58

MaineDOT releases 2020 version of its Three-Year Work Plan

Written by [Devin Martin](#)



[Click here to view video online.](#)

AUGUSTA – Officials from the Maine Department of Transportation announced its Three-Year Work Plan early Tuesday.

The plan includes all capital projects and programs, maintenance and operations activities for 2020, 2021 and 2022.

It contains more than 2,000 work items with a total value of \$2.59 billion.

“This plan is how MaineDOT fulfills its mission, to responsibly provide our customers with the safest and most reliable transportation system possible, given available resources,” Commissioner Bruce Van Note said.

One issue the commissioner brought up was the lack of funding the department has faced in recent years.

The commissioner said there is a \$232 million shortfall.

“The work plan makes a real effort at addressing Maine’s transportation infrastructure needs. Unfortunately, the work-plan does not get the job done. Despite the department’s best efforts, delivering the work plan is still predicated upon funding that may not materialize,” said Paul Koziell, president of CPM Constructors, Inc. in Freeport.

According to Koziell, the work plan relies on bonding and competitive federal grants to address basic transportation needs.

The work plan states, \$1.3 billion dollars will fund highway and bridge projects throughout the state.

According to the Maine State Chamber of Commerce President and former MaineDOT Commissioner Dana Connors, the public release of the work plan shows the integrity and transparency of the department.

“Think about the value it brings to a legislature or to the public when you have laid before you three years of work. Three years of what has been done, three years of what needs to be done, and those who weren’t completed perhaps in those first three years, and an explanation as to why,” Connors said.

The work plan can be accessed online at [MaineDOT's website](#).



Maine Transportation Department Unveils \$2.6 Billion, 3-Year Work Plan

By STEVE MISTLER | 1.14.2020 | [Click here to view online.](#)



I-295 northbound in Portland in 2011. MAINE PUBLIC/FILE

The Maine Department of Transportation released a three-year work plan that includes more than 2,000 projects worth nearly \$2.6 billion. It also contains something else: a plea to state lawmakers to help the department fill a project backlog spurred by higher construction costs, workforce shortages and chronic underfunding.

The cry for more money is nothing new, but it's increasingly desperate as MDOT officials issue dire warnings of a slow march toward a system failure.

The driveway and parking at Maine DOT's north Augusta facility is pocked with potholes, some temporarily patched up but deteriorating, and at least one large enough to bottom-out a small car. It was a fitting venue for Tuesday's press conference, in which Maine DOT Commissioner Bruce Van Note repeatedly emphasized a message that's woven throughout [the agency's new, 280-page work plan](#).

“I’m not one for hyperbole and I’m not one to use the word ‘crisis.’ It’s just not how I’m wired. We’re engineers by nature. We just address what we have, but this level of funding is not sustainable,” he says.

Sustainable funding for Maine’s sprawling network of state highways, bridges, railways and ports has been an issue for years. It’s been exacerbated by a combination of State House politics and challenges brought by newer, fuel efficient and electric cars **that have diminished the gas tax revenues** that help fund Maine’s transportation system.

The MDOT has pressed for more federal one-time grants, and Maine voters **have approved hundreds of millions of dollars** in transportation bonds.

Van Note says it’s still not enough.

“Maine DOT is essentially a great machine that knows how to produce good work at a good price, but we are running low on fuel,” he says.

The department’s three-year work plan spends \$150 million more than its predecessor, but on 142 fewer projects. And some of those projects are like the pothole patches in its own north Augusta parking lot — temporary solutions that are labeled as such in the work plan.

“Here are the titles: Light capital paving. Ultra-thin wearing surface. What are we doing? We’re taking that peanut butter pavement and spreading it as thin as we can to get as many miles going to hold it together,” Van Note says.

He describes the work plan as managing a slow decline in Maine’s transportation system.

It contains 148 bridge projects and 171 miles of highway construction and rehabilitation as well as funding for other projects.

But it also relies on an uncertainty: \$300 million in bonding over the next three years that must first be approved by the Legislature and, then, Maine voters.

And even if that bonding occurs the work plan has a \$230 million project shortfall.

A special transportation task force has proposed adding taxes and fees, which are unpopular with some lawmakers.

Paul Koziell, president of CPM Construction in Freeport, served on the task force and says he doesn't understand that position.

"Many of these same folks fail to appreciate the urgency and immediacy of this problem and do not have the political courage to take the necessary steps to resolve this funding shortfall," he says.

Maine isn't the only state confronting the transportation funding problem, but other states have moved faster to address it.

Since 2013, 27 states have increased gas taxes or added long-term funding sources, [according to a database](#) published by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Maine's last gas tax increase was in 2011, the same year the Republican-controlled Legislature eliminated the indexing that hikes the tax with inflation.

The prospect of an increase during an election year appears unlikely, leaving Van Note calling for what he describes as a "nonpartisan solution."

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Maine to fund fewer road projects

Increasing costs a key factor behind three-year plan

BY MICHAEL SHEPHERD
BDN STAFF

AUGUSTA — 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 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

See Repairs, Page A2



MICHAEL SHEPHERD | BDN

Maine Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note speaks at a news conference in Augusta on Tuesday. With the commissioner are (from left) Madawaska Town Manager Gary Picard, Paul Kosiell, president of CPM Constructors Inc. in Freeport, and Dana Connors, CEO of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. Van Note said that the current "level of funding is not sustainable," adding that "bipartisan funding solutions" are necessary.



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Repairs

Continued from Page A1

bipartisan funding solutions materialize."

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.

"This level of funding is not sustainable," Van Note said at a news conference at the department's garage in north Augusta. "The system will not fail immediately and Maine DOT will work to avoid any serious safety impacts, but holding actions only work for a short time and reliability of the system will suffer."

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 Madawaska project is a massive \$85 million rebuild in concert with the New Brunswick government. Federal funds will make up \$36 million of that

project and \$25 million of the \$30 million Woolwich bridge reconstruction. Those grants were announced by U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and the state and federal transportation departments last year.

Van Note's 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.

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. As past plans have, that assumes voter-approved borrowing of \$100 million each year.

A Maine blue-ribbon commission is examining funding solutions that could include a politically

fraught gas tax increase, transfers from the state budget or fee increases. That commission was initially supposed to deliver recommendations to the Legislature in December, but it filed for an extension this month to continue work as it revolves around a potential solution.

Van Note said the commission's work has him "as optimistic now as I ever have been" on the future of funding and that "structural, transformational change is needed that will have bipartisan support allowing it to avoid political whims in the State House in an election year."

"It's a huge puzzle, right," said Rep. Tom Martin, R-Greene, who sponsored the bill to create the commission and sits on it. "When we're done, we want the whole puzzle completed."

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Front page of this morning's paper in Bangor—YET—not one single mention of the I-395/Route 9 Connector project that we know for a fact is moving on in the planning stages and the first phase of the connector project—the \$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 Bridge replacement—will be bid this spring with construction to start later this year.

Portland Press Herald

Maine scales back highway work – but not its price tag

MDOT's three-year construction plan costs \$2.6 billion, but accomplishes less than in past cycles. The top transportation official says 'the reliability of the system will suffer.'

BY [PETER MCGUIRE](#) STAFF WRITER | 1.14.2020 | [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE.](#)



Trucks travel north over the Interstate 295 overpass in Yarmouth Tuesday. The state's three-year highway construction plan costs \$2.6 billion, but includes fewer projects than in previous years. *Derek Davis/Staff Photographer*

Maine's newest multiyear highway construction plan turns a common maxim on its head – the state now plans to do less with more.

At \$2.6 billion, the budget for three-year Department of Transportation work plan is 13 percent higher than three years ago – thanks to new federal grants – but will accomplish less.

Officials say a chronic budget shortfall and [high construction prices](#) forced the department to reduce the number of expensive bridge projects planned for the coming three years and substitute durable restoration with short-term repairs on hundreds of miles of state roads. Last year, the department cut tens of millions of dollars in projects from its 2019 plan for roadway and bridge work as it struggled with bids from private contractors that came in far higher than expected.

The new plan largely consists of spreading what used to be two years' worth of capital projects over three years, Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note wrote in the plan introduction.

"The reality is we are now competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system until bipartisan funding solutions materialize," Van Note said at an Augusta news conference Tuesday. "The system will not fail immediately, and we will do our best to avoid any serious impacts, but holding actions only work for a short time, and the reliability of the system will suffer."

The proposed work plan runs through 2022 and includes nearly 150 bridge projects and more than 170 miles of highway construction and rehabilitation. But the department also has increased the miles slated for light capital paving, also called "skinny mix," a thin layer of pavement to temporarily hold together broken roads.

Thin paving is planned for about 1,800 miles of state roads by 2022 – one-fifth of Maine's state highways – at a cost of \$76 million, but maintaining that production could be at risk without additional highway funding, the department said in its plan.

Some heavily traveled, top-priority roads aren't scheduled for even light paving. Instead, the department intends 170 highway safety and spot improvements – temporary patches – costing \$122 million.

"We're trying to keep good roads good and isolate the bad ones," said Andy Bickmore, director of the transportation department's results and information office.

Maine plans to reduce bridge work over the next three years, but 148 planned projects still will cost \$545 million, one-fifth of the entire spending proposal. Those projects include an \$84.6 million replacement of the International Bridge in Madawaska, and replacements of highway bridges in Portland, Yarmouth and Falmouth.

Competitive federal grants partially pay for some of the bridges. Although that gives the state additional funding for expensive projects, it also means Maine has to match spending and follow grant rules, which means less flexibility in an already tight budget, Bickmore said.

National construction costs last year [hit the highest point](#) since the Great Recession, pushing the state's highway budget to the breaking point. The department canceled [more than \\$59 million](#) worth of road and bridge projects because construction bids were higher than – in some cases double – state estimates.

In Maine, a persistent labor shortage has caused construction prices to increase dramatically. About 80 percent of the members in the Associated General Contractors of Maine are hiring right now, said Matt Marks, the trade group's CEO.

"I think maybe we are at a new plateau; I don't see that changing," he said.

Competing work from the private sector and the Maine Turnpike Authority further constrains the state's small construction workforce, Marks said. Southern Maine is in the midst of a building boom, and multiyear projects already are underway to [widen Interstate 95](#) around Portland and build a [new tollbooth in York](#).

Transportation officials updated their cost estimates to avoid having to cut planned projects again this year, and they plan to work with contractors to reduce the asking price of bids. That may mean soliciting bids further in advance of projects and relaxing requirements, such as night work, that limit traffic disruption but increase costs.

Those changes are welcome, said Paul Koziell, President of CPM Constructors in Freeport, but the core of the problem is that Maine has, for years, underfunded its transportation infrastructure.

The state has a \$232 million annual shortfall between available funding and needed work, according to the department. That gap takes into account [borrowing \\$100 million annually](#) to cope with the issue.

Almost one-third of the highway budget is paid for by the state's highway fund, mostly through its 30 cents-per-gallon state gas tax. Federal highway aid accounts for one-quarter of spending, and borrowing through general obligation bonds makes up another 12 percent. Competitive grants and other sources make up the rest.

Maine politicians have debated new highway revenue sources for years without reaching a solution, a situation that shows they do not have the "political courage" to meet the challenge, Koziell said.

"There is plenty of energy to talk about this problem, but not enough energy to solve it," he said.

A blue ribbon commission on transportation funding established by lawmakers last year issued [a final report in December](#), but asked for an extension through the spring to come up with a bipartisan compromise for new highway funding.

In its findings, the commission said the state should try to fill at least \$160 million of the funding gap, and if it did, reduce its reliance on bonding.

Democrats on the commission have suggested new revenue sources including a gas tax increase, new fees and allocating revenue from the sale of automobile parts and accessories. Commission Republicans [oppose a gas tax increase](#) unless the state significantly curbs its use of annual borrowing.

Van Note, the transportation commissioner, said he is optimistic that bipartisan progress will be made on highway funding, despite the scale of the challenge. "I'm absolutely convinced we need structural, transformative change" in how Maine funds its highways, he said. "This is a common network that needs common-sense solutions we can all agree on."

As of January 14, 2020, the MaineDOT has cancelled 142 essential road and bridge projects due to the DOT budget ballooning to an annual shortfall of -\$232 million.

YET, the MaineDOT apparently sits on \$57.3 million of our limited transportation dollars for the partial construction funding of the controversial \$100 million I-395/Route 9 Connector and will soon bid the \$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 bridge project, a replacement of a perfectly good functioning bridge, to support construction of 2B-2.

Only one quarter of 2B-2's cost comes from a \$25 million INFRA grant which means any amount over the initial \$25 million has either already been taken or will be taken in the future from other needy projects that share STIP funds. How many of those 142 cancelled projects were sacrificed to pay for a connector that the City of Brewer does not want and fails to meet the original system linkage need of a limited-access connection from I-395 to Route 9, EAST of Route 46?

Commissioner Van Note stated: "The system will not fail immediately, and we will do our best to avoid any serious safety impacts. But holding actions only work for a short time, and the reliability of the system will suffer. Maine deserves better."

Mr. Van Note, you are 100% correct—we do deserve better and Maine's unmet transportation needs should be number one priority and not another boondoggle...

MaineDOT News Releases

Following are the latest news releases issued by The Maine Department of Transportation.

1/14/2020: [MaineDOT Releases New Three-Year Work Plan Amid Funding Challenges](#)



News Release for January 14, 2020

For more Information:

Paul Merrill, Public Information Officer - 207-624-3355 or 207-215-9297

AUGUSTA - The Maine Department of Transportation has released the 2020 Edition of its Three-Year Work Plan. This Work Plan includes all capital projects and programs, maintenance and operations activities, planning initiatives, and administrative functions for calendar years 2020, 2021, and 2022. It includes 2,051 individual work items with a total estimated value of \$2.59 billion.

This Work Plan largely consists of spreading what used to be two years of capital projects over three years to stay within funding and cost constraints. Due to cost increases arising from workforce challenges, work constraints, and other factors, making old projects whole at the beginning of this Work Plan process has required an extraordinary amount of funding. The bottom line on this year's Work Plan is higher than last year's (largely due to increased levels of one-time infusions of federal grant money), higher costs will yield lower levels of capital project production in terms of miles of paving, numbers of bridges, etc.

"This fiscal challenge required us to prioritize even more and rely on less-reliable bond and competitive federal grant funding for basic needs," said Commissioner Bruce Van Note. "With lower levels of capital project production, we are focusing on essential safety needs, bridges, matching federal funds, and low cost patching of higher-priority roads until normal treatments become fiscally possible. The reality is that we are now competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system until bipartisan funding solutions materialize. The system will not fail immediately, and we will do our best to avoid any serious safety impacts, but holding actions only work for a short time, and the reliability of the system will suffer."

The biggest project in this Work Plan is the replacement of the Madawaska-Edmundston International Bridge. This bridge represents a vital link between Maine and New Brunswick. The current structure is 100 years old and has deteriorated to the point that it is near the end of its useful life.

"The importance of safe and reliable public transportation infrastructure and the effect on it has on our state and local economy cannot be ignored," said Madawaska Town Manager Gary Picard. "The International Bridge's five-ton weight limit has been financially detrimental to our town's largest employer, the Twin Rivers Paper Company, which employs more than 500 workers and contributes to more than 5,800 indirect jobs throughout The County. Under the bridge's current weight limits, all commercial traffic from Canada to Madawaska must now be rerouted primarily through Van Buren, adding 75 miles and nearly two hours in transit time to each trip. We need a new bridge."

Last year, the Legislature created the Blue Ribbon Commission To Study and Recommend Funding Solutions for the State's Transportation Systems. Commission members have identified an annual unmet funding need of approximately \$232 million. Members recommend that after providing sufficient funding, the state gradually reduces its reliance on bonding. The Commission is continuing to meet this year to try to identify a nonpartisan solution to MaineDOT's chronic funding problem.

"Not meeting this need is both concerning and disappointing," said Paul Koziell, President of CPM Constructors, Inc. of Freeport. "The Work Plan is comprehensive and mentions lots of projects. However, what projects are not in this Work Plan as a result of this annual \$232-million shortfall and should be? Think about this when you are driving and hit a crack in the road, a deteriorating road shoulder, or raised bridge joint and then need to bring your car, truck, or SUV to the garage for yet another front-end alignment. Maine deserves better. We need not only to maintain our transportation infrastructure but also to improve it. Regrettably, until there is a willingness to solve this funding shortfall once and for all, this will not be accomplished."

"Businesses in every sector in Maine are eager to recruit and train tomorrow's workforce," said Dana Connors, President of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. "That workforce needs to be able to get to and from work safely, and their families need to be able to access educational and recreational opportunities throughout the state. Transportation infrastructure and having transportation choices is important to every single citizen in the state of Maine, which means it is important to every single business in Maine, no matter their size, their location, their product or service. Transportation is critical to every single one of us. We must make it more cost-effective to move freight, we must expand transit for our aging population, and we must do so with safety at top of mind. This Work Plan moves us in the right direction."

Read the full 2020 Edition of MaineDOT's Three-Year Work Plan:

<http://www.mainedot.gov/projects/workplan>

Download images and renderings of Work Plan projects:

<https://file.ac/21euC01oZvBVcYfYZrdHMA/>

###

The connector always survives serious scrutiny:

Commissioner Van Note “struck a dour tone” saying his DOT is “spreading what used to be two years of capital projects over three years...competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system” with the cancellation of 142 essential road and bridge projects.



What was conveniently left out of the Work Plan rollout and the “notable projects” that Mr. Van Note discussed was that the DOT will bid this spring the \$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 bridge replacement in Brewer, the replacement of a perfectly good bridge in support of and considered to be the first phase of the controversial \$100 million I-395/Route 9

Connector, a project that is already partially funded with \$57.3 million of our limited transportation dollars in this same work plan—that is notable, and Maine deserves the truth.

Things cannot be so dour when you are sitting on that kind of money for one single project while 142 other projects go unfunded.

Maine’s unmet transportation needs must be priority one!!

Number of bridge repair projects drops as Maine DOT struggles to find funding

Don Eno | Fiddlehead Focus

The Madawasaka Bridge is shown here in 2016. Big projects like the Madawasaka Bridge tend to crowd out smaller projects competing for funding.



By [Caitlin Andrews](#), BDN Staff • January 16, 2020

AUGUSTA, Maine — Maine's [struggle to fund its transportation system](#) has not affected the amount of structurally deficient bridges in the state, but that [lack of funding has led to patchwork repairs and closing some bridges altogether rather than dealing with true costs of repair.](#)

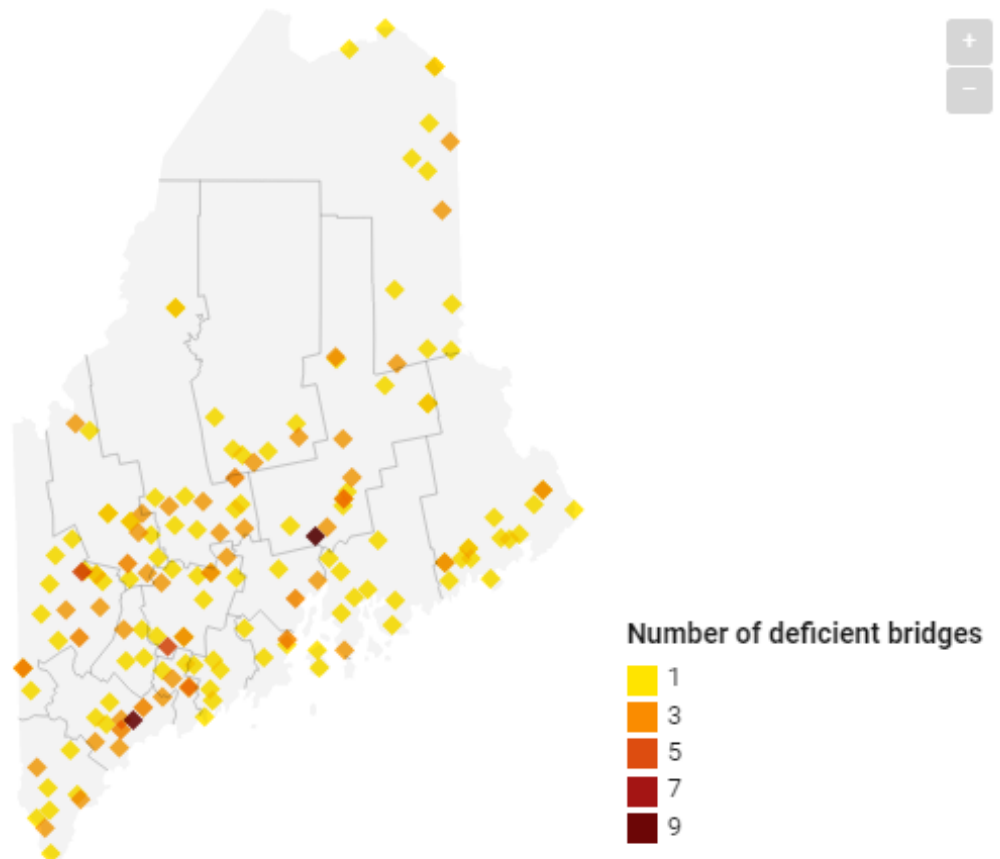
The share of [structurally deficient bridges](#) — any bridge that has advanced section loss, deterioration of material or erosion of base soil — has hovered in the teens since 2001, according to Maine Department of Transportation data. It was above 15 percent then and was [around 12 percent last fall.](#)

That's not to say those projects haven't been affected by a \$233 million annual funding shortfall. The state's [three-year work plan](#) released Tuesday shows the number of bridge projects have decreased since 2017 and are expected to drop from 79 last year to 45 this year despite the plan having \$150 million more than the past three years, due to an influx of federal grants.

Department officials say they fear losing ground on smaller projects while bigger, higher-priority bridges take up more space. National data show a trend of spending more money on patching up the infrastructure rather than making substantial improvements.

Bridges deemed structurally deficient

According to the Maine Department of Transportation, 248 bridges were deemed structurally deficient as of 2019.



Funding for infrastructure is a long-running, national problem. Joyce Taylor, the chief engineer for the transportation department, says the state has been able to stave bridges off from getting worse by doing preservation work. She worries such efforts won't last long, noting big projects — such as an \$85 million planned replacement of the International Bridge in Madawaska using \$35 million in federal money — can crowd smaller projects out.

“We have to ask, ‘Are we going to lose ground on other projects?’” she said.

Paul Merrill, a spokesperson for the department, said the state has been relying on surface treatment on bridges that need work, but are not high-

priority structures. Spot-repairing infrastructure is a national trend, according to the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit public policy research organization.

It found **last spring** that total spending on infrastructure maintenance increased by 9.5 percent during the past decade, even while total public spending has fallen. Transportation is the most expensive part of U.S. infrastructure, and Brookings found spending on it dropped by \$4.2 billion from 2007 to 2017, or 1.4 percent, with a sharp decline happening just after the Great Recession and has been increasing from 2012 on.

States and localities have been “entirely responsible” for the rebound, which has focused on operations and maintenance spending. Maine expects to spend \$545 million on 148 bridge projects and \$10.1 million in bridge and structural maintenance over the next three years.

What determines whether a bridge needs to be replaced varies. Taylor said in a fall interview that the state follows **national guidelines** to determine the status of its bridges, which must be inspected every two years. A committee of engineers meets every two weeks to discuss which bridges may need attention or to be closed.

There’s no “deterioration curve” to follow, so Taylor said state engineers tend to evaluate a bridge based on its how much weight they believe it can carry and its condition. If pieces have eroded, or a bridge moves down, up or sideways, it’s probably time to close it, she said.

Age can be a factor, but material is also important. Taylor said many interstate bridges were built with a light steel that is not as durable as current materials. Areas that see heavy truck traffic are likely to see bridges deteriorate faster.

Bridges close when the department cannot afford to fix them — or don’t think it’s worth it. Taylor described it as “managing the decline of our system” — allowing some lower priority bridges to deteriorate to the point that they have to be posted to weight limits.

For structurally deficient bridges that may only detour drivers a few miles out of their way, Taylor said they might consider closing those structures for good. The state has only closed 10 bridges in the past five years, Taylor said.

One of those bridges is on Rawson Avenue in Camden, built in 1935 and closed permanently this April.

Jeremy Martin, who heads the planning department for the town, said the state approached the town and told them the bridge would not be replaced because of its condition and its low traffic volume. Replacing the bridge would have cost around \$1 million, Martin said, which was too expensive for the town to consider.

He said the state has now committed to covering half of the \$150,000 cost for turning it into a pedestrian bridge. Martin said the bridge is heavily used by children walking to the nearby middle school. If it wasn't replaced, he said it would be dangerous.

"Certainly if they had to go over Route 1, we'd have to replace it, no question," he said. "Rawson [Avenue] has hardly any traffic — there are no easy alternatives."

[Click here to view article and interactive map online.](#)

She worries such efforts won't last long, noting big projects...can crowd smaller projects out. We have to ask, 'Are we going to lose ground on other projects?' she said.

MaineDOT Joyce Taylor Chief Engineer

How about those 142 projects that have been put on hold while the DOT continues to bank millions of our limited transportation dollars on the I-395/Route 9 Connector? If she was so worried about a \$85 million bridge, why isn't she as worried about a \$100 million connector?



Goals for 2020

Special supplement INSIDE

UMAINE BASKETBALL

Men's win emotional for Lebanese senior, parents PAGE B4

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DON ENO | ST. JOHN VALLEY TIMES FILE

The International Bridge in Madawaska in 2016. Big projects like the Madawaska bridge tend to crowd out smaller projects competing for funding.

Sparse funding forces patchwork repairs, closure of Maine bridges

BY CAITLIN ANDREWS
BDN STAFF

AUGUSTA — Maine's struggle to fund its transportation system has not affected the amount of structurally deficient bridges in the state, but that lack of funding has led to patchwork repairs and closing some bridges altogether rather than dealing with true costs of repair.

The share of structurally deficient bridges — any bridge that has advanced section loss, deterioration of material or erosion of base soil — has hovered in the teens since 2001, according to Maine Department of Transportation data. It was above 15

percent then and was around 12 percent last fall.

That's not to say those projects haven't been affected by a \$233 million annual funding shortfall. The state's three-year work plan released Tuesday shows the number of bridge projects have decreased since 2017 and are expected to drop from 79 last year to 45 this year despite the plan having \$150 million more than the past three years, due to an influx of federal grants.

Department officials say they fear losing ground on smaller projects while bigger, higher-priority bridges take up more space. National data

See Bridges, Page A4

Bridges

Continued from Page A1

show a trend of spending more money on patching up the infrastructure rather than making substantial improvements.

Funding for infrastructure is a long-running, national problem. Joyce Taylor, the chief engineer for the transportation department, says the state has been able to stave bridges off from getting worse by doing preservation work. She worries such efforts won't last long, noting big projects — such as an \$85 million planned replacement of the International Bridge in Madawaska using \$35 million in federal money — can crowd smaller projects out.

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nonprofit public policy research organization.

It found last spring that total spending on infrastructure maintenance increased by 9.5 percent during the past decade, even while total public spending has fallen. Transportation is the most expensive part of U.S. infrastructure, and Brookings found spending on it dropped by \$4.2 billion from 2007 to 2017, or 1.4 percent, with a sharp decline happening just after the Great Recession and has been increasing from 2012 on.

States and localities have been "entirely responsible" for the rebound, which has focused on operations and maintenance spending. Maine expects to spend \$545 million on 148 bridge projects and \$10.1 million in bridge and structural maintenance over the next three years.

What determines whether a bridge needs to be replaced varies. Taylor said in a fall interview that the state follows national guidelines to determine the status of its bridges, which must be inspected every two years. A committee of engineers meets every two weeks to discuss which bridges may

need attention or to be closed.

There's no "deterioration curve" to follow, so Taylor said state engineers tend to evaluate a bridge based on its how much weight they believe it can carry and its condition. If pieces have eroded, or a bridge moves down, up or sideways, it's probably time to close it, she said.

Age can be a factor, but material is also important. Taylor said many interstate bridges were built with a light steel that is not as durable as current materials. Areas that see heavy truck traffic are likely to see bridges deteriorate faster.

Bridges close when the department cannot afford to fix them — or don't think it's worth it. Taylor described it as "managing the decline of our system" — allowing some lower priority bridges to deteriorate to the point that they have to be posted to weight limits.

For structurally deficient bridges that may only detour drivers a few miles out of their way, Taylor said they might consider closing those structures for good. The state has only closed 10 bridges in the

past five years, Taylor said. One of those bridges is on Rawson Avenue in Camden, built in 1935 and closed permanently this April.

Jeremy Martin, who heads the planning department for the town, said the state approached the town and told them the bridge would not be replaced because of its condition and its low traffic volume. Replacing the bridge would have cost around \$1 million, Martin said, which was too expensive for the town to consider.

He said the state has now committed to covering half of the \$150,000 cost for turning it into a pedestrian bridge. Martin said the bridge is heavily used by children walking to the nearby middle school. If it wasn't replaced, he said it would be dangerous.

"Certainly if they had to go over Route 1, we'd have to replace it, no question," he said. "Rawson [Avenue] has hardly any traffic — there are no easy alternatives."

**AS
PRESEI**

This is the second front page BDN article, in the past 3 days, concerning the DOT's funding woes and still not one mention of what may be the most expensive project addressed in the 2020-2021-2022 Work Plan—the \$100 million I-395/Route 9 connector. The first phase of the connector's construction is the replacement of the \$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 bridge, to be bid this spring. Why the silence?? Is it the optics of crying for money when, at the same time, you're banking tens of millions for a controversial project that does not satisfy the original study system linkage need and the City of Brewer and many of its citizens do not support?



A report from News Center Maine: Once again we hear the DOT Commissioner pitch for more money for our roads and bridges. [View this report online.](#)

How about cancelling the I-395/Route 9 Connector?

AND – the blue-ribbon commission was discussed as if they have all the answers when if you go to their [website](#) you will find that they could not reach consensus on how to fix the problem,

The **Commission has completed its work** and has issued its [final report](#). At the fifth and final meeting, the commission voted unanimously in support of the following findings:

- Finding #1. Assuming an annual \$100 million general obligation bond package, the current unmet annual transportation funding need in Maine is approximately \$232 million.
- Finding #2. The federal government should be challenged to continue providing one third of Maine's transportation funding need.

- Finding #3. Given findings #1 and #2, the pragmatic state level funding target that Maine should address is approximately \$160 million, about two thirds of \$232 million.
- Finding #4. Once the annual transportation funding need is met, Maine's reliance on bonding to supplement transportation funding should be reduced in a fiscally responsible manner.
- Finding #5. That given the complexity and importance of the issues inherent in transportation funding, **the commission did not have enough time to fully develop a funding solution framework that it could support** recommending to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation.

Given the findings above, the commission voted unanimously in support of the following recommendation.

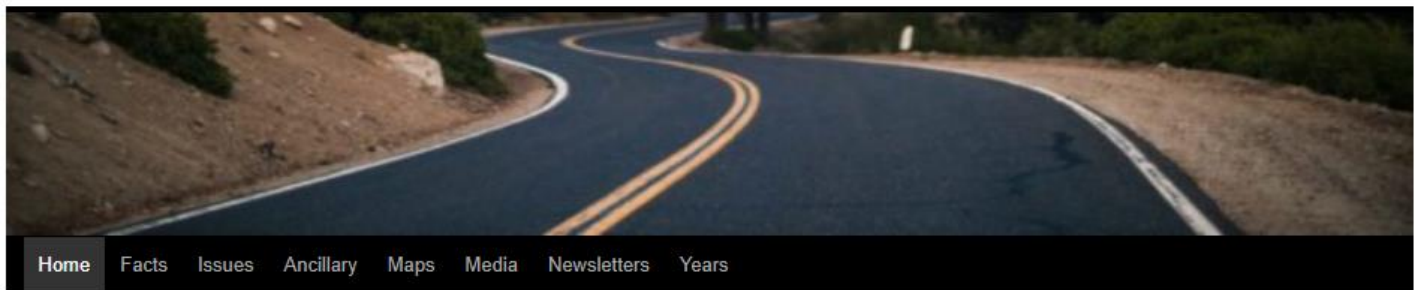
- That the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation report out a bill to immediately continue and authorize the commission to continue the work started by the commission, so that a recommendation may be submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation and can be acted upon before the end of the Second Regular Session of the 129th Legislature (see Appendix C for proposed language).

Changed website tagline:

FROM: Amidst the deadlocked blue-ribbon funding commission, the 46% increase in construction costs bloating the annual roads and bridge maintenance shortfall to \$232 million, and the 60% cost increase of the Gorham Connector in just two years, the DOT decided to go ahead with the Wilson St./I-395 bridge replacement in 2020 to advance the connector project. (11.2019)

"I-395/Route 9 Hard Look"

Amidst the deadlocked blue-ribbon funding commission, the 46% increase in construction costs bloating the annual roads and bridge maintenance shortfall to \$232 million, and the 60% cost increase of the Gorham Connector in just two years, the DOT decided to go ahead with the Wilson St./I-395 bridge replacement in 2020 to advance the connector project. (11.2019)



TO: Chief Engineer Taylor worries that “big projects...can crowd smaller projects out”, whilst Commissioner Van Note spoke “dourly” of the \$232 million shortfall, the downgrading of paving techniques and 142 cancelled projects, yet gave the go-ahead for the \$13.5 million Wilson Street bridge replacement - the first phase of the \$100 million connector project. (1.18.2020)

"I-395/Route 9 Hard Look"

Chief Engineer Taylor worries that “big projects...can crowd smaller projects out”, whilst Commissioner Van Note spoke “dourly” of the -\$232 million shortfall, the downgrading of paving techniques and 142 cancelled projects, yet gave the go-ahead for the \$13.5 million Wilson Street bridge replacement – the first phase of the \$100 million connector project. (1.18.2020)



News Release for August 1, 2011 | [Click here to view online.](#)

MaineDOT Commissioner Ends Plans To Build Bypass Around Wiscasset

AUGUSTA, Maine – Maine Department of Transportation Commissioner David Bernhardt announced today that MaineDOT will terminate the Wiscasset Route 1 Corridor Study, which will end any plans to build a bypass around the coastal community.

“The cost of building the bypass far exceeds any potential benefits to motorists and the communities,” said MaineDOT Commissioner David Bernhardt. “At a time when **we have difficulty finding the financial resources to maintain our existing infrastructure**, I cannot justify the expense of building a bypass around Wiscasset.”

The decision to end the corridor study was the result of an evaluation of the options for moving forward and the associated costs. Since the June, 2010 discovery of an undocumented eagle’s nest along the previously approved proposed route, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers subsequently informed MaineDOT that the proposed route was no longer acceptable, and that MaineDOT would need to submit a new application for a different alternative.

Since that time, MaineDOT has met with the affected communities, held a Midcoast Bypass Task Force meeting and a public information meeting in December 2010, and solicited public comment in order to decide whether to proceed and resubmit the application for a different alternative route.

Current estimates for the proposed bypass are close to \$100 million. Up until the past year, MaineDOT thought that over time the funding for the bypass would become available. However, since that time the potential for funding this project has dwindled, with flat federal transportation funding, and Congress has ended the practice of “earmarking” funding for special projects.

“Adding more miles to our transportation system in this current fiscal environment doesn’t make financial sense,” said Bernhardt, “Our responsibility going forward is to manage our existing infrastructure within our existing budget.”

With current funding levels stable at best, MaineDOT concluded that the expenditure of funds on new infrastructure was not justifiable.

“The long-term financial forecast for transportation funding makes it difficult to continue to spend scarce resources on such a large, financially unviable project,” said Bernhardt, “We are struggling to maintain the roads and bridges we currently have in safe and serviceable condition.”

“A project of this magnitude requires major federal participation as well as some type of special funding from the state,” said Bernhardt, “We simply do not see this type of funding becoming available in the foreseeable future.”

The proposed bypass options were designed to lessen traffic impacts along the Route 1 corridor in Edgecomb and Wiscasset. Over the past few years, MaineDOT has worked with the communities to find solutions to the traffic congestion, and will continue to look for new solutions and technologies to lessen the area traffic impacts at a price the state can afford.

The decision to end the corridor study will also have a positive impact on property owners in the area impacted by the proposed bypass alignments.

“We realize that the bypass has impacted people who own property along the proposed routes, clouding them in uncertainty, unable to sell their property if they wanted to,” said Bernhardt, “By this action I am taking today, our hope is that the uncertainty is now gone, and they can move forward with their plans for their property.”

MaineDOT will continue to move forward with solutions to help alleviate some of the traffic issues.

“We recognize that summer traffic continues to be a major problem in Wiscasset and Edgecomb. Even though we’ve decided not to build a bypass, we will take a serious look at some of the potential improvements that came out in the study. We’re also going to work aggressively with the communities to implement solutions such as real-time traffic information and traffic officers to help alleviate some of the backup,” said Bernhardt.

###

The fiscal environment is even worse than it was in 2011, when common sense momentarily kicked in and the DOT cancelled a project eerily similar to the \$100 million I-395 connector project. What’s the difference now?

Statements attached to August 2011 MaineDOT Press Release:

Today's fiscal environment—with an annual \$232 million shortfall, the subsequent cancellation of 142 projects and the “downgrading” of paving and repair techniques for our deteriorating roads—is considerably worse than the fiscal environment of 2011 when DOT Commissioner Bernhardt canceled the \$100 million Wiscasset Bypass project in August 2011:

“At a time when we have difficulty finding the financial resources to maintain our existing infrastructure, I cannot justify the expense of building a bypass around Wiscasset.”

“Adding more miles to our transportation system in this current fiscal environment doesn't make financial sense,” said Bernhardt, “Our responsibility going forward is to manage our existing infrastructure within our existing budget.”

With current funding levels stable at best, MaineDOT concluded that the expenditure of funds on new infrastructure was not justifiable.

“The long-term financial forecast for transportation funding makes it difficult to continue to spend scarce resources on such a large, financially unviable project,” said Bernhardt, “We are struggling to maintain the roads and bridges we currently have in safe and serviceable condition.”

Those words remain appropriate and should be said once again; they sum up the “dour” condition of our roads and bridges and what the DOT should be doing to minimize the damage from our current fiscal environment.

One is left to wonder why the DOT wants to spend \$100 million on one single project – a controversial project that fails to satisfy the original study purpose and needs and many of us do not support nor see the need for – when our infrastructure is in such dire shape. The blue-ribbon commission has failed to reach consensus and 2020 is an election year where any increase in the gas tax would be the kiss of death in politician's eyes; things will not get better, there's only one direction this is going and squandering \$100 million dollars on a single project while 142 other projects go unmet only magnifies the issue.

Maine's unmet transportation needs should be and must be the DOT's top priority, anything less is unacceptable. It's hard to comprehend why the DOT continues to bank money on the \$100 million connector project when the DOT will soon be forced to cold-patch potholes on our roadways forced off the paving schedule – and – post or close bridges that could have been rebuilt at a cheaper cost if done in a timely manner...

Portland Press Herald

New Maine Turnpike interchange planned to ease Saco traffic

Crippling rush-hour congestion on the sole existing exit for Saco and surrounding communities presents a safety hazard.

BY [PETER MCGUIRE](#) STAFF WRITER | 1.20.2020 | [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#).

Relief is on the way for commuters used to daily traffic headaches around the sole interstate exit in Saco, as the Maine Turnpike Authority plans a \$40.7 million interchange to alleviate congestion.

The morning and afternoon rush hours turn Exit 36 and nearby roads, including Route 112, into a morass of vehicles trying to get to Saco or communities west of the city.

The problem is concentrated around an approach to Industrial Park Road, which connects to Route 112. In the morning, left turns from vehicles traveling east slow commuters, while in the afternoon traffic stacks up behind a traffic light on Industrial Park Road. Almost 17,000 vehicles use the road daily.

“Industrial Park Road is kind of a bottleneck,” said Peter Merfeld, chief operations officer at the Maine Turnpike Authority. “Getting to the turnpike is difficult in the morning and getting off the turnpike is problematic in the afternoon.”

Crippling traffic creates serious safety concerns, as well as aggravation for drivers. In the evening rush hour a steady line of slow-moving vehicles sometimes backs up onto the turnpike’s main line, an unacceptably risky situation.

“Depending on how long the line is, traffic might stop in open lanes. Now you have stopped traffic and 75-mph traffic adjacent to each other. That creates a higher possibility of collisions,” Merfeld said.



To address the problem, the turnpike authority plans to reopen and expand a disused highway on-off ramp south of Exit 36 and build new ramps west of the highway. The hope is commuters from towns west of Saco, such as Buxton, Hollis and Limington, will use the new exit, reducing the burden on Exit 36.

“The point is, for the afternoon traffic, they just have a simple right turn heading west instead of going through the gantlet of Industrial Park Road,” Merfeld said. Construction is slated to begin in 2022.

The area has had a worsening traffic problem for years. More than 30,600 vehicles use the exit every day, 20 percent more than in 2011, according to a turnpike traffic study.

“There is a high level of frustration that I feel and my constituents that drive this stretch every single day feel,” said Sen. Justin Chenette, D-Saco. “The congestion and backups are like headache after headache.”

Chenette submitted a bill to the Legislature last year asking for \$24 million in state highway funding to improve traffic in the area in case the interchange expansion was not included in the turnpike authority’s newest four-year investment plan. Since the project is now in the plan, Chenette said he has asked the Legislature’s Transportation Committee to kill his bill.

“This is critical to our area, to our economy, to our way of life that we have these improvements,” Chenette said. “Our entire region utilizes this one exit.”

He doesn’t believe adding another highway interchange in the region contradicts state and regional efforts to reduce traffic and [greenhouse gas pollution](#) by [curbing urban sprawl and improving public transit](#).

“To me, this is not about just building more roads; it is about changing and modifying the existing roadways to be more efficient and safe for people,” he said. “This is not a philosophical debate about more public transit over roads.”

As it waits for construction to start, the city of Saco hopes to ease traffic by altering two intersections on Route 112. Left turns onto and from Garfield Street are now prohibited and a traffic signal will be installed at the intersection with Jenkins Road, said City Engineer Joe Laverriere.

"We are always tweaking signal timing, but we are not adding lanes or anything like that," he said.

Saco and the Maine Department of Transportation are using traffic signals to address traffic problems on Main Street/Route 1, a heavily used thoroughfare in town, he added.

The turnpike project should help at least this congested part of the city, he said.

"It is hard to take all the traffic from adjacent communities through that one corridor," Laverriere said. "I think this project is aimed at other options to get to the turnpike. Hopefully that will help us out."

Is anyone listening? Does it matter whether it's the DOT or the Turnpike Authority making these fiscal decisions? Didn't the DOT just tell us the dire condition of our infrastructure?

What's wrong with you Maine – we're out of money!!

NicoleC 1 hour ago

"This is not a philosophical debate about more public transit over roads."It is always a debate! There's only so much money in the budget. You're spending 40 million dollars on one (1!) exit. Up in Gorham the state is spending \$250 million on 6 miles of toll highway. There is a traffic engineering phenomena known as induced demand - building more roads and easing congestion results in more traffic to fill the upgraded capacity. In the worst case, the traffic hits a new bottleneck somewhere else and everyone's commute still sucks. How much money do we waste on incremental 'little tweaks' like this before we add a proper regional commuter network?

Respect 🙏 3 Reply ↩

Share ➦ Report 🚩

State scuttles Wiscasset Route 1 bypass

By Seth Koenig, Brunswick Times Record • August 3, 2011

[Click here to view online.](#)

WISCASSET — Maine Transportation Commissioner David Bernhardt on Monday announced that — after more than 50 years of debate, fits and starts — plans for a Route 1 bypass around downtown Wiscasset are being abandoned.

“The cost of building the bypass far exceeds any potential benefits to motorists and the communities,” Bernhardt announced in a statement. “At a time when we have difficulty finding the financial resources to maintain our existing infrastructure, I cannot justify the expense of building a bypass around Wiscasset.”

Bernhardt’s decision grinds to a halt the ongoing, but glacial, progress toward a new highway that would avoid the town’s village and give coastal motorists a less congested path to Boothbay and Rockland.

Talks about establishing such a route first began in the late 1950s. Traffic volume increased over time, and state transportation officials intensified discussion of building a new road in the mid-1990s.

Donald Jones, chairman of the Wiscasset Transportation Committee and a member of the local task force studying bypass options, said he’s been working toward development of a bypass since 1991.

After hearing the news in a midday conference call with top MDOT officials Monday, Jones said his immediate reaction was to wonder what potentially “intrusive” measures the department might employ to ease traffic through the downtown if not the bypass.

“Not building a bypass makes me say, ‘OK, what are we going to do now?’ It makes me worry,” Jones told The Times Record by phone Monday evening. “On a personal level, I feel it’s been a great waste of the last 20 years that I’ve been spending on this issue.”

MDOT last month began funding the placement of two traffic control police officers in the downtown to help pedestrians cross and cars move along in orderly turns.

Frank Risell, of Wiscasset, serves as co-chairman of a citizens’ group opposed to the bypass project called R.O.A.D. (Route One Alternative Decisions). Risell said state

transportation officials are still considering upgrades to the intersections of Route 27 and Route 1 on both sides of the Sheepscot River as well.

“We welcome the news that the bypass may be dead, but we’re also convinced that they still need to do something to improve what we have,” Risell, who leads the R.O.A.D. group alongside Morrison Bonpasse of Newcastle, told The Times Record. **“We did not want a bypass because we didn’t see the need for it, or (understand) why we’d spend \$100 million on that when there are a lot of other roads that need that work.”**

The road to constructing a bypass was a bumpy one, even in recent years, when the project was described by Maine Department of Transportation representatives as an eventuality, despite uncertainties surrounding funding.

But in late November 2010, state transportation officials announced that the one proposed bypass route, after years of debate, to receive the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ blessing must be thrown out due to a protected eagle’s nest in its path. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s determination that the nest could not be moved to make way for the project left MDOT officials considering whether to dust off previous route options and try again for Army Corps approval of a different path — or to drop the bypass project altogether.

The route blocked by the eagle’s nest was titled “N8c.” It stretched for 3.2 miles and featured a bridge across the Sheepscot River to Davis Island in Edgecomb, where it would reconnect with Route 1 near an MDOT maintenance facility.

Another previous option — N2a — was the only proposed bypass route to gain support from both state officials and members of a local task force studying the subject, but hadn’t been given the Army Corps’ OK.

“We did not want a bypass because we didn’t see the need for it, or (understand) why we’d spend \$100 million on that when there are a lot of other roads that need that work.” August 2011 Frank Risell

This is what the City of Brewer has been saying since January 2012. In 2020, the cost is identical, we still do not see the need for the connector and there are lots of other roads that need that money!

Short-term patches can't pave over Maine's transportation funding shortfall



Natalie Williams | BDN

By The Editorial Board.
The BDN Opinion Section operates independently and does not set newsroom policies, or contribute to reporting or editing articles elsewhere in the newspaper or on bangordailynews.com.
January 21, 2020

[Click here to view online.](#)

Over the next three years, the Maine Department of Transportation will upgrade and maintain **fewer roads and bridges** while spending more money to do so. This is because, while construction costs are increasing, state funding to pay for this work hasn't kept pace with the need.

The state's annual road and bridge funding shortfall — the gap between what the department says it needs to spend to maintain the system and the amount of money it expects to have available to fund this work — now stands at \$233 million. And this assumes that voters will approve about \$100 million in borrowing for transportation projects each year.

As a result of this shortfall, the department will essentially spread out what would be two years worth of work over three years. The department will also do more temporary patch work in place of more substantial rebuilds. Nearly 150 projects were removed from the three-year project list.

Even with this corner cutting, the three-year plan costs \$150 million more than the previous one because construction costs have risen sharply. Contractors report having to [pay higher wages](#) because of the difficulty finding qualified workers, which echoes long-time warnings of Maine's workforce challenges. In the construction business, this is compounded by [a shortage of truck drivers](#).

"Even with these efforts, the fiscal reality is that we are now competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system until bipartisan funding solutions materialize," Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note wrote in [a letter](#) that accompanied the three-year work plan. **"The system will not fail immediately, and we will do our best to avoid any serious safety impacts. But holding actions only work for a short time, and the reliability of the system will suffer."**

The pared-back transportation work plan for the next three years, which was previewed by the department's announcement last year that it had [scrapped 11 projects](#) for the 2019 list because of a shortage of funding and rising construction costs, is a huge red flag warning lawmakers that they must find additional ways to pay for this needed work.

Lawmakers can't ignore it. A committee tasked with examining transportation funding has asked for additional time to complete its work. Its job was made much more difficult last year when Republican members suggested that increasing the state's gas tax shouldn't be among the task force's recommended solutions.

This is counterproductive. Certainly the gas tax is not a panacea, but it should be among the solutions.

The gas tax, which accounts for 69 percent of the state's highway fund revenue, is now 30 cents per gallon for gasoline and 31 cents per gallon for diesel fuel. This is unchanged since 2011, when the Republican-controlled Legislature ended the practice of automatically indexing the gas tax to inflation.

According to the Department of Transportation, a 1-cent increase to the gas tax would generate [\\$7.5 million in revenue](#). The trucking industry, which would bear much of the cost of a higher fuel tax, [supports](#) a 15- to 20-cent increase. This would provide significant and much-needed revenue.

Other potential revenue sources include new tolls, levies on electric and hybrid vehicles, and dedicating a portion of sales tax revenue to transportation — all of which should be on the table.

Gas taxes and tolls have the benefit of tying funding to usage of roads and bridges. Taking money from the state's general fund, on the other hand, pits human services, education and other government priorities against transportation funding. This, too, is a discussion worth having, but it is unlikely to resolve the immediate funding problems that the Department of Transportation is facing.

The Transportation Department's work plan makes it clear that the shortfall in funding for road and bridge work has serious consequences and is getting worse. Lawmakers must propose realistic funding solutions to bridge the gap, and they need to do it soon.

Again, no mention of why—in such “dour” times—no one sees a problem in cutting 142 projects at the same time the DOT is bidding this spring the \$13.5 million Wilson Street bridge replacement that is only needed in support of the \$100 million I-395/Route 9 connector project that many do not support...

What's wrong with you—Maine is out of money!!

Wednesday, January 22, 2020 20:10

I-395 bridge replacement part of controversial connector

Written by [Nit-Noi Ricker](#)



[Click here to view video and article online.](#)

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.

How's that for optics? The DOT admits to a \$232 million annual shortfall, has had to cancel 142 projects in the latest 3 year work plan and will either cancel all together or just skim coat our failing roads. Yet, the DOT has no problem spending \$13.5 million on replacing a normally good bridge to support the \$100 million connector that the City of Brewer does not support.

How many roads and bridges have been sacrificed so the DOT can continue to bank our scarce transportation dollars into the controversial I-395/Route 9 connector project?

\$237 million for the Gorham Bypass, \$40.7 million for the Saco exit on I-95 and \$100 million for the I-395 connector, a \$232 million annual shortfall in the roads and bridges maintenance budget and 142 projects cancelled – the state needs to tackle the real problem with the MaineDOT – it's not the lack of funding, it's what they are spending the funds on; not one more foot of new pavement should be laid until our existing roads and bridges are brought back up to an acceptable level. The DOT's top priority must be the unmet transportation needs of the state of Maine.



Wednesday, January 22, 2020 20:24

Democrat Kevin O'Connell nominated for vacant House District 128 seat

Written by **Newsroom**



BREWER – The Democratic Party has decided who it wants to represent the Brewer area in the Maine House of Representatives.

Representative Arthur “Archie” Verow [died on Dec. 28](#), leaving his District 128 seat vacant.

Democrats held a caucus Wednesday night, choosing former Brewer city councilor and former mayor Kevin O'Connell as their nominee.

O'Connell was born and raised in Brewer and said he knows what's best for local residents.

“I know things don't happen quickly but I just want to move forward,” O'Connell said. “I don't care what pace it is, I just want to keep moving forward ... I want to do my best to help Augusta do that for the citizens of the city of Brewer.”

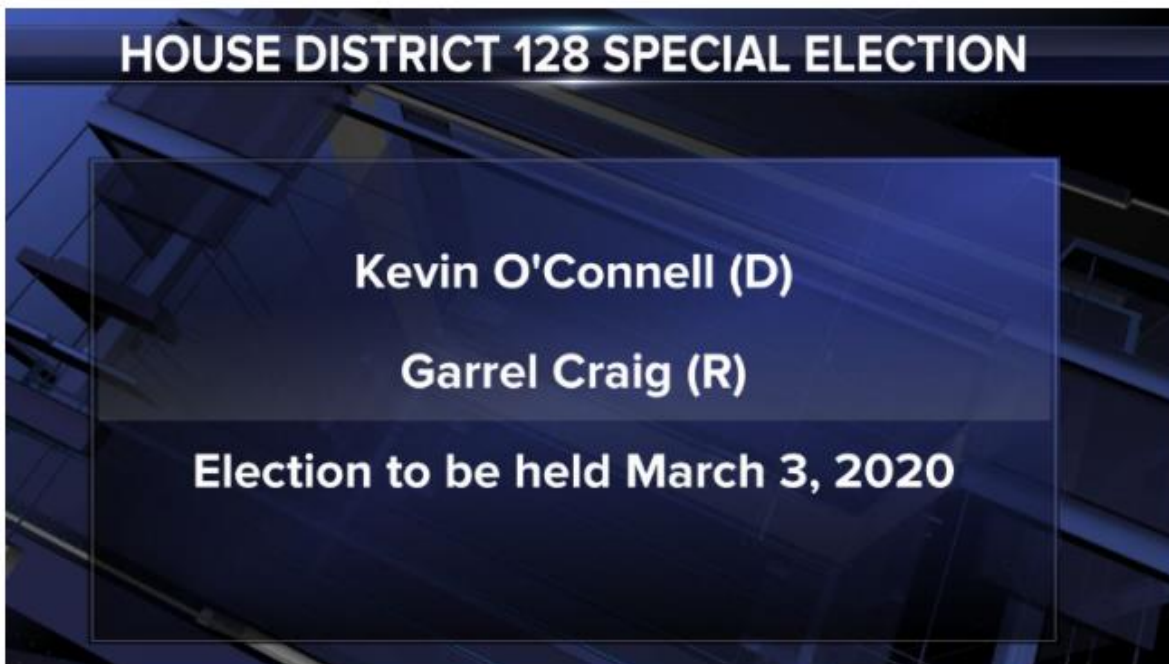
The names of each party's nominee, as well as nominating petitions for unenrolled candidates, are due to the Secretary of State's office by 5 p.m. Thursday.

The special election to fill the seat will be held Tuesday, March 3.

[Click here to view online.](#)

[Home](#) / [Local](#) / [Article](#)

Candidates nominated to fill vacant seat from Brewer House of Representatives



By News Desk | Posted: Sat 12:05 AM, Jan 25, 2020



BREWER, Maine (WABI) - Candidates have been nominated to fill a vacant seat from Brewer in the House of Representatives.

The House District 128 seat became open after the death of Archie Verow.

Penobscot County Democrats have chosen Kevin O'Connell as their candidate for the March 3rd special election.

Republicans have selected Garrel Craig as their candidate.



"One angry man
with a laptop"

Welcome to year 2020 in the 20th year of the I-395/Route 9 Connector study/project/boondoggle.

- Amidst the failure of the blue-ribbon commission to reach consensus,
- and the 46% increase in costs from a March 2019 estimate that bloated the annual road and bridge maintenance shortfall to \$232 million by Oct. 2019,
- and the subsequent 142 road and bridge projects that had to be cancelled due to said \$232 million shortfall,
- and the unforeseen 60% construction cost increase of the Gorham connector, in just two years, to \$237 million,
- at the same time that Maine's bridges and roads are rated 7th and 9th worst in the entire nation,
- at the same time that 22% of our rural roads are in poor condition and 14% of our bridges are rated structurally deficient,
- and the \$20.75 million cost increase in the I-395/Route 9 connector's construction cost from \$79.25 million to \$100 million in just 26 months – a 26.18% increase in cost,
- MaineDOT has nevertheless decided to go ahead with the \$13.5 million Wilson Street bridge replacement this year to advance the I-395/Route 9 connector boondoggle...

What's wrong with you MAINE—we have no money!!

Multi-state pact could curb transportation carbon emissions



Bill Sikes | AP In this Aug. 12, 2016, file photo, traffic crawls eastbound on Interstate 84 in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, after an overnight accident involving two tractor-trailers on the Massachusetts Turnpike. An alliance of Northeast and mid-Atlantic states are working on a pact aimed at lowering carbon emissions from cars, trucks and other means of transportation.

Steve LeBlanc, The Associated Press • December 19, 2019 7:53 am

[Click here to view online.](#)

BOSTON — Carbon emissions from cars, trucks and other means of transportation would drop while gas prices would jump under a multi-state draft climate proposal released Tuesday.

The proposal — known as the Transportation and Climate Initiative — is aimed at reducing pollutants contributing to global warming. An alliance of Northeast and mid-Atlantic states have been working on the project that would create a cap on pollution from transportation.

Under the agreement, wholesale fuel companies would be required to purchase pollution allowances at auction. The sale of those allowances could generate billions for states to invest in carbon-reducing transportation options — like electric buses, electric car charging stations, bike lanes and sidewalks.

If fuel companies pass the cost of the allowances onto consumers, the price of gas in the region could climb by five cents to 17 cents per gallon in 2022, when the pact would take effect.

The states say they hope the change would also put pressure on fuel companies to come up with alternatives to carbon-polluting fuels.

The pact would cover all of New England, except New Hampshire, and would stretch south into mid-Atlantic states — a geographic area that has tens of millions of registered vehicles.

The states include Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia. The group also includes the District of Columbia.

The transportation sector accounts for more than 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the region, officials said.

Under the proposal, transportation emissions are projected to decline by up to 25 percent from 2022 to 2032.

New Hampshire had been a part of the deal, but Republican Gov. Chris Sununu said his state was pulling out just hours after the draft agreement was unveiled.

“I will not force Granite Staters to pay more for their gas just to subsidize other state’s crumbling infrastructure,” Sununu said in a written statement. “This program is a financial boondoggle.”

Supporters say the pact would be a major step toward reducing transportation pollution — while also generating money to help pave the way to a renewable energy future.

One of those supporters is Massachusetts Republican Gov. Charlie Baker.

“You can use those resources to do a variety of things, but some of the things I think you’ll see states use it for are charging stations, more money in public transportation, more investments in things that would encourage the development of electric vehicles,” Baker said.

The pact would help Massachusetts reach goals set out in a 2008 law that requires the state to reduce its carbon emissions by at least 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Critics of the initiative say it will be bad for the economy and for families that rely on their cars to get to work and school.

Christopher Carlozzi, the Massachusetts state director for the National Federation of Independent Business, called the plan a hidden gas tax increase that will increase operating costs for small businesses, resulting in higher prices for Massachusetts consumers.

He said that's particularly true for businesses where telecommuting isn't an option.

"Most small businesses require their workforce to be on-site," he said. "Retail stores, restaurants, construction sites, and manufacturers cannot operate without their staff at the place of business."

Supporters say there are other benefits. They estimate the agreement could result in fewer cases of asthma, premature deaths and traffic-related injuries. They also said the shift away from polluting fuels could save hundreds of millions by avoiding the worst impacts of climate change.

Massachusetts Environmental Secretary Kathleen Theoharides said the agreement will help encourage fuel companies to ramp up their investment in cleaner transportation systems.

"It sends a clear signal to the market that there is going to be a price on carbon," Theoharides said.

The deal would be modeled in part after the nine-state regional "cap-and-invest" system for power plant emissions known as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. That pact involved many of the same states including every New England state plus Delaware, Maryland and New York.

The proposal released Tuesday is a draft version of a final proposal that will be released in the spring, allowing time for the public to weigh in. At that point, each state will decide whether to formally sign the final agreement.

The effort comes as the Trump administration has battled California over that state's efforts to curb fossil fuel emissions.

The states involved in the Transportation and Climate Initiative pact have joined a lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over what they call that agency's illegal attempt to revoke California's authority to set its own greenhouse gas tailpipe emissions standards.

Why Maine needs the Transportation Climate Initiative



Bill Sikes | AP

FILE - In this Aug. 12, 2016, file photo, traffic crawls eastbound on Interstate 84 in Sturbridge, Mass., after an overnight accident involving two tractor-trailers on the Massachusetts Turnpike. An alliance of Northeast and mid-Atlantic states are working on a pact aimed at lowering carbon emissions from cars, trucks and other means of transportation. A draft version of the agreement, known as the Transportation and Climate Initiative, was released Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019. (AP Photo/Bill Sikes, File)

By Phelps Turner, Opinion guest column - January 26, 2020

[Click here to view online.](#)

As any Mainer knows, we have a transportation problem. And it unfortunately goes beyond limited access to public transit and **chronic underfunding** of our transportation infrastructure. The greenhouse gas emissions from cars, trucks and buses are the **largest contributor** to the climate crisis, and it's getting worse.

We need to clean up our transportation system if we want to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, but the federal government is shirking its responsibility to solve this problem. That's where the **Transportation Climate Initiative** comes in. Several mid-Atlantic and New England **states**, plus Washington, D.C., have come together to propose a solution to cut the dangerous emissions that are pouring out of the transportation sector.

TCI will require suppliers of gasoline and diesel fuel to pay for the pollution they create by purchasing permits, with the total amount that fuel suppliers are allowed to pollute decreasing each year. The money that results from the permit payments will go directly to states for investments in clean transportation options, like electric buses running expanded schedules,

electric shuttles and vanpools for commuting, safer bike lanes, and improved walking paths.

TCI is expected to generate initial annual proceeds of at least \$1.4 billion across New England and Mid-Atlantic states. If Maine were to [sign on](#), we could expect to see public health benefits and avoided climate impacts worth millions of dollars.

This is an innovative and bold way to confront the climate crisis, clean up our transportation system, and increase opportunities to work remotely through expanded broadband access. But we need to get the details right from the beginning.

Some of our neighbors have been disproportionately impacted by terrible air pollution and have lacked access to good, affordable transportation options for generations. TCI [presents an opportunity](#) to not only tackle climate change, but also correct some of these inequalities and longstanding public health issues while ensuring that such changes are affordable for low-income and rural residents.

Our state leaders must take advantage of this opportunity.

Beyond the obvious climate benefits, true transportation justice for everyone from Kittery to Presque Isle, Jackman to Eastport, must be the goal. Transportation justice results from policies that help urban, suburban, and rural low-income residents see much-needed transportation investments while improving climate and public health impacts.

Funds from TCI should be invested in transportation options that predominantly serve these residents. The funds should also go towards replacing dirty diesel school buses with clean electric versions that will protect both our climate and our children's health. TCI proceeds should be invested in high-speed internet in rural communities to reduce the transportation needs of our residents or expand resilient infrastructure between major corridors and rural village centers. By investing in clean transportation, we will address climate change, improve air quality, make it easier and safer for residents to travel, and spur economic development.

As one of the most rural states in the country, Maine has some unique transportation and mobility challenges. We deserve affordable, reliable

solutions that get us to work, to stores and appointments, and to our favorite outdoor places while reducing dangerous air pollution.

In December, the states participating in TCI released [a draft](#) of the plan for just how they will get this done. The [public comment](#) period is now open, and we need to urge our leaders to think big about how to solve this crisis while ensuring that no one gets left behind, especially those that suffer through dirty air pollution while receiving no benefit and lacking safe transportation options.

At a time when the federal government is utterly failing to protect us from the impacts of climate change, we need state-level policies like TCI more than ever. If it's done right, we will all see the benefits. Now isn't the time for half-measures that only make a dent in the problem. Let's get to work creating a clean transportation system for the future that benefits all Mainers.

Phelps Turner is a senior attorney at Conservation Law Foundation in Portland.

Governor Janet Mills not abandoning regional gas tax despite 86% public opposition in stakeholder feedback

by Maine Examiner 01/18/2020 | Posted in Blaine House, Maine News, News, State House



Governor Janet Mills
speaks at a press conference
flanked by Senate President
Troy Jackson, House
Speaker Sara Gideon, DHHS
Commissioner Jeanne
Lambrew and Rep. Denise
Tepler

[Click here to view online.](#)

AUGUSTA – In the month since the architects of the Transportation and Climate Initiative rolled out their draft MOU and estimates that the agreement would add a 17-cent per gallon tax on a gallon of gasoline, comments from Maine people have rolled in. Those comments, accepted through the TCI online stakeholder input form, are overwhelmingly opposed to Maine joining the agreement.

A review of more than 800 official public comments on the TCI website since December 17th shows that more than 86% of the comments from Maine are in opposition to Governor Janet Mills entering Maine into the agreement. About 10% of comments are in support and a little over 3% are neutral.

The Transportation and Climate Initiative began as a compact of twelve states and Washington D.C. that would craft an agreement to, ostensibly, reduce carbon emissions from transportation on the east coast of the United States. The draft framework TCI released in December showed that the coalition proposed doing that with a tax on fossil fuels that would roughly equate to a 17-cent per gallon tax on gasoline in the initial implementation. It would rise from there as the TCI ratchets up pressure to further choke off emissions.

The coalition would then distribute the funds for “green” transportation projects, likely in areas with dense population centers.

For Mainers, that looks a lot like rural Mainers getting hit with a big tax increase to provide funding for more urban southern Maine – something that benefits rural Maine very little.

Since the framework that put the 17-cent per gallon increase in black and white was released, the Governor’s of Connecticut and New Hampshire have said they would withdraw from the TCI compact. Vermont’s Governor Phil Scott has also signaled he is not in favor.

Governor Janet Mills previously called opponents of the gas tax “trolls” when asked about people posting their opposition online by Maine Public. In a recent interview on WGAN, Governor Mills said she had talked to Governor Charlie Baker a couple times and that he is “very gung-ho” and a big proponent of TCI.

However, Mills said she was going to monitor it because she’s “not clear how it would pan out.” Mills also signaled she was not sure of the process the TCI had laid out and that she was not in favor of a framework that passed the tax along from the source of the gasoline to end-consumers. It’s unclear how that could be changed.

Governor Mills then transitioned to the state’s “Blue Ribbon Commission” on transportation funding. That commission, as Maine Examiner has reported, is looking at several different ideas that could lead to higher costs for Maine drivers, including expanding toll booths across Maine, raising the state gas tax or both, as one member of the commission has said.

Mills said she hopes the commission will “put their nose to the grindstone to come up with some long term planning” for transportation funding.

When asked a follow up question by host Matthew Gagnon about whether the state would be required to pass legislation entering into the TCI, Governor Mills said it was too early to say.

Raising the gas tax or borrowing money to repair Maine’s roads and bridges has been a point of debate in recent months. After Governor Mills’ first two-year state budget raised spending by more than 10% without providing any additional funding for transportation needs, the push has been on from the political left in Augusta to raise the gas tax or incur heavy borrowing for transportation.

Republicans have argued that transportation should be prioritized in the state budget. They point to existing money from transportation related sales tax as a simple solution to provide adequate funding for Maine roads, and are critical of Democrats for not

prioritizing transportation funding, then pivoting to taxes or borrowing to make up the difference.

Some of the comments from Mainers show strong opposition.

“I do not support this new gas tax. It will in no way make a difference in the carbon footprint. All it will do is hurt the middle-class working people of the State of Maine. All it will do is drive the prices of other goods up higher than they already are. Maine is in the top 10 in the nation of states with the highest taxes. Is Janet shooting to be number 1???” said David Cahoon of Wells, Maine.

Janet Mitchell of Dedham expressed concern that the TCI will hurt lower-income Mainers the most, “I do not support participation in TCI. Maine is a rural state and has many lower income earners that can not afford an increase to the cost of transportation. The proposed gas taxes or fees would not benefit those in rural Maine and would cause a hardship for minimal gain. I am 100% against TCI and feel Maine needs to focus on our budget and our people.”

But others, such as Steve Robey of Vinalhaven expressed support while criticizing the federal government, “I really believe we need to reduce pollution from transportation. I request that maine formally join the plan to reduce emissions. Please ensure that the policy includes strong component of equity by prioritizing clean investments in areas overburdened by pollution and/or for those who don’t have access. I appreciate the bipartisan nature of this project, moving us forward while the federal government takes us backward.”

The Transportation and Climate Initiative will continue accepting public comments through February 28th, 2020. They expect to produce a final Memorandum of Understanding in the spring of 2020. You can submit public comment at the link below:

<https://www.transportationandclimate.org/main-menu/tci-regional-policy-design-stakeholder-input-form>

Northeast governors slow to embrace regional climate pact



Bill Sikes | AP

In this Aug. 12, 2016, file photo, traffic crawls eastbound on Interstate 84 in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, after an overnight accident involving two tractor-trailers on the Massachusetts Turnpike. An alliance of Northeast and mid-Atlantic states are working on a pact aimed at lowering carbon emissions from cars, trucks and other means of transportation. A draft version of the agreement, known as the Transportation and Climate Initiative, was released last month

Michael Casey, The Associated Press • January 27, 2020

[Click here to view online.](#)

CONCORD, New Hampshire — Supporters of a regional pact that would tackle transportation emissions are struggling to win over several New England governors concerned that the climate change initiative will increase gas prices.

After the Transportation and Climate Initiative was announced last month, New Hampshire's Republican Gov. Chris Sununu said the state won't join, citing fears of a gas price hike. Vermont's Republican Gov. Phil Scott said he couldn't support the initiative if it amounts to a tax on carbon. A spokesman for Maine's Democratic Gov. Janet Mills said the state has yet to sign a draft memorandum of understanding for the initiative, citing the unique challenges of addressing transportation in a rural state.

The initiative is aimed at a dozen Northeast and mid-Atlantic states and would take effect in 2022. It would address pollution from transportation — which represents 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the region, the largest source of emissions. The area has tens of millions of registered vehicles.

New Jersey has not committed to implementing the initiative, while a spokesman for Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont of Connecticut said his administration was still examining it. Virginia is also reviewing the draft memorandum.

"I am happy to see that other Governors are following my lead in rightfully sounding the alarm on this new gas tax," Sununu said in a statement. "New

Hampshire is proof that the best environmental stewardship can be achieved without massive tax schemes.”

Many of the states are already part of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which covers 10 states in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic and targets emissions from the power sector.

Under the agreement, wholesale fuel companies would be required to purchase pollution allowances at auction. The sale of those allowances could generate billions for states to invest in carbon-reducing transportation options — like electric buses, electric car charging stations, bike lanes and sidewalks.

The initiative could lead to emissions reductions in the region by as much as 25 percent by 2032. But the opposition appears to be around a potential gas price hike. If fuel companies pass the cost of the allowances onto consumers, the price of gas in the region could climb by five cents to 17 cents per gallon in 2022, when the pact would take effect.

Among the pact’s opponents is Americans for Prosperity, the advocacy group founded by the billionaire Koch brothers. The group’s New Hampshire chapter came out against the initiative the same day as Sununu, calling the initiative a top-down government mandate that would “punish hardworking Granite Staters.”

Supporters of the initiative said the fears over gas prices are overblown and ignore its potential benefits.

“Personally I think this is political grandstanding,” said Timmons Roberts, a professor of environmental studies at Brown University. “This is the incremental change, it would be over 12 years. This is just using a well-meaning effort as a whipping boy.”

But Roberts and others acknowledge that the pact needs to address the concerns of low-income and working families who must drive long distances for work or school.

“Some people positively opt into this lifestyle, but many don’t. They live where they live because of family, lack of economic mobility, or other factors,” said Jason Veysey, the deputy director for the Stockholm Environment Institute’s energy modeling program.

“People who have to drive may be negatively affected by an increase in fuel prices,” he said. “However, it’s worth underlining that TCI is supposed to be a cap-

and-dividend program, in which higher costs for the most vulnerable are mitigated by the dividends.”

The pact has been praised by many of the region's business, health and environmental leaders, including Massachusetts Republican Gov. Charlie Baker. He touted the pact in [his State of the Commonwealth address last week](#) as part of his plan for the state to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Other governors also appear supportive.

J.J. Abbott, press secretary for Pennsylvania Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf, said the state was “committed to being a part of the TCI conversations,” but would make no decision on joining “until the program is fully designed.” Josh Block, a spokesman for Rhode Island’s Democratic Gov. Gina Raimondo, said she is “fully committed to the goals of the Transportation Climate Initiative,” but that the specific statutory and regulatory changes needed to meet those goals “will be the source of public discussion and input over the coming year.”

Jordan Stutt, the carbon programs director of the Acadia Center, an environmental research and advocacy nonprofit, said states understand the need to address transport emissions. The initiative could also help improve air quality, boost economies and improve transport, especially in rural areas, he said.

According to information on the initiative’s website, modeling has shown public health benefits of as much as \$10 billion annually by 2032, including more than 1,000 fewer premature deaths. It would also generate up to \$7 billion annually that could be invested into expanding transport choices for rural, urban and suburban communities.

“Without any viable alternative to this program, the states will not be able to achieve their climate goals,” Stutt said.

Associated Press writers David Sharp, Wilson Ring, Michael Catalini, Mark Scoloro and Susan Haigh contributed to this report.



News Release for January 21, 2020

For more Information:

Paul Merrill, Public Information Officer - 207-624-3355 or 207-215-9297

AUGUSTA - MaineDOT Commissioner Bruce Van Note issued the following statement in response to Governor Mills's State of the State Address:

"On behalf of the all Maine travelers and the hardworking men and women of the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), I applaud Governor Mills for her support of transportation and the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission to Recommend Transportation Funding Solutions. The Governor, the Commission, and all policymakers understand that transportation is fundamental to our safety, economic prosperity, and quality of life and that we need to come together to find nonpartisan solutions to our chronic underfunding challenge. Finding adequate and sustainable funding for transportation will take multiple strategies, and the Governor's openness to using General Fund dollars will help move the conversation forward.

"It is a conversation that needs to happen. Not only do we need to maintain the system we have, but we also need to improve the system. We need to make targeted capacity improvements, reduce the impact of transportation on climate, improve downtowns and villages, increase municipal support, and gradually reduce our dependence upon bonding and extraordinary federal funding to meet basic needs. We thank the Governor for her leadership and look forward to getting this done."

Background: Last year, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill to create a Blue Ribbon Commission To Study and Recommend Funding Solutions for the State's Transportation Systems. The Commission has estimated the annual unmet funding need at MaineDOT is \$232 million. Commission members have asked to continue working this year with the goal of identifying a nonpartisan and sustainable solution to MaineDOT's chronic funding problem.

###

MaineDOT News Releases

Following are the latest news releases issued by The Maine Department of Transportation.

2/3/2020: [Commissioner Van Note Reacts to Governor Mills's Supplemental Budget Proposal](#)



News Release for February 3, 2020

For more Information:

Paul Merrill, Public Information Officer - 207-624-3355 or 207-215-9297

AUGUSTA - MaineDOT Commissioner Bruce Van Note issued the following statement in response to Governor Mills's supplemental budget proposal:

"On behalf of all Maine travelers, I want to thank Governor Mills for her willingness to commit \$10 million in General Fund money to help repair our state's aging infrastructure. Transportation is a fundamental part of our lives, and funding it adequately will preserve public safety, support economic vitality, and reduce its impact on our environment. We look forward to working with the Blue Ribbon Commission and others as we continue to move towards nonpartisan and sustainable solutions to our chronic underfunding of transportation in Maine."

Background: Last year, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill to create a Blue Ribbon Commission To Study and Recommend Funding Solutions for the State's Transportation Systems. The Commission has estimated the annual unmet funding need at MaineDOT is \$232 million. Commission members are continuing to work this year with the goal of identifying a nonpartisan and sustainable solution to MaineDOT's chronic funding problem.

###

POLITICS

Republicans fault Mills plan for lack of Maine transportation funding

A group of Republican lawmakers said they will present a plan next week to funnel as much as \$200 million a year from the state's general fund to the Department of Transportation for highway and bridge construction and repair.

BY [SCOTT THISTLE](#) STAFF WRITER | 2.06.2020

[Click here to view article online.](#)

AUGUSTA — Republican lawmakers criticized Gov. Janet Mills on Thursday for not dedicating more funding to transportation in her supplemental budget proposal.

They said they will announce their own transportation funding plan next week, including a proposal to channel as much as \$200 million a year from the state's general fund budget toward state highway and bridge construction and repair.

A big chunk of the funding under the Republican plan would be the redirection of about \$160 million a year in sales taxes collected on new and used vehicle sales. The money now goes to the state's general fund but would be allocated specifically to the state's highway fund.

The \$126.7 million supplemental budget proposal unveiled by Mills, a Democrat, channels \$10 million to the Maine Department of Transportation's highway fund. She noted that the cost of getting the state's roads back in good shape is closer to \$300 million a year.

Her budget proposal, which depends largely on surplus tax revenue, also recommends borrowing \$100 million for transportation with a bond issue

that would need two-thirds support of the Legislature and statewide voter approval. That would add to the state's overall debt.

"I was very disappointed when I saw the supplemental budget, out of \$126 million — only \$10 million for roads?" Sen. Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock, said. Farrin said that figure came from the Mills' administration less than a year after DOT officials expressed concern that road repair and construction projects that were already planned were costing far more than anticipated.

Farrin is a member of a special bipartisan [Blue Ribbon Commission](#) to Study and Recommend Funding Solutions for the State's Transportation System that was created last summer. He said the commission has considered all funding options, including an increase to the state's 30-cents-per-gallon gas tax. That idea has been anathema to conservative lawmakers in his own caucus and to some Democrats as well.

Lawmakers also expressed concern that Mills made her proposal on highway funding before the commission had offered its final recommendations.

Farrin said he believes solving the problem of underfunded roads requires using more surplus revenue, a gas tax and directing more general fund money to DOT. "Kind of three legs of the stool," he said. "And the governor, in my opinion, has pulled out one of the legs of that stool."

Others on the commission, including Sen. Bill Diamond, D-Windham, said they understand the frustration of their colleagues, but they also note that Mills is the first governor in recent history to propose using any general fund money at all for highway construction. Diamond said he believed lawmakers would have the opportunity to possibly increase the \$10 million offered by Mills in her supplemental budget, calling the governor's proposal an "opening bid of sorts."

Maine's \$675 million annual highway budget is roughly \$232 million lower than it should be to meet the backlog of maintenance, repair and replacement projects, according to MDOT. That shortfall has persisted over

time, despite a recent practice of [offsetting it with a yearly \\$100 million bond package](#).

Assistant Senate Minority Leader Jeff Timberlake, R-Turner, said he believes the state has the revenue needed to fix and maintain its roads without going deeper into debt. Timberlake, a member of the Legislature's budget-writing Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, said **the state already spends between \$50 and \$54 million a year on debt service for bonding bills previously approved by voters.**

"If we take and restructure the budget, and take the sales tax from automobiles, we could basically stop the borrowing that we are doing for the roads every year," Timberlake said. "It's time we get our house in order and we cut back on the borrowing."

Lindsay Crete, the press secretary for Mills, said Thursday the governor had made clear her commitment to finding a viable funding solution for roads and bridges, including accepting the idea that some general fund revenues should be directed towards that effort.

Crete also noted former Republican Gov. Paul LePage, and a Legislature controlled by Republicans in 2011, voted to decouple the state's gas tax from the consumer price index. Analysts have estimated that shift costs the state's highway fund as much as \$5 million a year, or about \$40 million since it took effect in 2012.

"The Governor is serious about fixing the roads, and, as she said in her State of the State, partisan posturing won't get it done," Crete said in an email message to the Press Herald Thursday. "If Republicans want a sustainable funding solution, then they should stop holding press conferences and do the hard work of negotiating with their Democratic counterparts on the Blue Ribbon Commission. She looks forward to hearing their recommendations."

Maine Republicans target vehicle tax shift as transportation funding negotiations drag on



Troy R. Bennett | BDN

Rep. Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock, watches a vote tally in the Maine State House in Augusta on May 2, 2018. The senator sits on a blue-ribbon commission dedicated to fixing the state's annual transportation funding shortfall. He and other Republicans announced Thursday that they will ask the state to take money from vehicles sales and put it towards roads and bridges.

By [Caitlin Andrews](#), BDN Staff • February 6, 2020

[Click here to view online.](#)

AUGUSTA, Maine — Republicans in the Maine Legislature on Thursday revived the idea of diverting a large portion of vehicle sales tax revenue to roads and bridges in a move that could further complicate negotiations around solving a similarly sized transportation shortfall.

It came in response to Gov. Janet Mills' \$127 million supplemental budget proposal, which was released this week and [dedicated a one-time sum of \\$10 million](#) to the Maine Department of Transportation. Mills and fellow Democrats are unlikely to favor such a large transfer from the state budget to the separately funded transportation system.

It's an idea that Republicans floated under former Gov. Paul LePage in 2018, when the Legislature's fiscal office estimated that dedicating all vehicle sales tax revenue to transportation would amount to [a \\$230 million annual transfer](#). That equals about 6 percent of the state's annual budget.

The department is facing a \$232 million annual shortfall in maintaining Maine's road and bridge system, assuming annual borrowing of \$100 million. The proposal from Republicans comes as a blue-ribbon commission [aims to](#)

[negotiate a consensus solution](#) to fill the gap. It has considered increasing the gas tax, using state budget or surplus revenue and increasing other fees.

Sen. Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock, who sits on the commission, said Mills undercut his party by not allocating more surplus money to transportation, saying Republicans have been willing to broach the topic of a gas tax increase only if [state budget money comes with it](#).

“It would go a long way toward solving the problem,” he said of the proposed shift.

For perspective, Mills’ proposed transfer of \$10 million could pay for most of the replacement of the [Detective Benjamin Campbell Bridge in Millinocket](#), improvements to the [Falls Bridge](#) in Blue Hill, or build a new ferry from Portland to Peaks Island.

Republicans and Democrats on the commission studying the transportation shortfall have agreed the state should decrease its reliance on bonding for transportation. However, the minority party felt Mills made a bigger promise when she urged lawmakers to find a creative solution and “fix the damn roads” during her [State of the State address](#).

While Mills said during her address that she was open to shifting some state budget money to roads and bridges, moving all or a large portion of the vehicle sales tax revenue out of the general fund is unlikely to succeed in the Democratic-led Legislature.

On Thursday, Mills spokesperson Lindsay Crete said if Republicans want a fix, “they should stop holding press conferences and do the hard work of negotiating with their Democratic counterparts” on the blue-ribbon commission.

“I think \$230 million is a massive amount of money,” said Rep. Drew Gattine, D-Westbrook, the co-chair of the Legislature’s budget committee. “Certainly if their proposal is to divert \$230 million, my first question is: What are you going to cut in order to find that money?”

The gas tax is the dominant source of funding in Maine’s highway budget, making up more than two-thirds of the state money that goes toward roads

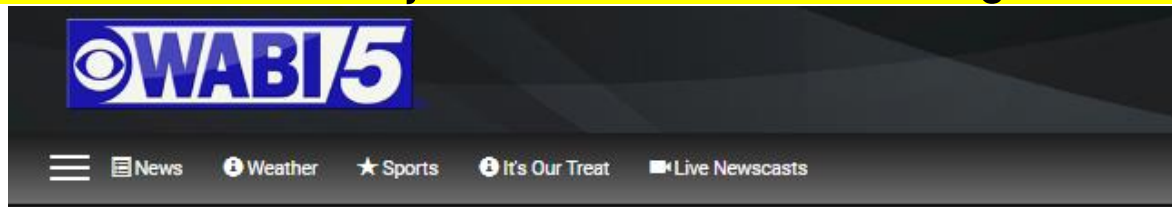
and bridges. The shortfall has been exacerbated as construction costs have continued to rise. [The state canceled \\$45 million](#) in projects last year after receiving higher than expected bids and included 142 fewer projects in the [three-year funding plan](#) released last month.

Farrin said that details of Republicans' proposal, such as how much of the revenue to divert, will have to be worked out at a commission meeting next week. He said smaller suggestions, such as upping the sales tax on electric vehicles and other vehicle-related purchases or charging more for registrations aren't off the table yet for his party.

Maclean, said, "...so my question for Republicans is what do you want to cut in order to fix our roads and bridges?"

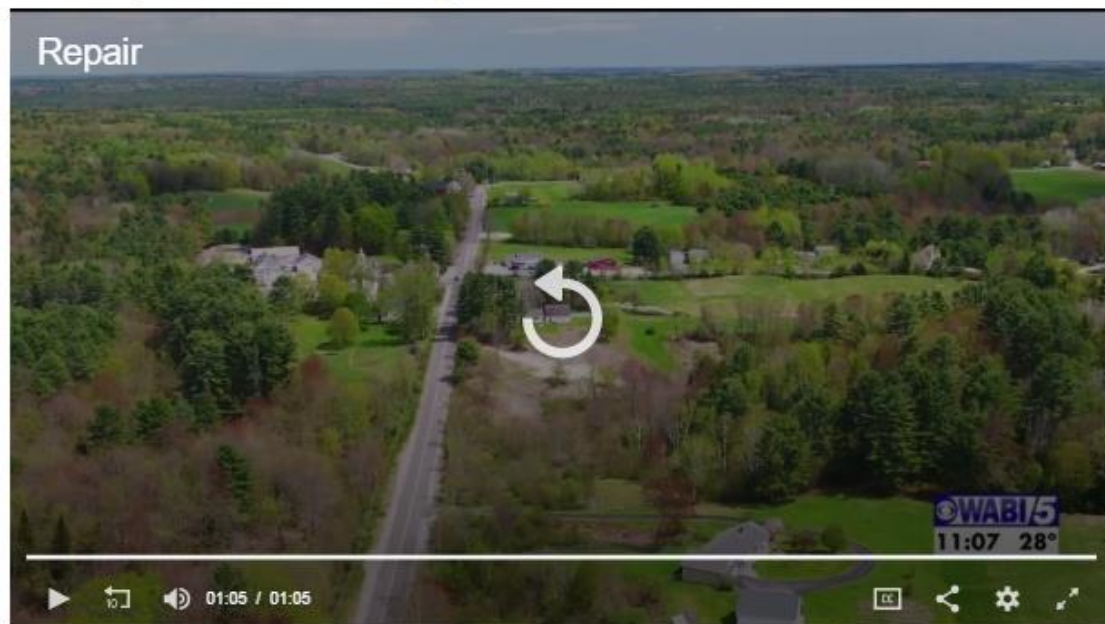
[Click here to view video and article online.](#)

I know where they can find \$100 million right now!!



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Republican state lawmakers reject Governor Mills' Transportation Budget



By WMTW | Posted: Thu 10:40 PM, Feb 06, 2020 | Updated: Thu 11:54 PM, Feb 06, 2020



AUGUSTA, Maine (WMTW) - Republican state lawmakers rejected Governor Mills' Transportation Budget.

She wants to spend 10 million dollars from general funds to fix roads and bridges plus 100-million dollars in a new bond.

The GOP is opposed to new borrowing.

They want to see what a Special Blue Ribbon Commission recommends -other than raising the gas tax or tolls.

Republicans are also skeptical about diverting sales taxes from car sales to the DOT.

Ferrin said, "Right now, that sales tax goes to the general fund. I think we're talking in the neighborhood of 160 to 200 million dollars a year, that if that went to the highway fund, we'd be a long way to solving the problem."

Maclean, said, "This \$10 million is a good faith effort to begin that conversation, so my question for Republicans is what do you want to cut an order fix our roads and bridges?"

The transportation money is part of the governor's overall plan to spend 126 million dollars in a revenue surplus this year and save 20 million dollars for the rainy day fund.



Gridlocked Maine panel could punt transportation funding fix to 2021 — or to voters



Michael Shepherd | BDN
Maine Transportation Commissioner
Bruce Van Note speaks at a news conference in Augusta on Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2020, alongside (from left to right) Madawaska Town Manager Gary Picard, Paul Kosiell, president of CPM Constructors, Inc. in Freeport and Dana Connors, the CEO of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce.

By [Caitlin Andrews](#), BDN Staff • February 11, 2020
[Click here to view this article online.](#)

AUGUSTA, Maine — A commission looking to solve Maine’s persistent transportation funding shortfall broke down in a messy Tuesday hearing over budget transfers and a gas tax increase, with some frustrated members saying it should punt its work to 2021 — or to voters.

The Maine Legislature and Gov. Janet Mills formed the blue-ribbon commission that has been tasked with bridging the shortfall for road and bridge maintenance, which is [estimated at \\$232 million annually](#) even with [\\$100 million in annual, voter-approved borrowing](#) factored in.

Members of the bipartisan commission, which includes trucking and construction interests, have agreed on a goal of finding \$160 million more a year for the system that with the idea that federal dollars would make up the rest. They have not firmly agreed on much else.

It has looked likely that any proposed solution would include transfers from the state budget along with an increase in the gas tax, the dominant funding source for Maine’s highway budget. In recent years, [Democrats have favored a gas-tax hike](#) while Republicans generally want to transfer money from the state budget to the separate transportation fund.

That seems to have broken down after last week. [Republicans are frustrated the Democratic governor put only \\$10 million in a spending proposal released last](#)

month that they felt hamstrung their ability to negotiate for more of the state's \$116 million surplus.

Sen. Matthew Pouliot, R-Augusta, said he's not interested in a gas tax increase now and supported taking \$160 million from vehicle sales tax revenue, though a straw poll of the commission showed he was the only one on it who wouldn't support a gas tax increase.

At the same time, Sen. Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock, and Rep. Tom Martin, R-Greene, said they would support a solution including an increase. Farrin said Republican opposition to that "concerned" him and noted it would partially affect seasonal visitors.

Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note said he wished Mills "hadn't put in anything" her spending plan for transportation because the \$10 million "couldn't be conflated" by Republicans. He said the money should be seen as buy-in from Mills for future spending, not an end number.

At one point, Sen. Bill Diamond, D-Windham, the commission's co-chair, suggested punting a solution to next year after the 2020 election. The breakdown frustrated industry members of the commission. Paul Koziell, the president of Freeport-based CPM Constructors Inc., said a solution would never come if it didn't happen this year.

"There's no excuse for this commission to come up with a bipartisan solution; there just isn't," Koziell said.

Other members are staying the course on a mixed solution but differ on timelines. Members seemed to identify a 9-cent increase in the gas tax — which would generate roughly \$ 67.5 million a year once in place — as a target.

The same goes for how much state budget money would be transferred. Diamond suggested \$60 million over three years, while his House counterpart, Rep. Andrew McLean, D-Gorham, suggested ramping to \$75 million over three years. Some included other, smaller measures including special fees for electric vehicles and tax rebates for low-income Mainers.

It looks unlikely that the commission will have a consensus solution for the Legislature to consider in 2020. They are expected to meet once more to discuss the issue in March, but Peter Mills, the executive director of the Maine Turnpike Authority and the governor's brother, suggested putting a solution to voters in November if the commission cannot agree.

"Admit the Legislature is dysfunctional on this topic and get it out of here," he said.

Transportation panel could punt funding fix to 2021 — or to voters

BY CAITLIN ANDREWS
BDN STAFF

AUGUSTA — A commission looking to solve Maine's persistent transportation funding shortfall broke down in a messy Tuesday hearing over budget transfers and a gas tax increase, with some frustrated members saying it should punt its work to 2021 — or to voters.

The Maine Legislature and Gov. Janet Mills formed the blue-ribbon commission that has been tasked with bridging the shortfall for road and bridge maintenance, which is estimated at \$232 million annually even with \$100 million in annual, voter-approved borrowing factored in.

Members of the bipartisan commission, which includes trucking and construction interests, have agreed on a goal of finding \$160 million more a year for the system that with the idea that federal dollars would make up the rest. They have not firmly agreed on much else.

It has looked likely that any proposed solution would include transfers from the state budget along with an increase in the gas tax, the dominant funding source for Maine's highway budget. In recent years, Democrats have favored a gas-tax hike while Republicans generally want to transfer money from the state budget to the separate transportation fund.



BDN FILE

Work continues on the replacement of the Union Street bridge over Interstate 95 in Bangor in March 2016.

That seems to have broken down after last week. Republicans are frustrated the Democratic governor put only \$10 million in a spending proposal released last month that they felt hamstrung their ability to negotiate for more of the state's \$116 million surplus.

Sen. Matthew Pouliot, R-Augusta, said he's not interested in

a gas tax increase now and supported taking \$160 million from vehicle sales tax revenue, though a straw poll of the commission showed he was the only one on it who wouldn't support a gas tax increase.

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See Funding, Page A8

Funding

Continued from Page A1

they would support a solution including an increase. Farrin said Republican opposition to that "concerned" him and noted it would partially affect seasonal visitors.

A frustrated Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note said he wished Mills "hadn't put in anything" for transportation because then the \$10 million in her spending plan "couldn't be conflated" by Republicans. He said it should be seen as buy-in from Mills on future spending, not a final figure.

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Bangor Daily News

Statewide edition

BDN bangordailynews.com

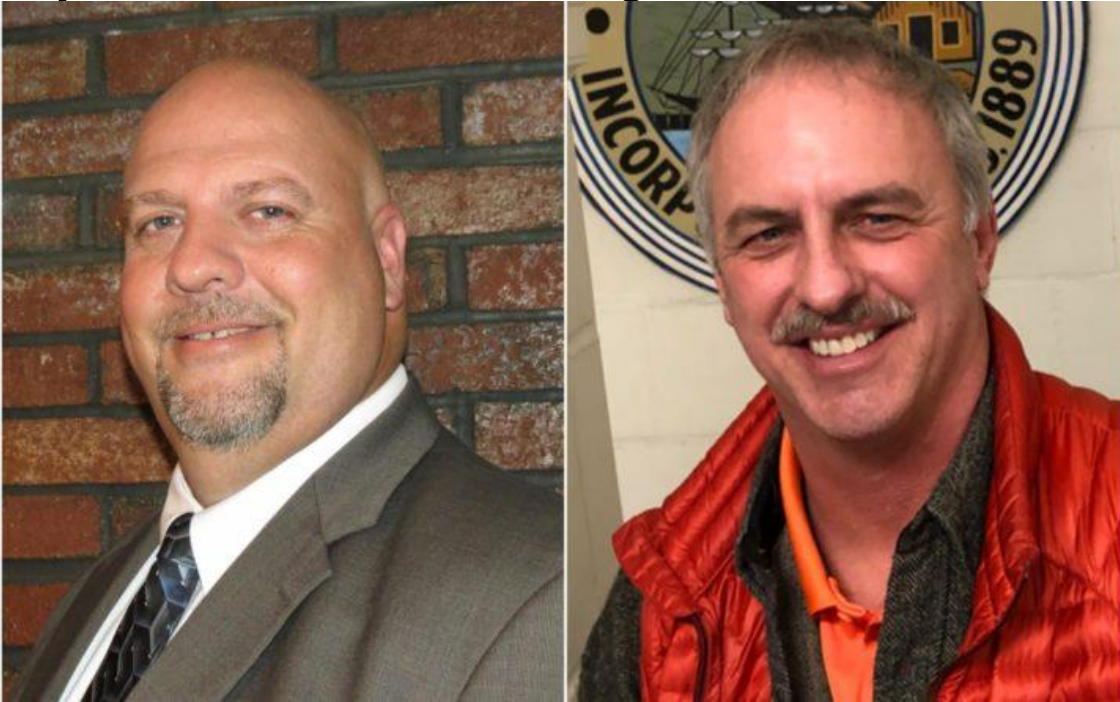
Thursday, February 13, 2020 \$1.25

The story always looks better in newsprint.

My take: The DOT continues to squander our limited transportation dollars on the \$100 million highly controversial I-395/Route 9 connector project that fails to meet the original study purpose and needs to the detriment of our existing roads and bridges. If you can't maintain existing roads, you certainly shouldn't be building a new one.

As I told one of the members of the blue-ribbon commission in an email, I believe the commission needs to start with a full investigation of how the MaineDOT spends our money and until they do that, nothing will change...

A former legislator and former mayor compete to represent Brewer in Augusta



Composite image | BDN

Republican Garrel Craig, left, and Democrat Kevin O'Connell

By [Eesha Pendharkar](#), BDN Staff • February 14, 2020 1:00 am

A former state legislator and former mayor, both longtime Brewer residents, are running against each other in a [special election](#) next month to represent part of Brewer in the Maine House.

Republican Garrel Craig and Democrat Kevin O'Connell will compete in the March 3 special election to fill the House seat last held by Rep. Archie Verow, which has been vacant [since Verow's death in December](#). Craig is looking to return to the Legislature, having held the House seat from 2016 to 2018. O'Connell is a former Brewer mayor looking to represent the city in Augusta.

Party members chose O'Connell and Craig as their candidates during caucuses in January. The winner will serve the remainder of Verow's term, which ends in December.

The special election takes place the same day as Maine's presidential primary and a statewide referendum asking voters if they want to repeal a new state law eliminating religious and philosophical exemptions from school vaccination requirements.

Garrel Craig: Craig said he is looking to return to the Legislature to continue addressing budget and spending issues that he focused on in his first term.

"We need to get a better handle on our spending," he said. "I think we should spend what we have and do less bond work."

Craig said he would like to resume his work on the Legislature's Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee to focus on reducing health care costs, nursing homes and what he said was an overloaded state Department of Health and Human Services.

If elected, Craig said, he would not support any new taxes.

The Brewer native worked for Bangor Savings Bank and now works as a sales specialist for a home improvement store.

Kevin O'Connell: O'Connell has served Brewer for 30 years in several capacities, including two terms as mayor, in 2013 and 2017. He's been a city councilor, a school board member, and served on a number of other boards and committees.

He's now looking to represent the city in Augusta.

"It's something I've always wanted to do," he said. "I didn't want to do it if Archie was doing it. I was going to wait until he was done."

O'Connell has worked as a lineman for Emera Maine for more than 30 years. He also served in the Maine Army National Guard for 24 years, which included time in Iraq.

If elected, he said he wants to focus on transportation issues, especially the Maine Department of Transportation's planned [Interstate 395 extension project that has been the subject of debate in Brewer](#). The 6-mile I-395 connector would extend I-395 from the Brewer-Holden town line to Route 9 in Eddington. O'Connell said he would also like to focus on housing and "equal representation for everybody."

"I'm proud to try to carry on the legacy of service that was so important to our great friend Archie Verow," O'Connell said in a campaign email. "In him, we had a representative that represented the values of this city. I am committed to doing my best to be that person for Brewer."

[Click here to view online.](#)

Kevin has signed unanimous [resolutions of nonsupport](#) of the connector project at least three times since the start of 2012. Please consider voting for Kevin to see if he can talk some sense into the DOT; at a time when the DOT can't even afford basic road and bridge maintenance – they shouldn't be building a new \$100 million connector that the City of Brewer does not support.

Janet Mills paid to track where you drive, ride & walk – now her climate group can get the data

by Maine Examiner 12/13/2019 | 6:04 Posted in Blaine House, Maine News, News, State House

0

AUGUSTA – The latest chapter in Governor Janet Mills' crusade to impact global climate change via the tiny population and economy of the state of Maine began on your cell phone in April of 2019 and you probably didn't even know it.

Presentation slides and screen recordings from a recent meeting of the Transportation Working Group of Governor Janet Mills' Maine "Climate Council" show that the Mills administration has been tracking where you drive, walk, or ride a bike and the data will be eagerly provided to the individuals working in Mills' climate change group at the urging of Maine DOT.

During Janet Mills' campaign for Governor in 2018, a video was released and widely distributed showing Mills discussing what opponents labeled a "track and tax" approach to raising revenue from Maine drivers. As the idea went, the miles a Mainer drove would be logged in a tracking system, and Mainers would eventually pay a tax for the number of miles they drove on Maine roads.

This spring, the tracking component of a potential "track and tax" plan went into place, with the Mills administration quietly hiring a firm to track the movements of Maine's drivers.

Records from a November meeting of a working group of Mills' Maine Climate Council show Kara Aguilar, an Assistant Engineer from Maine DOT, telling members of the Climate Council that Maine DOT can tell them where vehicles begin their trips and their eventual destinations, how fast they drove, how long trips took and even provide data on their turning movements.

The data, according to Aguilar, can also infer the purpose of the trip. Speaking during a slide presentation that listed the capabilities and limitations of the state's system, Aguilar said she had not listed "all of the capabilities" of the system.

Instead, Aguilar indicated that she chose to list the capabilities currently being used by Maine DOT. Aguilar also said that the system can access demographic data on drivers.

Nate Kane, the director of GIS services for Maine DOT, assured the Climate Council that Maine DOT works very hard to keep data organized, telling the council members, “I can tell you, no shortage of data available to this group, and of course other groups as well, but especially in regards to transportation.

“There is data available from the Department of Transportation and beyond at this group’s beck and call whenever you want it,” Kane told the group.

“So, uh, as part of that,” continued Kane. “We wanted to try to make sure that you had a brief overview of some of these data that is available from the Maine Department of Transportation to try to uh, stimulate the group’s uh, kind of quest for data here, uh, whet your appetite for data.”

According to online documentation provided by the vendor that Maine has hired to do driver tracking and other information, the state can track drivers through apps and other methods. Among those methods are apps on smart phones that allow access to GPS data, which many drivers have not been aware they were providing, and standalone vehicle GPS units.

StreetLight Data, the San Francisco based firm hired by Maine DOT, goes further than most other companies in that they match their GPS data to additional data to provide additional layers of insight into the data they collect.

According to StreetLight’s own website, “StreetLight InSight® metrics include inferred income, race, education, and family status at the neighborhood level to enrich your perspective on travel patterns.” The firm says it anonymizes data to protect the privacy of individuals but some privacy watchdogs and civil liberties groups are critical of the practice, saying they doubt the data can truly be kept anonymous.

That could well be the case in Maine where some neighborhoods or regions contain a limited number of residences and don’t provide the kind of raw numbers that could cloak drivers in anonymity even if the firm tried.

In an article published on GovTech, Kade Crockford of the ACLU of Massachusetts said that in the United States, citizens have basically no “existing statutory or regulatory protections” from their location info being harvested.

Across the nation, chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union, the libertarian leaning CATO Institute and others have opposed such data collection because of the privacy risks. The ACLU has also opposed tracking by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency when the agency was revealed to be building a database of vehicle movements based on license plate photos.

There is a significant expense to all this tracking of Maine drivers as well.

Overall, according to Kennebec Journal reporter Peter McGuire, the StreetLight contract runs about \$370,000 per year with Maine DOT covering about \$125,000 of that cost and the Maine Turnpike Authority paying just over \$130,000. The city of Portland and the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System pay for the balance of the contract, which gives them access to detailed, street-by-street driver data.

When the program to track Maine drivers was originally announced, the official purpose was reportedly to help improve Maine DOT's transportation planning.

Because StreetLight is also tracking the movement of pedestrians and cyclists and now making the data available to Mills' Climate Council, (and not just for transportation planning purposes), access and use of the data of the private citizens of Maine appears to have crossed a rubicon of sorts.

The Climate Council has six "working groups" with additional sub-committees possible beneath them. That means this data, which the Maine DOT says they will make available, can be accessed by various bureaucrats looking at virtually every aspect of Maine life, from the economy and energy to natural lands, housing, science and technology.

While the Climate Council has no authority to change state law, they do have broad latitude to explore and propose ideas and reforms.

The tracking of Maine drivers could serve as a starting point for future plans to track and tax Maine drivers, which many feared in the 2018 campaign. Currently, a Blue Ribbon Commission on transportation is gridlocked on potential gas tax increases. Democrats believe an increase in the gas tax is needed to fund road and bridge repairs. Republicans respond by saying the state has the money, it just needs to be allocated to the highway budget instead of spent on other things.

They point to the fact that Governor Mills pushed for an 11% increase in state spending, virtually every penny the state had, without putting a dollar more into Maine's roads and bridges.

Compounding the threat to drive up costs for Maine drivers is that Governor Mills is also looking at entering into a regional gas tax agreement with other eastern states, which could add 13 to 20 cents per gallon. That additional revenue would be spent on "green" transportation projects, not road and bridge repairs.

Raising taxes on gasoline and other fossil fuels has long been thought by the political left as an effective strategy to reduce carbon emissions. Cutting down on carbon

emissions is the top objective of the Maine Climate Council's Transportation Working Group, according to the [published draft of the group's scope of work](#).

Because carbon emissions from transportation are the largest emissions source in the state due to Maine's rural character, the transportation group in Mills' climate council could be tasked with identifying the lion's share of the council's overall carbon emission cuts.

With a penchant for raising gas and oil taxes already well-documented in the current Maine Legislature and Governor Mills' apparent willingness to take significant action in pursuit of victories in climate change, the working group could propose a new tax or fee.

That means the data that hundreds of thousands of Mainers have been unwittingly transmitting to the Mills administration over the past eight months could be used to drive up the cost of driving in Maine, through a vehicle mileage tax (VMT) or different tax-per-mile scenario.

Among the members of the Maine Climate Council's Transportation Working Group are a handful of representatives from private Maine businesses, but they are vastly outnumbered on the thirty person panel by representatives from non-profits, including environmental activism groups, government officials and representatives from consulting firms.

Among those with seats on the Maine Climate Council's Transportation Working Group are: The Nature Conservancy; BlueGreen Alliance; Conservation Law Foundation; Greater Portland Council of Governments; Bowdoin College and Penquis C.A.P..

[Click here to view this article online.](#)

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2020:

[Kevin O'Connell for District 128](#)

Support O'Connell in District 128 special election

Kevin O'Connell is running in the [March 3 special election](#) for the Maine House of Representatives in Brewer. Kevin is a lifelong Brewer resident and extremely dedicated to the city of Brewer and all of its people.

He has recently served on the Brewer City Council, including two terms as mayor. He has also served on the school board, parks and recreation committee and others. He has been very active in the community as a youth sports coach and a member of several adult parks and recreation sports teams. He has worked as lineman for Bangor Hydro and Emera Maine for more than 30 years, and he is a 24-year veteran of the Maine Air National Guard — having served on several deployments, including one to Iraq in 2009.

O'Connell is a practical problem-solver who will listen to and work with anyone in support of the interests of the residents of Brewer, including continuing to improve the economy, making health care more affordable, supporting education and finding additional ways to reduce property tax burdens.

Most of all, he is a caring and dedicated husband, father, neighbor and friend. If you live in [District 128](#), please support O'Connell in the special election on March 3.

Ron Bilancia

Brewer

If lawmakers are questioning the [legality of a lease](#) for the CMP corridor (see below), why aren't these same legislators questioning the legality of the DOT constructing a connector thru [I-395 Protected Wetlands](#) as can be seen today, on the DOT's own maps on their own website (see below).

We were told back in 2012, when we first questioned the existence of these protected wetlands, that since the MaineDOT couldn't validate the existence of these wetlands when researching titles/deeds/land records, they didn't exist.

If the protected wetlands don't exist, why are they still shown on a map that the DOT is still using 8 years later?

These protected wetlands didn't "accidentally" end up on this map; someone went to great lengths to map them and just because it doesn't promote alternative 2B-2, it doesn't mean they don't exist. Note the last term of the DOT mapviewer URL below: & hide=Wetlands (in red text). What does that mean?

If the protected wetlands truly don't exist, where is the mitigation from the original I-395? I believe the map to be accurate. If not, show us the mitigation map from the original project!!

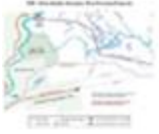
Should a possible administrative error in 1984, the failure to properly document the protected wetlands established and agreed to during the original I-395 project, cause the ruination of those same protected wetlands some 36 years later? If so, why bother establishing protected wetlands in the first place? Alternative 2B-2 should have never been considered, let alone become the preferred alternative, because of these protected wetlands. If these protected wetlands exist, the DOT is essentially going to environmentally mitigate a prior environmental mitigation and one has to wonder if that action is within National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance.

From: Larry Adams

Sent: Wednesday, February 19, 2020 1:48 PM

To: Larry Adams

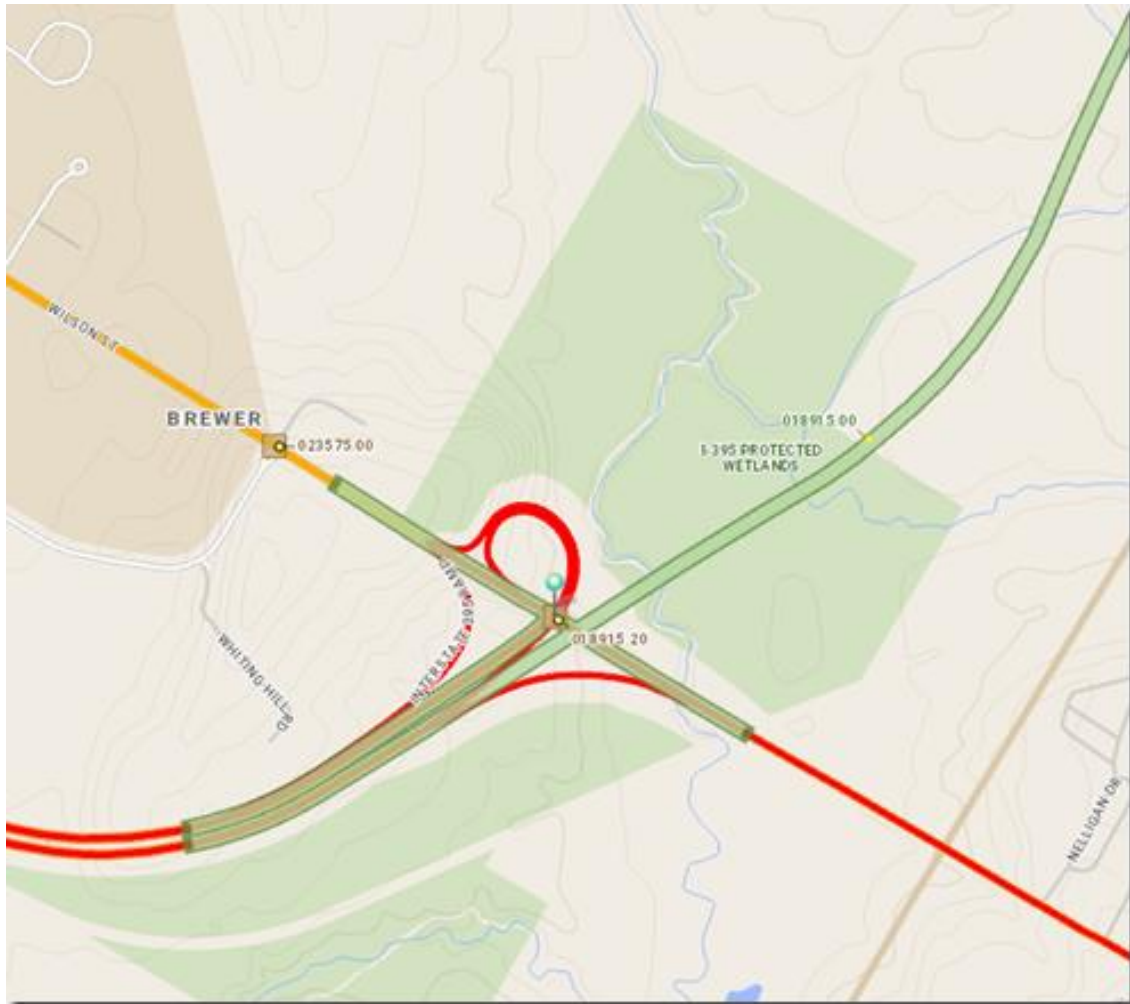
Subject: Maps that the DOT claimed were inaccurate in 2012 are still being used in 2020...



Lawmakers question legality of lease of state lands for CMP corridor

<https://bangordailynews.com/2020/02/19/politics/lawmakers-question-legality-of-lease-of-state-lands-for-cmp-corridor/>

<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/mapviewer/?show=Work%20Plan%202021-22%2cWork%20Plan%202020%2cHighway%20Corridor%20Priority&hide=Wetlands>



If the MaineDOT can't even correct a map that they said was incorrect in 2012, the engineering of said connector should also be suspect.

Firm did 'independent study' of electric line while working for energy giant that could make billions from it



Natalie Williams | BDN

A redacted copy of a report created by London Economics International for the Maine Public Utilities Commission to assess the economic impact of Central Maine Power's proposed hydropower transmission line for western Maine.

By [Josh Keefe](#), BDN Staff • February 20, 2020

[Click here to view online.](#)

In late 2017, Maine energy regulators hired an outside firm to analyze the economic impact of the 145-mile hydropower transmission line proposed for western Maine. But while that firm was conducting its study for Maine, it was simultaneously working for the Canadian energy company that stands to make billions from the line, according to a Bangor Daily News review of regulatory documents.

Maine regulators downplayed the appearance of a conflict of interest, while others said the firm's work for both sides should raise questions about what was billed as an independent report, especially since it has been used to justify the transmission line project proposed by Central Maine Power.

On Dec. 7, 2017, the Maine Public Utilities Commission hired Boston-based London Economics International to conduct an independent study of the potential economic benefits of the transmission line. It paid \$387,660 for the [report published the following May](#), according to the initial contract for the work.

But a month earlier, in April 2018, London Economics International [completed a separate study](#) for HQ Energy Services, the U.S. subsidiary of Hydro-Quebec. If the line

is completed, Hydro-Quebec stands to make \$12.4 billion selling energy to Massachusetts over the first two decades of operation, [according to a BDN analysis](#).

London Economics International disclosed it was working for HQ Energy Services when regulators hired the firm to analyze the line, according to Public Utilities Commission spokesperson Harry Lanphear. But regulators determined the simultaneous contracts did not create a conflict of interest, Lanphear said.

The firm's work for HQ Energy Services "was limited and unrelated to the proposed [transmission line] project," Lanphear said. Its study for HQ Energy Services examined carbon pricing issues in New York state. In addition, "the bulk" of its analysis was completed before it began analyzing the line proposed for Maine, he said.

London Economics International did not respond to requests for comment. Hydro-Quebec declined to comment or answer questions about how much it paid London Economics International for its work or when it hired the firm.

That work represented "a conflict of interest, plain and simple," said Sue Ely, a staff attorney with the Natural Resources Council of Maine, which opposes the proposed transmission line.

"The bottom line is that LEI should not have been working for Hydro-Quebec at the same exact time that it was evaluating a project that would allow the company to earn \$10 billion," Ely said. "This conflict should raise serious questions about the validity and impartiality of LEI's report on the CMP corridor, which has been cited widely as justification for the project."

The Public Utilities Commission [issued a permit for the transmission line in April](#). Earlier this month, opponents said they [had collected enough signatures](#) to put the project to voters in the form of a referendum question. The project still needs approval from federal agencies, as well as the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

The first mention in regulatory proceedings of London Economics International's concurrent work for both HQ Energy Services and Maine appears to be in May 2018, three days before the firm's report on the line was released and more than five months after the Public Utilities Commission hired the consulting firm.

"It is difficult to see how London Economics can provide appropriately independent and objective advice to the Commission," three energy companies argued in a regulatory filing. The companies, Calpine Corporation, Dynegy Inc. and Bucksport Generation, all had interests in Maine natural gas plants and stood to lose market share from a completed transmission line.

In the same filing, the energy companies pointed out another potential conflict: Before becoming Maine's independent consultant, London Economics International had been hired by energy giant EverSource to support a similar transmission line proposal in New Hampshire, which would have also allowed Hydro-Quebec to sell billions of dollars of energy to Massachusetts. New Hampshire regulators ultimately rejected the project.

The company was working in favor of that Northern Pass project "in an almost identical regulatory proceeding, and in the next case they were working for the decision-makers" in Maine, Calpine spokesman John Flumerfelt said this week.

The energy companies' objections failed to alter the proceedings. In their final analysis, Maine regulators cited London Economics International 80 times without mentioning any potential conflict.

Asked if regulators had informed the parties in the regulatory proceedings about London Economics International's simultaneous work for entities with competing interests, Lanphear said "the industry was generally aware of the work LEI conducted for HQ Energy Services."

He added that because the energy companies raised the issue in May 2018, five months after the commission hired London Economics International, the parties in the regulatory proceeding were "in essence advised of the issue."

The overlap of the two contracts "absolutely raises red flags," said Rep. Seth Berry, D-Bowdoinham, co-chair of the Legislature's energy committee and a frequent critic of Central Maine Power.

"At the very least, what this highlights is the world of regulators and the regulated community and the consultants who sometimes work for one or the other is a very small world," Berry said. "There is always a significant danger of a kind of revolving door culture."

[\[What you need to know about the CMP transmission line proposed for Maine\]](#)

London Economics International had at least two staff members working on both the study for Maine and the study for HQ Energy Services. Managing Director Julia Frayer and Senior Consultant Gabriel Roumy, a [former Hydro-Quebec employee](#), were listed as authors of the analysis delivered to HQ Energy Services. Both also testified about the Maine transmission line before Maine regulators.

The London Economics International analysis of the line determined the project would lower Maine electricity prices by \$33 million a year. That figure was significantly less than the \$71 million in annual price reduction a CMP-sponsored study found.

London Economics International also determined the construction of the line would generate \$98.2 million a year in gross domestic product for Maine. A CMP-funded University of Southern Maine analysis put that same figure at \$94.1 million.

Last week, the BDN [reported that Maine regulators gave](#) London Economics International a \$500,000 contract to study a proposal for [consumers to take over](#) Maine's electric companies despite the firm being ineligible for the award.

In that instance, regulators said the firm failed to disclose that it had been paid nearly \$40,000 by Emera Maine in 2018 when bidding for the project. The call for proposals had stated that any firm contracted by an investor-owned Maine utility within the past five years would be ineligible for the contract. The language was underlined for emphasis.

On Feb. 13, the Legislature's energy committee sent a letter to the Public Utilities Commission saying the committee was "deeply concerned" that London Economics International "may have misled the Commission by failing to disclose information critical to the evaluation of their bid."

As for the proposal to evaluate the transmission line for western Maine, the Public Utilities Commission's 2017 call for proposals only elicited one bid. The bid didn't qualify for selection, Lanphear said, so the commission wrote to the lone bidder, Vermont's Pike Hydro, in December 2017, telling them "no award would be given."

The commission then obtained a waiver from the state that allowed it to abandon the bidding process and give the contract to London Economics International, which the commission described as "highly capable and professional." The commission has hired the firm to conduct analyses several times in recent years.

Georgetown University law professor Scott Hempling, an expert on utility regulation, said it was "unusual" for regulators to hire a firm to analyze a project when the firm had an ongoing relationship with one of the project's primary beneficiaries.

"I can see why the situation would raise eyebrows," Hempling said.

But, he added, the energy consultant industry is a "small world."

"The amount of companies that are excellent and excel at it are limited," Hempling said. It was "not implausible," he said, that the commission could not find another firm who could do the analysis as quickly and as well as needed.

This is why you can't blindly follow your government officials, as they are not always working in your best interest.

Excerpt from Governor Mills' State of the State speech on January 21, 2020 reference transportation:

So, while we're at it, in the words of my friend and fellow governor, Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, **let's fix the damn roads!**

Just last week the Maine DOT released its three-year Work Plan. Chronic underfunding and **cost increases keep us from maintaining our essential infrastructure**. With a shortfall of as much as \$232 million a year, it's time to put our heads together and get creative. I want that Blue-Ribbon Commission to keep working on this for as long as it takes. I signed the Resolve that allows them to continue that work this morning.

Partisan posturing and **skinny mix won't fix the roads**. Creative ideas will.

I'm not opposed to using some general fund dollars to improve our infrastructure, boost our economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This is not a partisan issue.

There are no Democratic roads or Republican bridges.

We can fix this. Because we are not Washington, we are Maine.

Yes—Governor Mills, we can fix this but it needs to start with the DOT suspending all new projects, to include the \$100 million controversial I-395/Route 9 connector, and reallocate those funds to Maine's unmet essential transportation needs. This is a crisis and it needs to be treated as such with everything in play. Skinny mixing the same road every few years is a waste of money in the long term—let's fix the damn roads!

Portland Press Herald

As construction costs climb, key projects shrink and taxpayers' burden grows

Maine and its cities mirror a national trend, with a labor shortage driving up bids, while agencies scale back work on roads, bridges and schools.

BY [PETER MCGUIRE](#) STAFF WRITER | MARCH 1, 2020 |

Booming construction costs have delayed the repair and replacement of public roads, bridges, schools, sewers and more across Maine, worsening a backlog of work to restore the state's battered infrastructure.

A critical shortage of skilled labor and increased demand in a booming economy **has reduced competition** in the Maine construction industry, **driving up project costs** to the highest point in more than a decade. **And now taxpayers are footing the bill.**

Shackled to thin budgets and beholden to rules and regulations in place to ensure transparency and good governance, public agencies are increasingly unable to afford critical work and have scaled back or eliminated projects. Meanwhile, a [decades long list of overdue improvements](#) keeps growing.

Four years ago, Maine received a C- grade from the American Society of Civil Engineers in its quadrennial infrastructure report card, basically unchanged from its previous grade. **The state is billions of dollars behind in repairs and replacements to airports, dams, schools, roads and bridges, water and wastewater systems and more, according to the association.**

"It is a crisis now," said Matt Marks, CEO of the Associated General Contractors of Maine, a trade group. **"I think it is a bit of a reality check that we've underfunded infrastructure for years,"** he added. **"There are a lot of issues that are going to be harder to fix as the costs rise and rise and rise."**

The problem isn't confined to Maine. Local governments from coast to coast are struggling to get work done amid a national labor shortage, said Brittney Kohler, infrastructure advocacy director at the National League of Cities. Local property taxes don't keep up with escalating costs, state rules [prevent many towns and](#)

[cities from raising local sales](#) or fuel taxes, and the federal government hasn't done enough to take the burden off homeowners, Kohler said.

“What we are really talking about is **a problem we have known about since the 1980s and have let it continue to fester without real solutions and real funding sources,**” she said.

Construction prices naturally modulate but the last three years have seen a sustained increase of at least 8 percent a year, said Clif Greim, CEO of Harriman, an architecture firm in Auburn that specializes in designing public buildings. The recent price escalation is steeper than any he recalls in his nearly 40-year career.

“It has been very noticeable. We are in a market now that regularly sees a premium of 30 percent over what would be typical for pricing. That is significant,” Greim said.

High material prices have partially driven construction costs in recent years, but a [skilled-labor shortage](#) is frequently cited as the central cause. Maine's unemployment rate was 2.9 percent in January and has been [below 4 percent for two straight years](#). The shortage drives up overtime, recruitment and training costs. With plenty of work to go around, companies that bid on public projects don't have as much incentive to offer competitive pricing.

Public agencies are particularly disadvantaged in a high-cost environment. Major building construction, such as a school, can take years of planning, public input and buy-in and often a local vote on borrowing. By the time the project is ready to start, economic conditions may be very different from when project design and bond were authorized.

“By the time a shovel hits the ground it can be three to four years from when it was visualized,” Greim said. “If you are not sure you are following the market correctly, you could be behind the eight-ball from the very start.”

Paying with taxpayer money also limits flexibility to select contractors and limit costs. Open bidding is necessary to provide transparency and limit public graft. But it also means if agencies want to proceed with a project, they're locked in with the companies that put in a bid.

Ten years ago, in the depths of the Great Recession, public projects regularly received 10 or more bids and had the upper hand in purchasing power, Greim added. These days, the opposite is true.

“What we are seeing is a reduction of bidders on public projects,” he said. “Sometimes there is as few as one bidder, sometimes none for subcontracts.”

Public work has strict timelines, restrictions on materials and additional costs and oversight, said Marks, from the associated general contractors. Also, many public jobs are advertised late in the year, after construction firms and specialized subcontractors already have a full schedule.

“All those kind of things add up. On the public side there are a lot more rules and regulations; on the private side you have a client that can determine what is important for them,” he said. “At the end of the day it is a lot easier for folks to manage.”

The construction balloon cut into projects across the state in 2019 and public officials are expecting more challenges ahead.

The Portland School Department may scale back long-awaited renovations to four elementary schools after a new estimate revealed the work would cost at [least \\$21 million more](#) than the \$64 million bond [approved by voters](#) almost three years ago.

Even “light touch” renovations – less than the original plan – were too expensive after two rounds of estimates, said Superintendent Xavier Botana. The price for Lyseth Elementary School, the first to be worked on, came in [\\$2 million above estimates](#) and costs have only gone up since.

“Even work we were about to do with Lyseth basically a year ago is not affordable in the three schools we have left,” Botana said.

Less visible projects have also been casualties of soaring costs. A 2-year-old plan to replace a culvert in Hallowell attracted bids far above estimates both times it was advertised, said road foreman Chris Buck. A renovation of the town’s boat ramp was delayed last year after the low bid [was \\$60,000 more than expected](#).

“Everyone is coming in high,” Buck said. “It is probably the labor force in the construction field that is driving it.”

A new fire station in Farmingdale was [delayed for years](#) because contractor prices outpaced the budget. Road [improvements in Augusta](#) came in hundreds of thousands of dollars [over estimates](#) last year.

Lewiston got its highway work done within budget in 2019, but Public Works Director Dale Doughty suspects that was a fluke because some paving companies were freed up after other work got canceled.

“I am very concerned those were catch-as-catch-can – we were lucky,” Doughty said. “I suspect our luck may not hold out this year.”

Similar concerns swirl around the future of a years long plan to build two bridges in Scarborough for a multi-use path to connect South Portland to the Eastern Trail, an on- and off-road network that runs through southern Maine. A group behind the project [finished raising \\$4.1 million](#) two years ago but is still getting rights-of-way permission.

The work will be advertised this spring, but Scarborough Town Manager Tom Hall is prepared for bad news. “It is likely we will not have an adequate budget,” Hall said. “There is really no sign of things cooling down in the construction industry.”

Last year, Portland’s public work was quoted an [average 30 percent higher than expected](#). One important sewer separation project was more than twice what engineers estimated. Prices seem to have moderated this year, but at a historically high rate. “It didn’t go down any, it just hasn’t gone up any,” said Public Works Director Chris Branch.

That’s an ominous sign for plans to restore at least \$146 million worth of battered city streets and sidewalks. Portland will likely try inexpensive pavement overlay on streets, but there are typically no cheap options for sidewalks, particularly the city’s distinctive red brick ones. Steep prices “have an impact everywhere; there is no question that it is an issue,” Branch said.

The Maine Department of Transportation last year canceled [almost \\$60 million worth of road and bridge projects](#) to keep up with prices. Its newest \$2.6 billion, three-year plan includes more money than the last iteration but [only accomplishes two-thirds of the work](#).

So far, bids for Maine DOT work have been in line with officials’ expectations, but some came in over budget, said department spokesman Paul Merrill. It’s too early to say if those are outliers or a trend. If high prices become the “new normal” in Maine, it will mean tough public spending decisions.

“If a workforce shortage continues to impact the prices we continue to get on bids, we are going to have to have a lot of conversations about how we are going to do the work we know needs to be done,” he said. “If those prices do stabilize at the highest point, that’s not going to be good.”

Aging sewer lines and treatment plants in Maine communities have an estimated \$1 billion maintenance backlog, said John True, director of the clean water loan fund at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Voters in 2018 passed a [\\$30 million bond](#) to help local wastewater agencies replace equipment and improve systems, but if costs stay high, that money won’t go nearly as far as expected, True said.

“Obviously with price increases, you are not going to get as much bang for your buck,” he said. “Construction costs have slowed some projects down and if we are asking them to come into environmental compliance that makes it more difficult.”

Maine’s public schools are in the same situation. The average Maine school is between 50 and 60 years old, at or beyond what’s considered a useful life. The cost to replace schools has more than quadrupled since the 1990s, according to the Maine Department of Education. In 2009, it cost the state \$65 million to build a new technical high school in Farmington. Last year, it approved almost double that amount – \$120 million – to replace the slightly bigger Edward Little High School in Auburn.

Scott Brown, the head of school facilities at Maine DOE, cautions that each project is different, and schools are especially expensive because they take a long time to design and build and need specialized spaces such as kitchens, gymnasiums and particular security and ventilation systems.

Even taking that into account, the \$126 million state debt limit on new school construction may not be enough to compete with construction prices, Brown said. There are more than 70 schools on a waiting list for state funding and last year the state chose three small elementary schools for replacement, at a projected cost of \$140 million.

“The dollars don’t go as far,” he said. “We have to say we’re concerned because we know there is a need and the prices are really high. But there have been other times when we’ve been able to do more, and those have been great.”

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Maine panel recommends hiking road funding, but punts on long-term shortfall fix



Troy R. Bennett | BDN

Sen. Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock, watches a vote tally in the Maine State House in Augusta in this 2018 file photo.

By [Caitlin Andrews](#), BDN Staff • March 3, 2020

[Click here to view online.](#)

AUGUSTA, Maine — A commission tasked with solving Maine's transportation funding shortfall will recommend an immediate infusion of between \$20 million and \$60 million while punting a range of possible solutions to the next Legislature.

The blue-ribbon commission decided on Tuesday to suggest the Legislature consider any funding solutions be built on a 50 to 60 percent increase in general fund revenue and the rest from new revenues, which could include measures like a gas tax increase or higher fees for electric vehicles. It recommends the increase be built up to over the next three to four years.

The decision means lawmakers avoid a tricky decision of deciding how the problem will be fixed for now. Commission members agreed a compromise would be nearly impossible with the end of the legislative session approaching in April. The recommendation will go to the Legislature's Transportation Committee.

The issue of how to fix the funding gap has been a prominent one this session, with Gov. Janet Mills urging lawmakers to ["fix the damn roads"](#) during her State of the State address in January. Republicans became frustrated when the Democratic governor then introduced a supplemental budget package that included a [one-time expenditure](#) of \$10 million for transportation.

The commission did not specify whether the infusion it suggests would be on top of that \$10 million or include it. Ultimately, members wanted to show some progress had been made.

“I think everybody wishes we would have been able to find the magic bullet to fix this problem, but we didn’t get into this hole overnight, and it’s going to take a while to dig out of it,” said Sen. Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock.

The commission has struggled for months to gain consensus on a solution despite getting an [extended deadline](#). It was able to agree the state should come up with an additional \$160 million to narrow the shortfall — estimated at [\\$232 million](#) assumed \$100 million in annual borrowing — but divisions on how to get there have fallen mostly on party lines. There was also support to increase general fund spending and reduce reliance on bonding.

But whether a gas tax increase should be part of the solution divided the group for months. The idea was supported by trucking, construction and alternative transportation industry members and municipality and aging interest groups and got buy-in from Democrats on commission. The state tax rate hasn’t increased since 2011.

Republicans have generally [resisted the idea](#) and said Mills left lawmakers “no options” but to increase taxes and bonding in a February press release. They floated using the tax revenue from vehicle sales — a \$230 million funding source in the annual state budget — to plug the gap. That didn’t go over well with Mills and members of the Legislature’s budget committee.

A gas tax increase is not popular with all Democrats. Senate President Troy Jackson, D-Allagash, opposed it [last month on WGAN](#), saying it’s something “I’m not real interested in.”

The issue looked like it would prevent the commission from making a recommendation at all, after a [tense meeting last month](#). But Sen. Matthew Pouliot, R-Augusta — who has been vocal about using existing revenues over any gas tax increase — and Rep. Nathan Wadsworth, R-Hiram, ultimately supported a split funding solution, although they both preferred a heavier contribution from the general fund.

Pouliot said he needed assurance that the state would reduce its level of bonding. Wadsworth said he was against a gas tax outright but would support other measures such as upping the highway toll rate during summer months.

But while commission members agreed the state should reduce its reliance on bonding, Maine Department of Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note said it wouldn’t be possible in the immediate future unless other funding is approved.

Brewer voters choose former Mayor O'Connell, a Democrat, to fill vacant House seat



Linda Coan O'Kresik | BDN

Democrat Kevin O'Connell (left) and Republican Garrel Craig shake hands of voters outside of the Brewer Auditorium on Tuesday morning as they go in to cast their ballots. O'Connell and Craig were the candidates in a special election to represent much of Brewer in the Maine State House. O'Connell won.



By [Eesha Pendharkar](#), BDN Staff • March 3, 2020 8:29 pm
Updated: March 3, 2020 8:40 pm

Brewer voters chose Kevin O'Connell, a former mayor, to represent them in the Maine House on Tuesday, handing the Democrat a victory in a special election to fill a seat that's been vacant since December.

O'Connell received 1403 votes while his Republican opponent, former state Rep. Garrel Craig, received 1017 votes.

HOUSE DISTRICT 128

Maine House of Representatives District 128

Candidates	%	votes
 ● ✓ O'Connell, K (d)	58%	1403
 ● Craig, G (r)	42%	1017

100% of Maine has reported

✓ - Race has been called

✗ - Candidate has been eliminated

O'Connell will fill the House seat held by Rep. Archie Verow until the 77-year-old Democrat [died of a heart attack in December](#).

"I'm pleasantly surprised," O'Connell said. "I really appreciate the fact people of Brewer had faith in me to think that I could go on to this next step and represent them."

The special election to fill the seat was held the same day as Democrats across the state cast their presidential primary votes, translating to a larger turnout among Democrats that Republicans tried to counter through canvassing efforts in the city.

O'Connell has worked as a lineman for Emera Maine for more than 30 years. He also served in the Maine Air National Guard for 24 years, which included time in Iraq.

O'Connell [has also served Brewer for 30 years](#) in several capacities, including two terms as mayor, in 2013 and 2017. He's been a city councilor and school board member, and he's served on a number of other local boards and committees.

What is the real cost of the connector in 2020 and beyond?

January 14, 2020: total project cost is \$100 million (maybe).

A clue to the current cost of the I-395/Route 9 connector can be found in the following statement on page v. of the MaineDOT's [2020-2021-2022 Work Plan](#): **"\$25-million INFRA grant for the I-395/Route 9 Connector, providing a quarter of the estimated total project cost;"**

- **Cost increased from \$79.25 million in the October 23, 2017 INFRA Grant to \$100 million by January 14, 2020; a \$20.75 million (26.2%) increase in cost over that 26.7 month period—an average increase of 0.98% per month. The overall 26.2 % cost increase actually appears low when compared to the 46% and 60% cost increases reported by the MaineDOT and the MTA.**

Note: Since the DOT has chosen non-transparency as their means of public involvement, the dates referenced above are dates with bona fide references and not necessarily when a specific action occurred. Study updates aren't a normal occurrence and real-time facts are virtually non-existent.

- In October, the [gridlocked blue-ribbon commission](#) was informed of the [\\$232 million shortfall](#) for road and bridge maintenance—a [46% increase](#) (\$73 million) from estimates in March mostly attributed to rising costs of construction—AND—the estimated cost of the [Gorham Connector](#) has increased by as much as 60% (\$87 million) over the past two years.

The connector's project cost has increased by 26.2% as the DOT/MTA reported increased construction costs of 46% over an eight month period and as much as 60% over a two year period, almost the same two year period as the 26.2% increase in the connector's cost. Could it be that the cost is as high as \$115.705 to \$126.8 million with unviable BCR's of 0.81 to 0.89?

Assuming the benefit remains unchanged from Oct. 2017 when the BCR was 1.3 and the cost was \$79.25 million, the resulting benefit is still \$103.025 million. The project becomes unviable when the cost exceeds \$103.025 million; this project is only \$3 million away from unviability—right now—and that is if the cost is really only \$100 million, and the cost may already surpass the benefits. The BCR may already be below 1.0 and thus the I-395 connector is no longer a viable project and must be immediately suspended.

If you choose to ignore the increases of 46% to 60% that both the DOT/MTA have experienced and would rather use the presumptive 0.98%/month increased cost experienced with the connector from 2017 to 2020, assuming the costs increase at that same rate, **by January 2022 the connector could easily cost \$123,520,000.**

The BCR with a projected cost of \$123.52 million by January 2022 would be 0.83 and that is unviable—how does the MaineDOT spin that? Will they say that the benefits have also increased when it is a fact that the cost has increased mainly due to construction costs—how would that affect the benefits—wouldn't the benefits remain relatively constant? **I contend that the benefits will not change if the costs consist of mostly labor costs and not something that could affect both cost and benefits, such as the price of fuel.**

The cost in January 2022 may easily double the original \$61 million cost referenced in the March 2012 DEIS—with change left over.

Why does the MaineDOT continue to promote a controversial project, that doesn't meet the original purpose and needs, when the project may no longer even be viable—when Maine has unmet transportation needs?

Once again—when it comes to the connector—the DOT stonewalls—staying mum even after multiple media reports referencing the work plan's -\$232 million shortfall, after letters to the editor published in the [BDN](#) and the [PPH](#), nothing—nada, only one mention lately in the report about the [\\$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 Bridge replacement](#). The Turnpike authority went to the media when the [Gorham Bypass](#) construction costs had increased by as much as 60% over the past two years, voicing their concerns, arguing in favor of the project and advising how they planned to pay for it. Yet, the MaineDOT stays quiet about the I-395 connector—what are they hiding?

Do we trust the MaineDOT to let us know when the cost makes this project unviable—OR—will the DOT just keep throwing money at a project we do not support? Why are they so willing to promote this one single controversial project when the results will not meet the original system linkage need of a limited-access connection from I-395 to Route 9 east of Route 46?

- What's the total cost and the BCR now in 2020, and the projected cost and BCR at the start of construction in 2021 and commissioning in 2024?
- As construction costs increase due to labor costs, is it SOP to disregard the BCR parameter that allowed the project to be initially approved?

If we were still in the study with such a high a cost and an underwhelming BCR (lower 1.0's), would it still be approved? I contend NO and there should be no difference today. **If the costs are too high and the BCR is no longer viable—this project needs to be revalidated or cancelled immediately before construction starts on the 1st phase of the project: the Wilson Street bridge.**

History of costs from December 2011 to 2020 and 2022:

\$93.24 million on 12.06.2011 per [FOAA #000391](#) and [#000392](#)
 \$<65.0 million on 1.13.2012 per [FOAA #000364](#) ("no greater than \$65 M")
 \$62.19 million on 1.30.2012 per Memo [FOAA # 000431](#) ("reduced by one third")
 \$61.0 million on 3.07.2012 per the [DEIS](#) (s15/s18)
 \$79.25 million on 10.23.2017 per the [INFRA grant application](#)
 \$100.0 million on 1.14.2020 per the [2020-2022 work plan](#) (26.2% increase)
 \$115.7 to \$126.8 million on 1.14.2020 based on DOT/MTA increases of 46-60%
 \$123.52 million in two years based on 26.2% cost increase from 2017 to 2020

The DOT has offered no explanation on 2B-2's costs over the history of this project. We have been treated to intentional misinformation, outright lies, fuzzy math, months and months of quiet, resulting in a questionable, controversial project with ever-changing needs for \$61 million in 2012—that connector has turned into a \$100 million boondoggle in 2020.

Alternatives	Description	Meets Purpose		Meets Needs		
		Study Purpose	USACE Purpose	System Linkage	Safety Concerns	Traffic Congestion
Alternative 2B-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfies design criteria Length: 6.1 mi. of new alignment, 4.2 mi. of Route 9 without additional improvements Bridge length: 2,232 ft. Earthwork: 2.2 mcy (1.2 mcy cut, 1.0 mcy fill) 	Yes	Yes	In the near-term (Year 2035)	Yes	Yes

The I-395/Route 9 Connector is nothing more than a band-aid fix; a near-term project with no long-term benefits, no funding and no plans. Please view the

the Draft EIS [page 258 of Appendix C](#) and note the highlighted "less than YES" answer under the Meets Needs System Linkage column: "In the near-term (Year 2035)". **Is this alternative worthy of a \$100 million expenditure?**

This project does not meet the long-term needs and thus does not provide long-term benefits; the MaineDOT can't have it both ways—in MaineDOT's own words, **this project is a near-term (short-term) project and thus does not meet Governor Mills' Infrastructure Policy to "invest in projects that will show a long-term benefit, versus short-term appearances."**

2B-2 is the ultimate photo-op and nothing more; unplanned and unfunded long-term needs have been punted 20 years into an unknown future for your children to pay for. **If Maine can't afford to fix the roads we already have, how will they afford to rehabilitate this boondoggle twenty years from now?**

It's about time that the MaineDOT comes to the City of Brewer and explain how they plan to pay for this connector when they can't even pay to maintain our existing roads and bridges.

The fact is, actions over the past ten years have given us no reason to trust the MaineDOT and yes, I have lost faith in our government. I believe today's \$100 million cost is probably low, and may be more likely as high as \$115.705 to \$126.8 million using similar cost increases (46% and 60%) that the DOT/MTA have recently experienced.

The DOT cannot keep pouring our limited dollars into this project as the cost overwhelms the project's limited benefits.

The blue-ribbon commission is [deadlocked](#); 142 projects will not be funded; the amount of bridge repairs are reduced; road paving may be downgraded to light paving or patching or nothing at all, as the annual shortfall in the roads and bridge maintenance budget is -\$232 million. AND—the governor just gave \$10 million of G.O. money to the DOT—when I contend the DOT should be investigated for mismanagement of the state's infrastructure program.

DOT's priority must be the maintenance and repair of our existing roads and bridges, not another north of Augusta bypass-boondoggle.

Shortfalls have more than tripled since that icy day in March...

At the March 25, 2016 [BACTS](#) meeting, Brewer [officials](#) and [residents](#) arose to present justification for separating the I-395 connector from the amended work plan to encourage additional analysis and debate; those efforts were rejected by MaineDOT/FHWA Senior Management in attendance en masse. **BACTS members voiced reservations, but under threat of losing \$57 million of regional funding—with the exception of Brewer members—they signed off on the amended plan that included the I-395 connector—a project that lacks Brewer’s support and doesn’t meet the original purpose and needs at a time when the DOT can’t afford to even maintain our current roads and bridges.**



[BDN's](#) front-page headline captured the confrontational and threatening meeting. I [highlighted](#) the impacts to people and communities, forewarned in an [October 2003 MaineDOT Technical Memorandum](#):

“Alternatives that do not provide a limited access connection to Route 9 east of Route 46 [2B-2] would negatively affect people...would severely impact local communities along Route 9.” DOT (Rollins) countered: what you just heard was not truthful. The personal attack was offensive, but **employing divide and conquer tactics was deplorable** and noncompliant with DOT [Public Involvement](#) policy. Public participation is a convenient talking point; **the DOT has refused any discussion of this project’s shortcomings over the past 8 years.**

- MaineDOT’s response: “Nass said if the BACTS committee voted down the amended plan...it would mean **“serious ramifications” for communities in the region that are planning on the \$57 million in funds for road projects.**” **“This is not the forum to discuss the merits of the project...Rollins said.”**
- Brewer’s response: Jerry Goss said **“It appears that BACTS is being held hostage...It’s either do this or you’re not going to get all the other projects in town.”** Steve Bost responded: **“Watching this unfold today, in my humble opinion, is precisely why people have lost faith in government...an unyielding bureaucracy that is unwilling to listen and unwilling to move...”**

As a reference point—the annual shortfall in 2016 was **-\$68 million** per the MaineDOT [2016-2017-2018 work plan](#).

Imagine the untold millions of our state's critical transportation dollars that could have been saved to date if the BACTS members were not coerced into approving the I-395 connector project to save their own projects. One can only imagine the “discord” that would have resulted from a BACTS vote to not forward the connector project. **Unyielding, the MaineDOT controlled the conversation—and—displayed an unwillingness to listen or to move...**

Today, BACTS is facing another threat with “serious ramifications”, but the cause now is a ballooning shortfall, worsened by the draw off of funds for a controversial connector with a questionable, ever-changing need.

As a reference point—the annual shortfall is now **-\$232 million** per the [2020-2021-2022 work plan](#)—that's **\$164 million more than and 341.2% greater** than the **-\$68 million** shortfall just over four years ago in March of 2016.

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

The MaineDOT continues to squander our limited transportation dollars on a controversial project that fails to satisfy the original purpose and needs of the study—to the detriment of our existing roads and bridges. If you can't maintain existing roads, you certainly shouldn't be building a new one.

This project has been mismanaged since the [April 2009 \(Final\) PAC Meeting](#) when the MaineDOT decided to continue working on the study covertly for the next 32 months. The same alternative **(2B-2)** that **satisfied only 1 in 5 (20%) of the study's original purpose and needs in April 2009** that the [DOT forewarned in October 2003](#): **“Traffic congestion and conflicting vehicle movements on this section of Route 9 would substantially increase the potential for new safety concerns and hazards.”** ultimately replaced 3EIK-2, the first MaineDOT/FHWA preferred alternative for some 7 years to the surprise and disbelief of Brewer officials and residents kept in the dark.

It appears that nobody of consequence has held the MaineDOT accountable to the impacted communities, and yet, now the DOT appears to be once again patted on the back for doing such a great job with a \$10 million award from the governor's latest budget even though the shortfall is now -\$232 million. As I told one of the members of the blue-ribbon commission in an email, I believe **the commission needs to start with a full investigation of how the MaineDOT spends our money and until they do that, nothing will change...**

No matter where the DOT gets the money, they cannot make the argument that funding the connector project does not affect funding of other projects. That would be completely preposterous. **As this connector is being funded by STIP/STP funds, they are indeed taking money away from other projects.**

I listened closely to DOT spokesman Paul Merrill on a [Jan. 22 WFVX report](#): "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 [the connector] but we have made the commitment to do it.**"

- **"Made the commitment to do it."** What does that mean? Does it mean the commitment the DOT Commission made in the [match assurance letter](#) of the October 23, 2017 INFRA Grant application to the U.S.DOT for the state of Maine to match \$39,625 million in funds? (50% of the then \$79.25 million project cost) What other commitments have been made and to whom?

Is the DOT withdrawing STIP funding (State Transportation Improvement Program) and/or STP funds (Federal Surface Transportation Program) to the connector that could have and should have gone to other projects? Simply put, as evidenced by the INFRA Grant application on pg. 12—yes...

- **"The funding is not entirely nailed down..."** Where's the money coming from? Isn't it irresponsible to go ahead with a \$13.5 million replacement of a bridge in support of a project that is not completely funded? When the DOT cries for more bonding in November—will they simply quietly siphon more money off the top of that transportation bond for the connector? **In a project's 20th year, why is the funding "not entirely nailed down"?**

Spending money to save money is fiscally irresponsible...

The DOT's defense against LD-47 in February 2015 was an unfounded threat they'd have to pay back \$2,205,277.00 of federal funds used to that point, but the DOT never confirmed that claim nor disputed the facts presented in my [testimony](#). Essentially, the DOT was willing to spend \$61 million to save the \$2.2 million that many said would not have had to been paid back as was the case when the Wiscasset Bypass was cancelled in August 2011; the JSC on Transportation obviously "bought" the unsubstantiated DOT argument.

The MaineDOT would not even entertain a pause to have a nongovernmental entity perform an independent analysis last March; LD-783's \$25,000 cost would have been a mere 0.025% of the 2020 project cost of \$100 million.

The DOT's defense against LD-783 in March 2019 was that they could not stop the project for one minute for a \$25,000 independent evaluation, again they didn't argue the facts and the committee chair could be heard to quietly mumble that it was probably too late anyway. **Once again the MaineDOT controlled the conversation—and—displayed an unwillingness to listen.** My 18 pages of written [testimony](#) was patently ignored at the work session.

Have they backed themselves into a corner where they feel the state needs to spend \$75 million or more of our limited transportation funds instead of halting the project and giving back the \$25 million federal INFRA grant? **Is this once again the argument that the DOT needs to spend money to save money?** Do you really think the federal government would balk at the state of Maine if the DOT gives back the \$25 million in INFRA grant funds?

- First—it makes good fiscal sense to put all our resources into the roads and bridges that need to be repaired and maintained at this time!
- Second—**FHWA is as culpable as the DOT in the decisions made in this debacle.** When FHWA Manager (M.H.) proclaimed in December 2011 that [the preferred alternative \(2B-2\) does not meet purpose and needs](#) because of recent changes in criteria, he was summarily muzzled by his superiors. The FHWA wasted an opportunity to refocus this study back to the original (first decade) purpose and needs of [April 2009](#). (Pages 9-10).

How did 2B-2 end up as the connector's preferred alternative?

April 15, 2009: 2B-2 meets only 20% of original purpose and needs.

I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study
PAC Meeting April 15, 2009



Purpose and Needs Matrix

Alternatives	Meets Purpose		Meets Needs		
	Study Purpose	USACE Purpose	System Linkage	Safety Concerns	Traffic Congestion
No-Build	No	No	No	No	No
Alternative 1-Upgrade	No	No	No	No	No
2B-2	No	No	No	Yes	No
3A-3EIK-1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3EIK-2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5A2E3K	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5A2E3K-1	No	No	No	Yes	No
5A2E3K-2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5B2E3K-1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

“The alternatives that tie into Route 9 at Eddington and use a section of Route 9 do not satisfy the purpose and need statement.” MaineDOT R.F.

www.i395-rt9-study.com

How does the MaineDOT reconcile that 2B-2 is now the best choice for this project when 5 other alternatives actually met the study's original purpose and needs in 2009 at the same time that 2B-2 was basically only 20% better than nothing at all?

[Click here for the April 2009 \(Final\) PAC Meeting minutes and official DOT handouts.](#)

Sept. 21, 2010: System linkage need “in near-term” and “long-term”.

I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study DEIS/Section 404 Permit Application
Meeting with Cooperating Agencies

September 21, 2010

- The DOT has taken a hard look at the capacity of Route 9:
 - Route 9 has sufficient capacity to accommodate the anticipated traffic volumes at a reasonable speed for the next 20 years, with the possible exception of the intersection at Route 9/46.
- The system linkage need was discussed. With Route 9 having sufficient capacity for the next 20 years, the system linkage need and need for a limited access facility should be considered a long-term need. The DOT is committed to the East-West highway vision, and the system linkage need remains a valid need for this study. To help clarify when an alternative satisfies the system linkage need for the I-395 / Route 9 study, the DOT will change references in Chapter 2 Alternatives Analysis and Appendix C Alternatives Considered and Dismissed to ‘partially satisfies’ the need to ‘in the near term’ (or something similar) and define ‘near term’ as the year 2030.

When asked at the March 2016 BACTS meeting how the MaineDOT planned to address the long-term needs in 20 years, S.R. denied there were any long-term needs—yet the MaineDOT's own meeting minutes say otherwise. And—that question, as most of my questions over the past 10 years, goes unanswered today.

Meets Needs

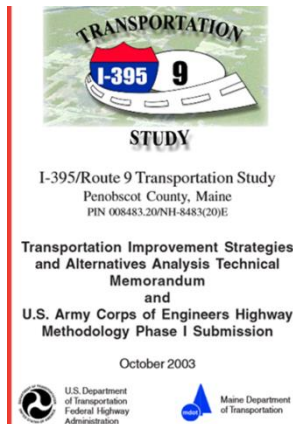
System Linkage

In the near-term (Year 2035)

Sept. 2010: 2B-2 meets the system linkage need “in the near-term” after the [DOT parsed the words: “partially satisfies”](#) (suggesting: does not meet need) into the words: “in the near-term” (suggesting: meets need) as seen to the left from the DEIS [Appendix C](#) page 258. Near-term is +20 years.

2B-2 does not meet the long-term system linkage need and the need for a limited access facility, yet the DOT has made no long-term plans for 2B-2.

2B-2 did not fit the study—they simply changed the study to fit 2B-2!



[Click here to view:](#)

September 2000 to September 2010

Logical Termini: “Specifically, the eastern logical termini was refined. Alternatives that did not connect to Route 9 east of Route 46 were dismissed from further consideration.”

System Linkage: “must provide a limited-access connection between I-395 and Route 9 east of Route 46.” 2B-2 did not meet the system linkage need.

Access Management: Any of the 47 studied alternatives that met the system linkage need had zero added access points over the total length of the connector; bypassed the Village of East Eddington, the intersection of Rte. 9/46 and 2B-2’s 4.2 mile section of Route 9.

Speed Limit: Entering Eddington westbound from Clifton, the speed limit is 50 mph and one would connect direct to any of the 47 studied alternatives that met the system linkage need of an east of Route 46 connection and immediately assume the posted highway speed (for approximately 10 miles) to I-395.

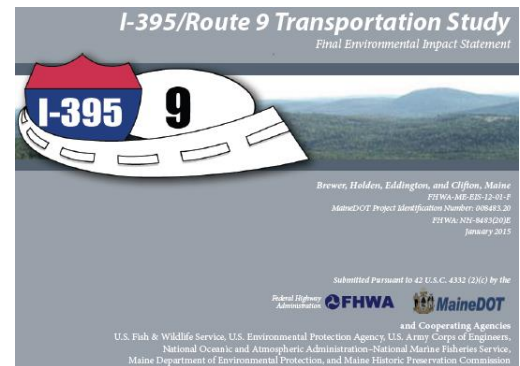
Route 9 Connection Point: East of Route 46, at or near the Eddington/Clifton corporate boundary.

Purpose and Needs: 2B-2 meets only 20%.

Facility Type: Limited-access.

Long-term Needs: None.

What you won't find is
MaineDOT's plan to
meet the long-term
limited-access system
linkage need in 20
years—triggered by
their questionable
selection of 2B-2.



[Click here to view:](#)

September 2010 to beyond

Logical Termini: “The logical termini of the project was identified and defined as (1) I-395 near Route 1A and (2) the portion of Route 9 in the study area.”

System Linkage: System linkage need and the need for a limited-access facility were redefined to long-term needs; 2B-2 meets the near-term (Year 20XX) system linkage need.

Access Management: Because of 2B-2’s 4.2 mile Rte. 9 section, vehicles will transit past “10 local roads and 148 existing driveways or access points to undeveloped lots” and transit through the Village of East Eddington and the intersection of Rtes. 9/46. (158 access points.)

Speed Limit: “The posted speed in this section of Route 9 is predominantly 45 mph, with 35 mph near the Route 46 intersection.” Five posted speed changes from 35 to 50 mph on 2B-2’s Route 9 segment until reaching posted speed on the new 6.1 mile section of 2B-2.

Route 9 Connection Point: 4.2 miles west of where majority of the 79+ studied alternatives connected as per logical termini redefinition to: “the portion of Route 9 in the study area.”

Purpose and Needs: 2B-2 meets 100%

Facility Type: Controlled-access.

Long-term Needs: Limited-access retrofit.

October 2003 Design Criteria per Technical Memorandum page i:



STUDY

I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study
Penobscot County, Maine
PIN 008483.20/NH-8483(20)E

Transportation Improvement Strategies
and Alternatives Analysis Technical
Memorandum
and
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Highway
Methodology Phase I Submission

October 2003



U.S. Department
of Transportation
Federal Highway
Administration



Maine Department
of Transportation

“Alternatives were developed, and impacts quantified for a four-lane highway with two travel lanes in each direction, a divided median, and an approximate right-of-way of 200 feet. This highway was designed in Accordance with MDOT’s design criteria for limited access freeways. MDOT proposes that two lanes be constructed. When traffic volumes increase, warranting additional roadway capacity, the remaining two lanes would be constructed.”

[Click here to view:](#)

Does 2B-2 meet any of the design criteria in this memorandum?

- **NO**—Original 4-lane divided highway upgradability was abandoned; as referenced in minutes of the October 2011 Interagency Meeting. (DEIS comments suggest an upgrade could be done within a reduced ROW.)
- **NO**—2B-2’s right-of-way was stated at both 100’ to 125’ and 100’. FOAA #001143 on 8.1.2011 and Senator Collins’ office email (C.W.) on 4.8.13. DOT backpedaled on the ROW in FEIS—labelling it as “brief discussions” even though it was previously confirmed. IMO—it was a smokescreen that was necessary to appear to be compliant with NEPA and we’ll only know the ROW truth when final plans are issued, outside the NEPA process. Future upgradability depends on width of ROW.
- **NO**—Original freeway criteria downgraded—2B-2 is being designed using downgraded “rolling rural” criteria.
- **NO**—Original limited access criteria was scrapped—alternative 2B-2 is now a controlled-access facility; limited-access was identified as a long-term need, deferred for 20 years.
- **NO**—2B-2 is a near-term project with long-term unplanned /unfunded needs: a limited-access connection between I-395 to Rt.9 EAST of Rt.46.

October 11, 2011 changes in engineering criteria:

Excerpt from October 2011 MaineDOT Interagency Meeting:

- I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study presented by Judy Lindsey

A change to the design since last meeting [December 2010] is a **reduction from purchasing a four-lane right-of-way to two-lane right-of-way**.

Bill Plumpton: Last time we met, December 2010,

Page 2 of the handout – Change made to typical section since our last meeting [December 2010], the project **considered having two lanes of highway constructed within right-of-way sufficient to accommodate four lanes in the future**. That has now changed to two lanes of highway within right-of-way that accommodates two lanes but does not accommodate four lane construction in the future.

[Click here to view full notes from October 2011 Interagency Meeting.](#)

In this study's 11th year, within less than six months of finalizing the March 2012 DEIS, a downgrade in criteria became applicable to only 2B-2 and not the other 47 of the 79 studied alternatives that met this study's original purpose and needs.

December 6, 2011 cost of \$93.24 million-a second change is coming:



000391

December 6, 2011

Ms. Judy Lindsey
Maine Department of Transportation
16 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0016

Re: Revised Cost Estimate for the Build Alternatives
I-395 / Route 9 Transportation Study

Dear Judy:

Attached please find a copy of the latest cost estimate for the build alternatives retained for further consideration and detailed analysis for your review and consideration. We are working to complete both the property acquisition and utility relocation technical memoranda; the memoranda will reflect the costs shown in the attached estimates.

This cost estimate for the build alternatives was prepared using the DOT's freeway criteria. We understand the DOT would like, following the conclusion of the NEPA process, for the preferred alternative to be developed using rolling criteria. Developing the preferred alternative using rolling criteria would reduce the cost to construct it. Based on the DOT's experience with similar projects, we ask that the DOT let us know the anticipated percent reduction in cost that would result from this change in criteria; we will apply this percent reduction to the cost to construct the build alternatives that is shown in the DEIS/Section 404 Permit Application.

We appreciate the opportunity to be of service on this important study. Please contact either Dave Hamlet or myself if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Gannett Fleming, Inc.

William M. Plumpton, CEP
Project Manager

This letter, from MaineDOT's Consultant, affirms there's a second change coming in criteria following the NEPA process from interstate criteria to rolling rural criteria.

This change is applicable to 2B-2 and none of the 47 of 79 alternatives that met the original study purpose and needs.

W.P. is looking for the % reduction to apply to the attached current cost estimates of December 2011.

000392

Cost Estimate Summary for Range of Alternatives

Alternatives		Engineering & Construction				Right-of-Way		Total				
		Construction	Utility Relocation	Impassment	Engineering	Right-of-Way	Mitigation					
2B-2	\$	75,491,276.60	\$	1,578,100.00	\$	12,078,600.00	\$	4,084,912.41	\$	-	\$	93,240,000.00
5A2B-2	\$	97,629,921.84	\$	3,130,600.00	\$	15,620,780.00	\$	5,205,118.05	\$	-	\$	121,590,000.00
5B2B-2	\$	79,879,364.36	\$	9,345,600.00	\$	12,780,700.00	\$	9,659,718.99	\$	-	\$	111,670,000.00

FOAA #000391-#000392

December 14, 2011—FHWA manager (MH) seeks outside advice on how to proceed with changing criteria at the end of the study:

QUESTION: [NEPA analysis w/ footprint change posted 12.14.2011](#) “We are preparing an EIS and are currently reviewing the administrative draft of the DEIS. For the last five years we analyzed impacts for many (too!) five to ten mile long, new alignment, 250' ROW, controlled access, build alternatives. We have even identified a 'preferred alternative', with the caveats that go with that. Two lanes would be constructed initially, as a "super 2", one barrel of the four-lane version and reserve the remaining ROW, building out the other two lanes when needed. We are just now considering a much reduced footprint to around 100' ROW and to a lower standard, a two-lane arterial, rural rolling to reduce costs. **With this proposed reduction in footprint, what happens now? We most certainly need to revise the admin draft to some extent given this change, at least the impact analysis as impacts will be substantially reduced, in some cases by more than one-half. Do we revisit any previous alternatives that were dismissed (not being carried forward for further consideration)? Do we need to step/look back? How far? Thoughts on this one? Examples?**” Anonymous author of this question was presumed to be FHWA (MH) by MaineDOT (JL). [View FOAA email string](#).

Why wasn't the study paused to reassess the 47 of 79 previously removed routes that met 100% of purpose/needs?

IMO - DOT felt it wasn't necessary as it wasn't their priority to select the best route for the whole study area, but the one route that would satisfy a few elite area residents.

ANSWER: [FHWA Division Office 12.15.2011](#)

“The project being proposed now is very different than what was originally proposed - it is practically a new project. Has the Purpose and Need changed for the project (would seem like it would have to for the reduced roadway to be acceptable)? If so, you would definitely need to look at your alternatives analysis again based on the revised needs. And as you said, the impacts would have to be revised. You may want to hold a new public meeting (not quite scoping, since the areas of concern would be the same). **Sounds like almost a complete rewrite of the EIS.** Another option would be to do a combined PEL (Planning Environmental Linkage) and EIS document. The larger project would be the planning portion (what you would like to do), and the reduced template would be the EIS (what you are actually going to do based on funding). This would require that you identify BOTH the overall impacts (which you already have) and the impacts of the reduced project. Still have to do most of what I described above and add a lot of discussion to the PEL/EIS to clarify what is happening, but you wouldn't have to throw out the work that is already done.”

A project cannot simply be changed at a whim when using government funds and this study was changed—2B-2 should have been removed from consideration in December 2011 when [FHWA \(MH\) raised serious concerns](#) and all 79 alternatives re-analyzed “based on the revised needs”.

December 13, 2011 – DOT was advised the FHWA was not happy:

Mark Hasselmann, FHWA Right of Way Program Manager, advised Judy Lindsey, MaineDOT Project Manager, on Dec 13, 2011 that **“the 2-lane/2-lane ROW Preferred Alternative does not satisfy Purpose and Needs...”** and **“Mark is concerned the criteria change to a 2-lane/2-lane ROW of the Preferred Alternative will alter impacts and prior analyses is not comparable (apples to apples) as those done with 4-lane/4-lane ROW”**. Mark Hasselmann was overruled by his superiors. [Click here to view the emails obtained by FOAA](#). Why was M.H. silenced and why did the DOT not miss a beat in the process? Why did the DOT and FHWA not go back and see how that downgraded criteria would affect previously removed alternatives such as 3EIK-2 and 4B which were just a few of the **47 of 79 studied alternatives that met the study's original purpose and needs in April 2009 when 2B-2 only met 20%**.

January 13, 2012– Is this a cost estimate–or–guesstimate?

From: Sweeney, Ken

Sent: Friday, January 13, 2012 1:07 PM

To: Charette, Russ

Subject: RE: I-395/Route 9 Study

000364

“Low should be no greater than \$65..you decide High.”

Yes...as follows:

Does the purpose statement need to reference AASHTO POLICY? If it must then it should say GUIDE not policy.

Add a sentence or two about Freight connectivity and the recent Congressional action to allow 100k trucks on the interstate system and the critical need to provide a safe connection to the interstate system for those trucks on route 9 from Canada and regionally from Washington County and EastPort Port needing to travel to points south and west.

Fill in the range of cost alternatives....Low should be no greater than \$65 M ..you decide High.

000365

Anticipated Construction could begin in 2014-2015

We also discussed wording and had a meeting with the biologists that led to a comment that we should only commit to the 1.2 bankful on the structures that make environmental sense and not a blanket 1.2 statement. We should also avoid the “will be considered in final design” when it involves environmental commitment because the regulators interpret the language consider the same as require.

That's all I recall

Thanks

ken

It needs to be noted that the information found in FOAA documents, such as this one and others cited in this document, were not obtained until March 2013 at a cost of \$500.00 to the Town of Eddington. We did not have this information to comment on during the comment period of the DEIS—another example of the lack of transparency from an unyielding bureaucracy.

<https://i395rt9hardlook.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FOAA-000364-and-000365.pdf>

January 30, 2012:

Another guesstimate and
some fuzzy math:

000431

MaineDOT

Memo

To: I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study Project File
From: Ken Sweeney, P. E. - Chief Engineer *KS*
CC: Russell Charette, Project Manager
Date: January 30, 2012
Re: Planning Level Cost Estimates for the Alternatives 2B-2, 5A2B-2, 5B2B-2

The build alternatives have been designed as a two-lane road within a two-lane right-of-way using MaineDOT's criteria for freeways. The latest estimate to construct the build alternatives dated December 2011 range from approximately \$93 million for Alternative 2B-2 to \$122 million for Alternative 5A2B-2.

After reviewing the cost estimates for the build alternatives, the cost estimates should be reduced by one-third, for planning purposes moving forward. The basis for this one-third reduction includes, but is not limited to:

- Reducing the number of structures that need to meet 1.2 stream bankfull structure design would reduce structure costs.
- Using a rolling design, earthwork quantities would be reduced by approximately one-third
- Recognizing that lump sum items – drainage, signing and pavement marking, erosion and sedimentation control, maintenance and protection of traffic, and mobilization – were calculated as a percentage of construction, additional savings would be realized for these items
- Reducing the contingency percentage from 20% to 10%.
- Reducing the design engineering and construction engineering services, based on the type of construction, from 16% to 10%.

January 30, 2012 – The Chief Engineer decides that the estimates of December 2011 should be reduced by one third. A one third reduction of \$93.24 million would then be \$62.19 million which is not the \$61 million as published in the March 2012 DEIS. As can be seen below, a cost of \$62.19 million would have exceeded the \$61.424 million benefits and thus the BCR would have been below 1.0.

March 8, 2012 cost \$61
million per the Draft EIS
[Draft EIS](#). (Page 54)

Estimated Construction Costs

The estimated construction costs of alternatives include the costs of preliminary engineering, construction engineering, utility relocation, acquisition of property for right-of-way, and mitigating environmental impacts. The costs of the build alternatives would range between approximately \$61 million and \$81 million (in 2011 dollars).

- Note that 2B-2 was the \$61 million alternative.
[DEIS pages S15/S18](#)

August 1, 2012 – BCR of 1.1

[FOAA #000185](#) and [#000187](#) (page 277-279):

I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study Environmental Impact Statement
Net Present Value Analysis and Benefit-Cost Ratio of Modeled Transportation Benefits
August 1, 2012

	Installation	Benefits
SUM OF PRESENT VALUES	61,000,000	61,424,195
AVERAGE ANNUAL EQUIVALENTS	5,381,279	5,798,009
BENEFIT-COST RATIO	1.1	
AVG ANN EQVLNT NET BNFTS	\$416,731	

000185

Stewart, Jean

From: Charette, Russ
Sent: Thursday, August 02, 2012 1:03 PM
To: Sweeney, Ken
Cc: Thomson, Herb
Subject: FW: 395 - Net Present Value and B/C Ratio of Transportation Benefits of 2B-2
Attachments: I-395 - Route 9 study net present value bc ratio 08022012.xlsx

Ken,

Attached please find a Benefit/Cost analysis for Alternative 2B-2. The B/C number calculated is 1.1. A 7% discount rate was used based on guidance material from FHWA and the White on calculation of B/C numbers. (references: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/asstmgmt/primer03.cfm>, & http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a094)

The B/C number does not include the costs for maintenance nor the added benefits from job creation.

The additional transportation benefits beyond the 20 year design period are also not included in the benefit side of transportation.

I also ran a sensitivity analysis on the discount rate. At an 8% discount rate, the B/c number is equal to 1.0. Using a discount rate lower than 7% increases the B/C number above 1.1.

October 23, 2017 cost \$79.25 million and BCR is now 1.3, per the [INFRA grant application](#); the. One could ask how the benefits managed to increase over that 5 year period from 1.1 to 1.3; was the BCR embellished for the INFRA grant application?

Exhibit 4.1 – Total Project Cost

	MaineDOT	Other Federal (STP)	INFRA	Total	Percentage of Total Project Cost
Preliminary Engineering	\$3,900,000	\$1,600,000	\$0	\$5,500,000	7%
Right of Way	\$5,450,000	\$4,200,000	\$0	\$9,650,000	12%
Construction	\$27,175,000	\$0	\$33,825,000	\$61,000,000	77%
Construction Engineering	\$3,100,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,100,000	4%
TOTAL	\$39,625,000	\$5,800,000	\$33,825,000	\$79,250,000	100%
% of TOTAL Project	50%	7%	43%	100%	

October 23, 2017 total cost was \$79.25 million.

The BCR is now 1.3 when it was 1.1 in August 2012.

All INFRA grant funding for the project will be expended on actual construction costs. It will not be used for engineering-related costs or any right of way acquisition.

Actual INFRA grant received was \$25 million. Not sure how that skews project cost data.

b. Future Eligible Costs

Future eligible costs for the project are presented in Exhibit 4.2 below.

Exhibit 4.2 – Future Eligible Costs

Total Project Cost	\$79,250,000
Previously Incurred Expenses to Date (PE and ROW)	\$305,069
Future Eligible Costs	\$78,944,931

Note: Previously incurred costs noted above relate to preliminary engineering and right of way only; the planning study and NEPA compliance (\$3.10 million) related to this project were expended as part of a separate project and not reflected in this calculation.

Of the total future eligible project costs, MaineDOT has already programmed \$1,450,000 in State funds and \$5,800,000 in Federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds for a total of \$7,250,000 (80% Federal/20% state match) for this project, as shown in MaineDOT's current State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) found here: http://www.maine.gov/mdot/stip/docs/FinalSTIP2017_2018_2019_2020.pdf

The remainder of the non-federal match (\$38,175,000) will be reflected in MaineDOT's upcoming STIP(s) and will be programmed using state-derived funds.

INFRA funds will comprise the remaining project balance of \$33,825,000.

c. Non-Federal Funds

Funding for the entirety of MaineDOT's portion of the project will be state-derived (Highway Fund revenues and/or General Obligation Bond proceeds). A match commitment letter from the MaineDOT Commissioner is attached as Attachment B. MaineDOT is well equipped to manage and administer this grant, having received and managed several USDOT grants for highway, railroad and transit programs including previous TIGER and FASTLANE awards. MaineDOT estimates that an additional \$500,000 in expenditures for preliminary engineering and right of way acquisition for the project will be incurred, prior to the award of the INFRA grant.

Exhibit 5.4 - Benefit Cost Analysis Summary

	Sum of Present Values	Annual Average Equivalent Value
Benefits	\$75,726,400	\$5,308,600
Costs	\$56,418,200	\$3,955,000
Net Benefits	\$19,308,200	\$1,353,600
Benefit to Cost Ratio	1.3	1.3

Benefits and costs were brought to present value using a 7% discount rate, amortized over the 40-year project analysis period (Exhibit 5.4). The average annual equivalent value of benefits is \$5,308,600, compared to \$3,955,000 in average annual equivalent costs. Average annual equivalent net benefits are \$1,353,600, and the benefit to cost ratio is 1.3.

Benefit-Cost Analysis of October 2017:

More fuzzy math? I have no idea what the \$56,418,200 cost under the sum of Present Values represents, when the total project cost is \$79.25 million and the construction cost alone is \$61 million. The DOT did not include BCR analysis in the INFRA Grant application.

Benefit–Cost Analysis:

Benefit–cost ratios (BCR) are used to analyze the monetary value of benefits versus costs over the 20 year design–life of a transportation project during the study process. Benefit/cost analysis determines the value of a project by dividing the incremental monetized benefits related to a project by the incremental costs of that project. A 1.3 BCR simply means the project's benefits are 1.3 greater than the project's cost; a ratio equal to or greater than 1.0 is a viable project; below 1.0 is not viable. The \$100 million Wiscasset Bypass (cancelled in August 2011) had BCR's of 2.27, 2.43 and 2.47; providing almost twice the benefits than the \$79.25 million I-395/Route 9 connector with an underwhelming 1.3 BCR in 2017.

Benefit/cost ratios can be used to compare the relative value of different projects. Various projects may be prioritized (in terms of economic efficiency), assessing each project individually and calculating the B/C ratio for each project. In comparing the various projects, those projects with the highest B/C ratio would be ranked as the most efficient. Net Benefit is determined by summing all benefits and subtracting the sum of all costs of a project. This output provides an absolute measure of benefits (total dollars), rather than the relative measures provided by B/C ratio.

Table 2-1 Comparison of Projects Using B/C Ratio and Net Benefit

	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3
Benefits	\$200,000	\$150,000	\$400,000
Costs	\$50,000	\$100,000	\$200,000
B/C Ratio (Benefits/Costs)	4.0	1.5	2.0
Net Benefit (Benefits–Costs)	\$150,000	\$50,000	\$200,000

Table 2-1 Comparison of Projects Using B/C Ratio and Net Benefit

(Dollar amounts in millions)

	Wiscasset	I-395/2017	I-395/2020
Benefits	\$239.0	\$103.025	\$103.025
Costs	\$100.0	\$79.25	\$100.0
B/C Ratio (Benefits/Costs)	2.39 average	1.3	1.03
Net Benefit (Benefits–Costs)	\$139.0	\$23.775	\$3.025

[FHWA](#) Table 2.1 (left) shows how BCR works. Table 2.1 (right) shows what happened as the construction cost increased for the connector from October 2017 to January 2020. If the cost increases and the benefits stay stable—the net benefits decrease and the BCR decreases towards unviability. One has to wonder why the Wiscasset Bypass was cancelled when it yielded almost 6 times the net benefits than the I-395 connector.

“Average annual equivalent values” and “sum of present values” are used in BCR analysis—compare October 2017 BCR and [August 2012 BCR](#) (pg.279) analyses. Using the \$79.25 million cost from the INFRA grant and the \$75,726,400 benefit in Exhibit 5.4 on page 12, would yield an unviable 0.95 BCR. BCR analysis was inferred to be in ["Attachment" A](#), but [Appendix A](#) contains no such analysis, so we are at a loss how the BCR was computed.

In simple math, knowing the cost (\$79.25 million) and knowing the BCR (1.3); solving for B equals \$103.025 million and I contend once the cost exceeds \$103.025 million, the project is no longer viable and should be cancelled. It's not as important whether you are using “equivalent values” as the DOT or simplified dollar figures using simple math ratios, the important fact is that rising labor costs will cause a decrease in BCR—resulting in a decrease in overall net benefits if the benefits remain unchanged. And today, we don't even know what the actual cost is and if the project is even still viable; we deserve to know the project's status immediately. What are they hiding?

Click here for further information on Benefit-Cost analysis from the [FHWA](#).

January 14, 2020: total project cost is \$100 million (maybe).

A clue to the current cost of the I-395/Route 9 connector can be found in the following statement on page v. of the MaineDOT's [2020-2021-2022 Work Plan](#): “\$25-million INFRA grant for the I-395/Route 9 Connector, providing a quarter of the estimated total project cost;”

- **Cost increased from \$79.25 million in the October 23, 2017 INFRA Grant to \$100 million by January 14, 2020; a \$20.75 million (26.2%) increase in cost over that 26.7 month period—an average increase of 0.98% per month. The overall 26.2 % cost increase actually appears low when compared to the 46% and 60% cost increases reported by the MaineDOT and the MTA.**

Note: Since the DOT has chosen non-transparency as their means of public involvement, the dates referenced above are dates with bona fide references and not necessarily when a specific action occurred. Study updates aren't a normal occurrence and real-time facts are virtually non-existent.

- In October, the [gridlocked blue-ribbon commission](#) was informed of the [\\$232 million shortfall](#) for road and bridge maintenance—a [46% increase](#) (\$73 million) from estimates in March mostly attributed to rising costs of construction—AND—the estimated cost of the [Gorham Connector](#) has increased by as much as 60% (\$87 million) over the past two years.

The connector's project cost has increased by 26.2% as the DOT/MTA reported increased construction costs of 46% over an eight month period and as much as 60% over a two year period, almost the same two year period as the 26.2% increase in the connector's cost.

Could it be that the cost is as high as \$115.705 to \$126.8 million with unviable BCR's of 0.81 to 0.89—exceeding the BCR by \$12.68 to \$23.775 million?

Assuming the benefit remains unchanged from Oct. 2017 when the BCR was 1.3 and the cost was \$79.25 million, the resulting benefit is still \$103.025 million. The project becomes unviable when the cost exceeds \$103.025 million; this project is only \$3 million away from unviability—right now—and that is if the cost is really only \$100 million, and the cost may already surpass the benefits. The BCR may already be below 1.0 and thus the I-395 connector is no longer a viable project and must be immediately suspended.

If you choose to ignore the increases of 46% to 60% that both the DOT/MTA have experienced and would rather use the presumptive 0.98%/month increased cost experienced with the connector from 2017 to 2020, assuming the costs increase at that same rate, **by January 2022 the connector could easily cost \$123,520,000.**

The BCR with a projected cost of \$123.52 million by January 2022 would be 0.83 and that is unviable—how does the MaineDOT spin that? Will they say that the benefits have also increased when it is a fact that the cost has increased mainly due to construction costs—how would that affect the benefits—wouldn't the benefits remain relatively constant? I contend that the benefits will not change if the costs consist of mostly labor costs and not something that could affect both cost and benefits, such as the price of fuel.

The cost in January 2022 may easily double the original \$61 million cost referenced in the March 2012 DEIS—with change left over.

Why does MaineDOT continue to promote a controversial project, that doesn't meet the original purpose and needs, when the project may no longer even be viable—when Maine has unmet transportation needs?

Once again—when it comes to the connector—the DOT stonewalls—staying mum even after multiple media reports referencing the work plan's -\$232 million shortfall, after letters to the editor published in the [BDN](#) and the [PPH](#), nothing—nada, only one mention lately in the report about the [\\$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 Bridge replacement](#). The Turnpike authority went to the media when the [Gorham Bypass](#) construction costs had increased by as much as 60% over the past two years, voicing their concerns, arguing in favor of the project and advising how they planned to pay for it. Yet, the MaineDOT stays quiet about the I-395 connector—what are they hiding?

Do we trust the MaineDOT to let us know when the cost makes this project unviable—OR—will the DOT just keep throwing money at a project we do not support? Why are they so willing to promote this one single controversial project when the results will not meet the original purpose and needs?

- **What's the total cost and the BCR now in 2020, and the projected cost and BCR at the start of construction in 2021 and commissioning in 2024?**
- **As construction costs increase due to labor costs, is it SOP to disregard the BCR parameter that allowed the project to be initially approved?**

If we were still in the study with such a high a cost and an underwhelming BCR (lower 1.0's), would it still be approved? I contend NO and there should be no difference today. **If the costs are too high and the BCR is no longer viable—this project needs to be revalidated or cancelled immediately before construction starts on the 1st phase of the project: the Wilson Street bridge.**

History of costs from December 2011 to 2020 and to 2022:

\$93.24 million on 12.06.2011 per [FOAA #000391 and #000392](#)

\$<65.0 million on 1.13.2012 per [FOAA #000364](#) (“no greater than \$65 M”)

\$62.19 million on 1.30.2012 per Memo [FOAA # 000431](#) (“reduced by one third”)

\$61.0 million on 3.07.2012 per the [DEIS](#) (s15/s18)

\$79.25 million on 10.23.2017 per the [INFRA grant application](#)

\$100.0 million on 1.14.2020 per the [2020-2022 work plan](#) (26.2% increase)

\$115.7 to \$126.8 million on 1.14.2020 based on DOT/MTA increases of 46-60%

\$123.52 million in two years based on 26.2% cost increase from 2017 to 2020

The DOT has offered no explanation on 2B-2's costs over the history of this study/project. We have been treated to intentional misinformation, outright lies, fuzzy math, months and months of quiet, resulting in a questionable, controversial project with ever-changing needs for \$61 million in 2012—that connector has turned into a \$100 million boondoggle in 2020.

Alternatives	Description	Meets Purpose		Meets Needs		
		Study Purpose	USACE Purpose	System Linkage	Safety Concerns	Traffic Congestion
Alternative 2B-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfies design criteria Length: 6.1 mi. of new alignment, 4.2 mi. of Route 9 without additional improvements Bridge length: 2,232 ft. Earthwork: 2.2 mcy (1.2 mcy cut, 1.0 mcy fill) 	Yes	Yes	In the near-term (Year 2035)	Yes	Yes

The I-395/Route 9 Connector is nothing more than a band-aid fix; a near-term project with no long-term benefits, no funding and no plans. Please view the

the Draft EIS [page 258 of Appendix C](#) and note the highlighted “less than YES” answer under the Meets Needs System Linkage column: “In the near-term (Year 2035)”. Is this alternative worthy of a \$100 million expenditure?

This project does not meet the long-term needs and thus does not provide long-term benefits; the MaineDOT can't have it both ways—in MaineDOT's own words, this project is a near-term (short-term) project and thus does not meet Governor Mills' Infrastructure Policy to “invest in projects that will show a long-term benefit, versus short-term appearances.”

2B-2 is the ultimate photo-op and nothing more; unplanned and unfunded long-term needs have been punted 20 years into an unknown future for your children to pay for. If Maine can't afford to fix the roads we already have, how will they afford to rehabilitate this boondoggle twenty years from now?

It's about time that the MaineDOT comes to the City of Brewer and explain how they plan to pay for this connector when they can't even pay to maintain our existing roads and bridges.

The fact is, actions over the past ten years have given us no reason to trust the MaineDOT and yes, I have lost faith in our government. I believe today's \$100 million cost is probably low, and may be more likely as high as \$115.705 to \$126.8 million using similar cost increases (46% and 60%) that the DOT/MTA have recently experienced.

The DOT cannot keep pouring our limited dollars into this project as the end-cost overwhelms the project's limited benefits.

The Connector somehow survives any serious scrutiny once again:

Commissioner Van Note “struck a dour tone” saying his DOT is “spreading what used to be two years of capital projects over three years...competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system” with the cancellation of 142 essential road and bridge projects—with no mention of the connector.



As “dour” as DOT officials articulate the \$232 million annual budget shortfall and the ensuing cancellation of 142 projects, this \$100 million connector project somehow survives any serious scrutiny once again...

What was conveniently left out of the Work Plan rollout and the “notable projects” that Van Note discussed was that the MaineDOT will soon bid the \$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 bridge project in Brewer, the replacement of a perfectly good bridge considered to be the first phase of the controversial \$100 million I-395/Route 9 Connector, a project that is already partially funded with \$57.3 million of limited transportation dollars in this same work plan—that is notable—and Maine deserves the truth. Things cannot be so dour when you are sitting on that kind of money for one single controversial project while 142 other projects go unfunded.

MaineDOT Chief Engineer, Joyce Taylor, in a January 16, 2020 [Bangor Daily News](#) article: “She worries such efforts won’t last long, noting big projects—such as an \$85 million planned replacement of the International Bridge in Madawaska using \$35 million in federal money [INFRA grant funding]—can crowd smaller projects out.”

“We have to ask, ‘Are we going to lose ground on other projects?’” she said. How about the \$100 million I-395/Route 9 Connector using \$25 million in Federal INFRA grant money. How is it possible that the connector project always seems to be left out of the conversation? What are they hiding?

The blue-ribbon commission is [deadlocked](#); 142 projects will not be funded; the amount of bridge repairs are reduced; road paving may be downgraded to light paving or patching or nothing at all, as the annual shortfall in the roads and bridge maintenance budget is -\$232 million. AND—the governor just gave \$10 million of G.O. money to the DOT—when I contend the DOT should be investigated for mismanagement of the state’s infrastructure program. DOT’s priority must be the maintenance and repair of our existing roads and bridges, not another north of Augusta bypass-boondoggle.

Maine needs more money for roads. Drivers should be the first to pay more.



Pat Wellenbach | AP

By The Editorial Board. The BDN Opinion Section operates independently and does not set newsroom policies, or contribute to reporting or editing articles elsewhere in the newspaper or on bangordailynews.com. •

March 6, 2020 1:55 pm

There's no disagreement in Augusta that Maine needs to spend more money to maintain and repair its roads. There is, however, little agreement on where that money should come from.

A guiding principle in this debate should be that funds devoted to transportation infrastructure should come primarily from the users of that infrastructure.

That's the idea behind the state's [highway fund](#), a pot of money that is meant, under language in the [state Constitution](#), to be used for highway needs. So, logically, if the state does not have enough money to pay for needed road repairs and improvements, it needs to first put more money into the highway fund. The most direct way to do this is to raise more revenue from the major sources of highway fund money — fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees.

Alternatively, lawmakers can use general fund money to pay for road and bridge work. Gov. Janet Mills proposed [allocating \\$10 million](#) in general fund money toward road work.

A commission, created last year, to recommend ways to fill the state's [\\$232 annual transportation repair and improvement shortfall](#), has [called for a mix of the two](#) — although it largely punted on how to raise more highway fund revenue. In addition, transportation work is funded by borrowed money, with Maine voters approving bonds of roughly \$100 million each year in recent years.

The commission called for lawmakers to immediately put between \$20 million and \$60 million of general fund money toward plugging some of the transportation shortfall. At a time when the state has many critical needs — such as reducing, or better, eliminating the waitlists for services that enable children, adults and seniors need for their daily lives — this is backward.

The logical first step to ensuring Maine has more money for transportation needs is to increase the amount of money in the highway fund. Yes, this means raising taxes or fees, but tying the revenue collection (from highway users) to its use (improving Maine's highways) simply makes sense.

More than two-thirds of the revenue in the highway fund comes from fuel taxes. These tax rates — 30 cents per gallon of gasoline and 31 cents on a gallon of diesel — were frozen in 2011 by the Republican-controlled Legislature. Previously, they were indexed to the rate of inflation. If the gas tax had kept [pace with inflation](#), it would have raised tens of millions of dollars in additional revenue for road and bridge work.

According to the Department of Transportation, a 1 cent increase to the gas tax would generate [\\$7.5 million in annual revenue](#). So, a 10 cent per gallon increase would generate \$75 million a year. The trucking industry, which would bear much of the cost of a higher fuel tax, [has said it supports](#) a 15- to 20-cent increase. This additional revenue, which would come at a time when fuel prices are relatively low, would go a long way to closing the transportation funding gap.

Fuel taxes aren't the only solution. As people drive more fuel efficient vehicles and the state invests in electric vehicle infrastructure, gas tax collections will shrink.

This highlights the need for other revenue sources, some of which the [commission on transportation funding](#) discussed, but it failed to make solid recommendations about them. These include raising the tax on rental cars in Maine, a reasonable idea that was part of a [tax reform package rejected](#) by lawmakers in 2013, and a surcharge on hybrid and electric vehicles, [another idea](#) rejected by lawmakers in recent years.

The funding commission failed Maine residents by not making solid recommendations on funding sources, other than a diversion of general fund money to transportation work. Lawmakers can remedy this by taking the politically unpopular, but necessary, step of approving a plan to increase fuel taxes as the first step in raising the revenue needed to maintain Maine's transportation infrastructure.

Aroostook County is getting the biggest chunk of Maine's 2020 road budget



Morgan Mitchell | BDN

This image from December 2018 captures the view looking down Bridge Avenue in Madawaska toward the international bridge to Edmundston, New Brunswick.

By [Alexander MacDougall](#) • March 8, 2020

[Interactive map: See all of Maine's planned construction projects for 2020](#)

[Click here to view this article online.](#)

HOULTON, Maine — Road projects in Aroostook County will have the highest estimated cost of any county in the state this year, according to data obtained from the Maine Department of Transportation.

Projects around The County will cost approximately \$135 million as part of the Transportation Department's work plan for 2020, according to the figures. The amount exceeds that allotted to Penobscot County at \$102 million and Cumberland County at \$97 million, which were the second- and third-highest county recipients for road projects.

The bulk of the money entering Aroostook is going toward the international bridge that connects the town of Madawaska to the Canadian city of Edmundston. Totaling at more than \$84 million, it accounts for more than half of the funding for road projects in The County for the 2020 fiscal year, and is the largest single road project in the entire state in terms of cost.

The current bridge spanning the St. John River, which defines much of the border between northern Maine and New Brunswick, is approaching 100 years old, and is the subject of a five-ton weight restriction that was placed on it in 2017. The weight restriction means that heavier vehicles that may be transporting goods for key industries in the region, such as lumber and paper, are forced to find a detour.

The Transportation Department did receive a \$36 million federal grant last July to assist in the financing of the project, but even after subtracting that amount, it still remains the most expensive project for the state.

“This is a challenging project because we have the U.S. customs facility right there. This is a bridge over an international waterway connecting two countries, so you can think of all the entities that are involved to make sure this happens and it happens right,” said Paul Merrill, a spokesman for the Transportation Department. “This involves the U.S. government, the Canadian government, the state of Maine, the province of New Brunswick, the towns of Edmundston and Madawaska — and certainly anyone who lives and works around that area is going to be affected so we’re doing our best to make sure that people know what is going on.”

Merrill also said that the department lacks the necessary funds to do everything it needed to repair roads and bridges throughout the state, and unless a bipartisan consensus can be reached at the State House in Augusta, it is likely to remain that way.

“We know that the roads and projects need more attention than we’re able to provide,” he said. “They are all safe, otherwise we would close them, but we know they need attention and we’ll just do our best to try to make the best of the funds we have and keep fighting for more.”

Other notable projects in Aroostook are a slope stabilization project off Route 161 in Allagash for \$8.7 million, bridge rehabilitation projects along the Maine Northern Railway for \$5.7 million and reconstruction around Houlton International Airport for \$4.7 million.

Though Madawaska’s new bridge is by far the largest project in Maine in terms of cost, the other members of the top three costliest projects in the state are also bridge replacements: One at the town line between Brunswick and Topsham that also traverses Cumberland and Sagadahoc counties, costs \$19.8 million. It’s followed by a \$17.9 million bridge replacement project in Portland.

Penobscot County’s most expensive projects also included bridgework, with a \$13.5 million budget for fixing the Wilson Street Bridge in Brewer, and \$10 million for improvements to the Detective Benjamin Campbell Bridge in Millinocket.

The most expensive project in Penobscot county is the Wilson Street/I395 Bridge in Brewer—a perfectly good bridge that is only being replaced to support the new connector project that the City of Brewer does not support. The bridge replacement is considered the first phase of the connector project.

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Gov. Mills' bond package gets first hearing

Gov. Mills' infrastructure bond package gets first hearing



By Paul Dwyer | Posted: Wed 6:20 PM, Mar 11, 2020

AUGUSTA, Maine (WABI) State lawmakers held a public hearing Wednesday on Governor Janet Mills' proposed bond package. It would provide over one hundred million dollars for Maine's infrastructure.



"People from both parties talk about how important this is, but I think we need to put our money where our mouth is and come through for Maine people on this," said Rep. Drew Gattine (D) Westbrook, who sponsored the bill on behalf of Mills.

The bill proposes \$105 million in bond funding for roads and bridges, and \$15

million for broadband expansion. These funds would also be able to leverage federal and private funds. Democrats are on board.

"We really need to do whatever we can to expand access to broadband into our rural communities," said Gattine. "People who live in more urbanized areas obviously have better access, but we can't just leave our rural communities behind."

Republicans say they are waiting to take a position on the bill. They are citing a desire to fix roads and bridges, but with a long-term solution instead of bonding.

"We are very much in favor of addressing the problem, particularly on a long-term basis," said Rep. Sawin Millett, R-Waterford. "And bonding is one way of dealing with it. It's the way we've been dealing with it for the last decade. It's 100 million a year, every year. We don't think that's the long-term solution."

The commissioners of the Department of Transportation and the Department of Economic and Community Development testified in support of the bill.

"Critical infrastructure is the only way the economy can grow," said DECD Commissioner Heather Johnson. "Having good roads is the path for goods and services and people. And having good broadband infrastructure is the path for data and information. Both are now critical in our economy."

We're told they're likely to have a work session on the bill Thursday.

[Click here to view this article and video online.](#)

Let's see, borrow another \$105 million again this November or cancel the \$100 million I-395 connector project and put that money back into the unmet transportation needs of our state? They just don't get it...

Lawmakers urged to borrow funds for roads and high-speed internet

The bill, which would also need voter approval, would funnel \$90 million to the state's highway fund and \$15 million towards the expansion of high-speed internet for parts of rural Maine.

BY **SCOTT THISTLE** STAFF WRITER | [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE.](#)

AUGUSTA — Maine must pass another borrowing package to fix roads and bridges because longer-term solutions to pay for such projects are at least a year away, state Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note told lawmakers Wednesday.

A [special blue-ribbon task force on transportation](#) funding is scheduled to release a report to the Legislature on Thursday, but it [offers no long-term solutions and instead recommends the problem be put off for the Legislature to tackle in 2021](#), Van Note said. [Maine's ailing highway fund is about \\$230 million short each year for ongoing maintenance.](#)

Van Note said the task force determined that adding 9 cents a gallon to the state's gas tax would raise an additional \$68 million a year for the highway fund, but it is not formally recommending doing that.

Van Note, speaking to the Legislature's budget-writing Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, was testifying in support of a new state borrowing package that would provide some [\\$90 million for the state's highway fund](#) and another \$15 million for other transportation projects, including bike and pedestrian paths, and ports and rail lines. The package also includes \$15 million to expand high-speed internet to underserved parts of the state.

The bonding bill, which would need two-thirds support in the Legislature and statewide voter ratification in the fall, is the latest in an ongoing pattern of borrowing to pay for highway maintenance in Maine. [Van Note told lawmakers that, even though he supports the borrowing bill, it would add to the state's debt payment for transportation projects, which is now about \\$52 million a year.](#)

Van Note called the bond proposal "mission critical" and noted that the department's 2020 work plan lists more than 2,000 projects that are ongoing or planned.

“Simply put, Maine DOT’s work plan, which has already been pared back to unsustainable levels due to recent cost increases, cannot be delivered without this bond, similar bonds in the future or replacement funding,” Van Note said.

A sustainable long-term funding source for transportation has been elusive, and many lawmakers have opposed increasing the state’s gas tax. Republicans have pushed for additional funding from the state’s general fund surplus and [have criticized Gov. Janet Mills for only offering \\$10 million to the fund](#) in her supplemental budget proposal this year.

Van Note said the need to invest in expanding high-speed internet in rural Maine has been exacerbated by the coronavirus outbreak, noting that delivering educational programming for K-12 and colleges and universities was going to depend on the internet.

About a dozen advocates, including Commissioner of Community and Economic Development Heather Johnson, testified in support of the borrowing package. But it whether it will get two-thirds support in the Legislature is unclear. A near carbon copy of the bill was rejected twice by Republicans in 2019.

While Republicans eventually approved transportation borrowing in September, and voters approved that bond in November, [the road ahead for another borrowing bill could be politically difficult with all 186 legislative seats up for election this year.](#)

But Johnson said funding for transportation and internet connectivity improvements are critical to the state’s economy.

“A strong economy that provides family-supporting incomes and productivity growth allows us to invest in other areas that collectively improve the high quality of life that we all enjoy in Maine,” Johnson said.

She said Maine is at an economic crossroads in 2020. While industries are making breakthroughs in areas from renewable fuels to new wood fiber products, they need stable infrastructure, especially roads to get products to market and connectivity to market and manage distribution of those goods.

“I believe that the value of broadband is widely agreed upon,” Johnson said. But some 85,000 Mainers are without reliable connectivity, she said. “Broadband is not a partisan issue. It is a lifeline to rural Maine.”

The bonding package would also help the state pull down private and federal matching funds. [The highway bonds, for example, would draw down an additional \\$275 million in federal funds](#) and the funds to expand high-speed internet would be matched with federal and private funding, Johnson said. The bill will be the subject of a work session before it is sent to the full Legislature, likely later this month.



Maine lawmakers send forward transportation, internet bonds

Maine lawmakers send forward transportation, internet bonds

The bond questions will be put to Maine voters on the June 9 congressional primary ballot.

BY [J. CRAIG ANDERSON](#) STAFF WRITER | MARCH 18, 2020 | [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#).

Two bond measures sought by Gov. Janet Mills to borrow \$105 million for transportation projects and \$15 million for broadband expansion projects cleared the Legislature Tuesday night.

The bond questions will be put to Maine voters on the June 9 congressional primary ballot.

The transportation bond question will read:

“Do you favor a \$105,000,000 bond issue for improvement of highways and bridges statewide and for multimodal facilities or equipment related to transit, freight and passenger railroads, aviation, ports, harbors, marine transportation and active transportation projects, to be used to match an estimated \$275,000,000 in federal and other funds?”

The broadband expansion bond question will read:

“Do you favor a \$15,000,000 bond issue to invest in high-speed internet infrastructure for unserved and underserved areas, to be used to match up to \$30,000,000 in federal, private, local or other funds?”

Maine Turnpike traffic down sharply amid coronavirus outbreak



Troy R. Bennett | BDN

By Irwin Gratz, Maine Public • March 25, 2020

Traffic on the Maine Turnpike has fallen drastically — by about half — in recent days. Meanwhile, the Maine Turnpike Authority has sent most staff home, but is planning to continue construction for now.

Turnpike Authority Executive Director Peter Mills said regular auto commuters seem to make up the bulk of the decline in traffic, as more people are either working from home or not working at all.

Mills said much of the remaining traffic is trucks that are moving goods from warehouses to stores or from out-of-state companies into Maine.

Because of that, he said turnpike revenue is not down as much as vehicle counts are.

Mills said only about a quarter of the turnpike's staff is currently working. Mills, who was working from the turnpike's headquarters in Portland, said it "is essentially a ghost town," with only about 15 people on the job, down from more than 100 most weekdays.

For now, turnpike employees, whether at work or not, are being paid.

"We made a commitment to do it for two weeks," Mill said.

While Mills said he's not sure what will happen after that, "the first priority of this organization is to retain our workforce."

Nonetheless, construction work is continuing. Mills said this week the authority is likely to approve the first phase of a widening project in Greater Portland. It will add a third lane in each direction from the Interstate 295 exit in Scarborough into South Portland.

Mills said decisions can be made this fall and winter on the second and third phases of the widening project.

This article appears through a media partnership with [Maine Public](#).

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Updated March 24

Plummeting Maine Turnpike traffic a 'proxy for economic collapse'

Daily vehicle traffic on the turnpike dropped precipitously last week as employees worked from home and businesses closed.

BY [PETER MCGUIRE](#) STAFF WRITER

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE.](#)

Traffic on the Maine Turnpike has become increasingly sparse as Mainers have followed government guidance to stay near home and limit nonessential travel.

Daily traffic dropped by 20 percent between Monday and Friday of last week, according to data provided by the Maine Turnpike Authority. Last Friday, there were about 155,700 vehicles on the road, less than half the number on the same day a week before.

Weekend traffic was down by almost 50 percent from the same period last year. On Sunday, fewer than 81,000 vehicles drove on the turnpike, almost 57 percent below the same day in 2019.

"It really just shows a record of how rapidly commerce has deteriorated," said turnpike authority Executive Director Peter Mills. "It is a very good proxy for economic collapse."

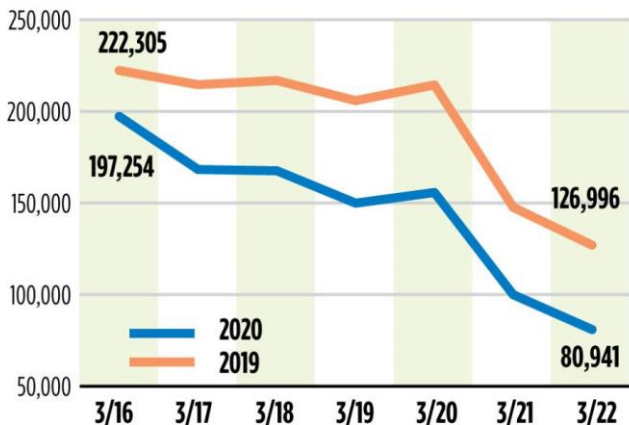
Even the impact a multi-day snowstorm can have on vehicle traffic is an inaccurate comparison to the current persistent decline. It is likely fewer cars will be on the road after Wednesday, following Gov. Janet Mills' [move to impose new restrictions](#) on nonessential businesses.

“We don’t have these extended periods, when traffic is off by 50 percent now for a week at a time,” Peter Mills said. “I’m trying to remember anything to compare it to and I can’t.”

There also has been a double-digit decline in traffic on state roads in general, based on initial observations by the Maine Department of Transportation. Still, the department would not release traffic data because it is incomplete and too early to indicate a trend, said state traffic engineer Steve Landry.

Maine Turnpike volume

Between last Friday and Sunday, about 336,600 vehicles were on the turnpike, almost 47 percent lower than the same weekend in 2019.



SOURCE: Maine Turnpike Authority STAFF GRAPHIC | MICHAEL FISHER

At first glance, it seems vehicle counts are down more on the interstate and urban parts of southern Maine compared with rural parts of the state, he said.

“We are seeing a reduction, but we don’t know how long it is going to last or if this is a blip,” Landry said.

A sudden decline in passenger traffic on the turnpike drove overall volume down, said turnpike authority Chief Financial Officer Doug Davidson in an interview last week.

Passenger cars were down nearly 19 percent as of last Thursday, as many office employees working from home avoided their daily commute and other businesses closed their doors. The most noticeable drop was on a typically busy stretch of highway around Portland between Biddeford-Saco and Falmouth, Davidson said.

At the same time, commercial traffic was still flowing up and down the highway, he added. Over the week, truck traffic was down just 1 percent from the year before, as supermarkets and other stores restocked depleted shelves.

“Goods are flowing, people are not,” Davidson said.

Turnpike records mirror national traffic trends tracked by Inrix, a location and mobility data and analytics company based in Washington. In a Monday post, the company said [personal vehicle travel was down 30 percent nationwide](#) for the seven days beginning March 14, compared with the last week in February.

Before the sudden impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the Maine Turnpike was heading into another record-breaking year for traffic and toll revenue.

Turnpike traffic has increased by 13 percent in five years. Last year, it hit a record at nearly 90 million fare transactions. Until this month, yearly traffic had increased by almost 7 percent in 2020, according to Davidson.

Maine's transportation networks [ground to a halt last week](#) as businesses eliminated nonessential travel and people heeded government warnings to stay home and avoid groups in an effort to limit the spread of coronavirus.

By the end of last week, airplane boardings at Portland International Jetport dropped by roughly 70 percent compared with the year before. The Amtrak Downeaster passenger rail and Concord Coach Lines bus company dramatically reduced service between Maine communities and Boston in reaction to absent customer demand.

It is too early to tell what a sustained drop in traffic will mean for the turnpike's finances, Peter Mills said. The authority's board of directors is expected to meet this week to vote on awarding a \$28 million contract to [widen 5 miles of highway from four to six lanes](#) north of Scarborough.

"My present instinct is to go to my board on Thursday and recommend going ahead with the contract," he said. "It is a good way to keep commerce moving in southern Maine."