"One angry man with a laptop"

Welcome to the 4th quarter of 2020, year twenty of the controversial $104 million I-395/Route 9 connector boondoggle; the annual shortfall in the road and bridge budget is now $232 million with 142 projects cancelled in the Work Plan. In April, the DOT projected a loss in the Highway Fund of $125 million over the next 18 months. We can't afford this project, but that does not deter the MaineDOT—nothing ever does…

Amidst a pandemic, with unknown financial outcomes, it makes no sense to go ahead with such a controversial $104 million project when many other transportation projects, in addition to the 142 projects already cancelled in January, may have to be cancelled due to the loss of revenues during the pandemic.

- It can't be business as usual as Mainers are suffering.

The first phase of the connector, replacing of the Wilson Street/I-395 Bridge has commenced. The low bid was Wyman Simpson of Richmond, Maine @ $10,744,235.

CNN BUSINESS

· PERSPECTIVES ·

Building more roads won't help fix America's economy

Opinion by Charles Marohn for CNN Business Perspectives

October 2, 2020 | Click here to view online.

KEITH BIRMINGHAM/PASADENA STAR-NEWS/SCNG/MEDIANEWS GROUP/PASADENA STAR-NEWS/GETTY IMAGES

Charles Marohn is founder and president of Strong Towns and the author of Strong Towns: A Bottom-Up Revolution to Rebuild American Prosperity. The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own.

CHARLES MAROHN

As America seeks to return to a growth economy after the recession, there will very likely be calls for aggressive investments in roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure as a way to quickly create jobs and spur economic growth. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has proposed a $1.3 trillion investment in infrastructure while President Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed support for a large infrastructure spending bill.

But state and local governments have long struggled to maintain their road networks, even in the best of times. There is a smarter way forward than simply building more roads and bridges that state and local governments can't afford to properly maintain. Instead, we need to focus on preserving what we have already built, surrounding that commitment with strategies to get higher returns out of these existing investments.

Roads were in rough shape pre-pandemic

Programs to build new transportation systems have become broadly popular. The interstates were completed decades ago, yet we continue to expand them, along with vast networks of local roads. So-called "fix it first" legislation, which requires transportation departments to certify that they can maintain what they have built, has failed to dampen demand for new lanes, interchanges and bridges.

While the federal government has been generous in funding expansion, the responsibility for maintenance mostly falls to state and local governments. The more we build, the more we must maintain. All this infrastructure becomes an endless obligation local taxpayers inherit, regardless of its value or productivity.

Cities and states are now overwhelmed with maintenance demands, a backlog of promises they lack the financial capacity to fulfill. To generate the revenue needed to maintain all those past investments, many suggest that we need to stimulate economic growth through even further expansion. But this is a misguided mentality.

Less driving means less transportation money

Even before the pandemic, Congress demonstrated reluctance to raise the gas tax to pay for transportation investments, but it was willing to borrow money to close annual deficits in the Highway Trust Fund, which collects and distributes federal gas tax revenues. State and local governments have also been willing to borrow enormous sums from the municipal bond market for transportation but, unlike the federal government, they are forced to service that debt with actual tax receipts to maintain a balanced budget.

It's finally time to spend money on infrastructure

For example, a state like New Jersey has one of the country's highest gas taxes, yet it typically spends nearly all of the revenue it collects on debt service from prior transportation projects. Texas tapped its rainy-day fund in 2014, and the following year redirected billions from sales tax revenues, all for transportation.

It's still not enough. Across the country, local government debt levels are near all-time highs.

Already burdened with massive maintenance backlogs and claims on future cash flows, state and local governments are now watching the pandemic strip them of their ability to respond to infrastructure issues. Gas tax receipts are down as people drive less. Sales tax receipts are down as people spend less. Residential mortgage delinquencies are up, and as work-from-home trends undermine the commercial real estate market, these two factors have raised doubts about future property tax receipts.

At the same time cities and states are reaching the breaking point on road maintenance, the money they were counting on is not there.

Transportation spending is not the key to economic recovery

Even if cities and states can get funding from the federal government for more frontage roads, interchanges, bridges and lane miles, is that really the best approach? When local governments don't maintain what they already have, can they credibly justify building more?

Instead of pursuing economic growth through system expansion, recovery must be based on a firm commitment to maintaining what has already been built and squeezing higher returns out of these existing infrastructure investments. This will require a nuanced and hyper-local approach to future transportation spending, one where local governments take their cue from the urgent needs of residents, instead of the latest popular infrastructure investment the federal government is funding.

The city of Muskegon, Michigan, for example, used some strategically placed storage sheds to connect their farmer's market to the downtown while creating entrepreneurial opportunities within their community. In Memphis, Tennessee, the successful transformation of a blighted block began with some paint, some benches and a few traffic cones. Cities across North America are reconfiguring streets for biking and walking, shifting parking spaces to street seating and giving their residents more of a say in how public infrastructure is used. These are all productive ways to add value to underutilized public investments.

The federal government can enable this shift by giving cities and states more authority, flexibility and responsibility. The infrastructure investments with the highest returns today are small. They look more like planting trees along streets and connecting sidewalks instead of funding another generation of

interstate-scale projects like more highway lanes, interchanges and frontage roads. These small investments are the work of local mayors and city councils.

Bottom-up investments have less risk and higher financial returns than the federally guided projects of the past. They will provide Americans with a higher quality of life and a more broadly shared prosperity with systems that are more empowering, responsive and just than our current top-down approach.

BDN BANGOR DAILY NEWS

2 construction workers hurt after falling onto I-395 in Brewer

Christopher Burns | 10.20.2020 | Click here to view online.

Two construction workers were injured Monday afternoon when a wooden walkway over Interstate 395's Wilson Street exit gave way beneath them. Credit: Courtesy of the Maine State Police

Two construction workers fell onto Interstate 395 in Brewer on Monday when a wooden walkway gave way beneath them.

Garrett Mulligan, 19, and 56-year-old Darren Pelletier were removing cross braces connected to an outer beam on the bridge over I-395's Wilson Street exit about 3:24 p.m. when the beam twisted unexpectedly as the support was removed, according to Katy England, a spokesperson for the Maine Department of Public Safety.

The beam's sudden twist caused the temporary wooden platform on which the men were working to fall about 20 feet onto the interstate below them, England said Tuesday morning.

Two construction workers were injured Monday afternoon when a wooden walkway over Interstate 395's Wilson Street exit gave way beneath them. Credit: Courtesy of the Maine State Police

Mulligan and Pelletier landed on the debris, but no vehicles were in the road when they fell, according to England.

The men were taken to Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor, where they were treated for injuries.

Mulligan and Pelletier work for Wyman and Simpson of Richmond, which has been contracted to replace the Wilson Street bridge over I-395 as part of the Maine Department of Transportation's project to replace several interstate bridges.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration is investigating the incident.

MaineDOT

Route 9/I-395 Connector Updates: 10/22/20

As final design continues on the Connector, some rough quantities have been estimated. We are looking at 697,000 cubic yards excavation, 710,000 cubic yards borrow, 165,000 cubic yards ASCG, and 60,000 tons of pavement. Our Geotech engineers are gearing up to get more subsurface information as we fine tune the design. A DOT grant has been awarded. This grant will provide the Maine Department of Transportation funding for the use of Advanced Geotechnical Methods in Exploration (A-GaME) on the Brewer-Eddington I-395/Route 9 Connector Project.

Maine DOT facing $40 million budget shortfall as it nears end of road construction season

The MDOT says traffic levels have remained 10% lower than last year since early summer

Volume 90%

Author: Sean Stackhouse (NEWS CENTER Maine)
Published: 8:23 AM EST November 23, 2020

MAINE, USA — As Maine nears the beginning of winter, construction on roadways will soon be ending. Although the Maine Department of Transportation has been able to complete major projects amid the pandemic, the department is facing major budget shortfalls.

According to Maine DOT public information officer Paul Merrill, the department is bracing to take in $40 million less than expected by the end of its biennium in June 2021.

"We're bracing for a significant hit," said Merrill. "We've seen this coming, we know this is coming. Essentially the traffic data shows traffic dropped off a cliff, and it's come back, but it still hasn't come back to what it was this time in 2019.

According to data from the Maine DOT, **traffic levels have dropped by roughly 10 percent** throughout the pandemic compared to 2019, following a major drop-off in March.

The Maine Department of Transportation sees **about 36 percent of its budget, roughly $354 million, come from the highway fund.** That draws money from a tax at the gas pump, which have been down significantly during the pandemic.

The MDOT has been able to keep current projects in 2020 on schedule, however. That's happened through utilizing daytime work, which is cheaper and now possible due to less traffic. **The MDOT was also able to accelerate the usage of bonds funds for projects this year, that was originally slated to be used for future years.**

The MDOT will now need to reassess its budget for future projects next year, and years to come.

"We're looking at, how we prioritize roads," said Merrill. "Some of those lower priority roads are going to potentially get less of a treatment than they would two to three years ago. We have no choice because just simply isn't there."

Merrill says however that the MDOT is not expecting budget challenges to impact snow removal whatsoever this year. He adds that snow removal and road treatment should look the same as any year prior, but the changes will be seen in how and where future road improvement projects take place.

Portland Press Herald

Maine's infrastructure gets a C- from civil engineers

Slightly better than the nation's average D+ grade, Maine's roads, bridges, wastewater plants are still in dire need of upgrades, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers.

BY PETER MCGUIRE | STAFF WRITER 12.03.2020 | CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLIINE.

For the fourth time in a dozen years, Maine's public infrastructure has received a middling assessment in an independent report from the American Society of Civil Engineers.

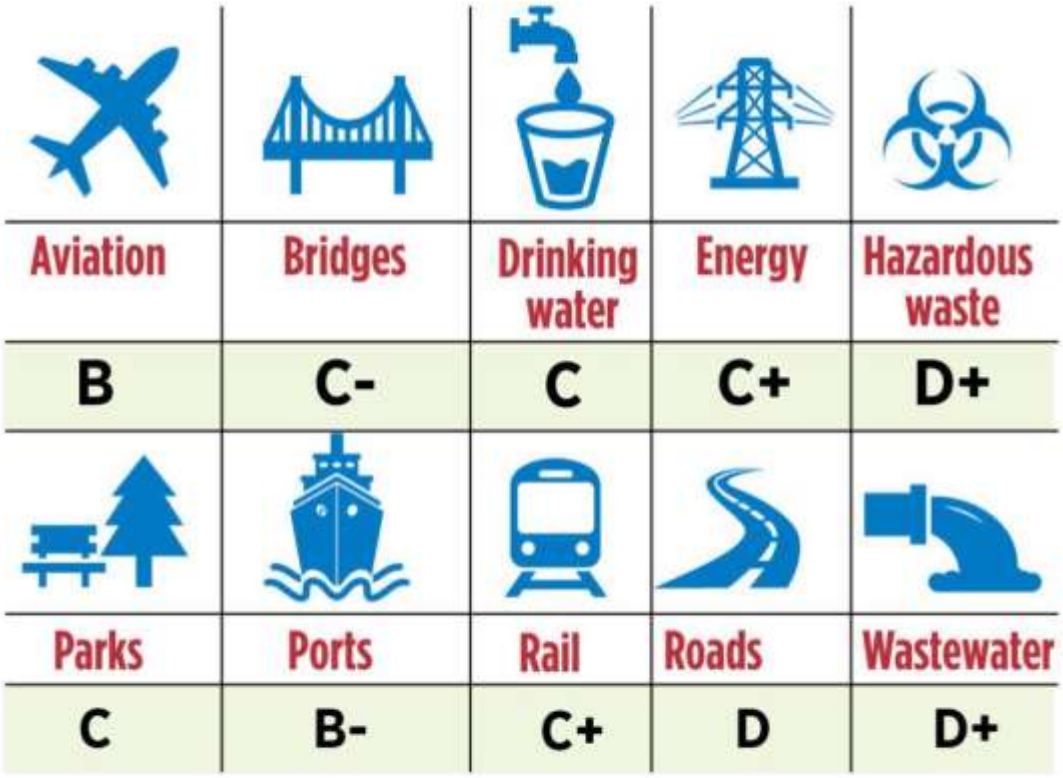
The group's Report Card for Maine's Infrastructure, produced every four years, covers 16 categories including transportation, water and sewer, education and energy infrastructure.

Overall, Maine was assigned a C- in the 2020 version, produced by dozens of volunteer members of the society's Maine chapter.

Even as the group urges more investment to deal with a backlog of hundreds of millions of dollars, some infrastructure priorities are shifting to meet greenhouse gas reduction goals and climate change mitigation outlined in a new action plan from Maine's Climate Council.

Maine's infrastructure grades

Most categories reviewed by the American Society of Civil Engineers were given a mediocre or near-failing grade in its 2020 report card.



Aviation	Bridges	Drinking water	Energy	Hazardous waste
B	C-	C	C+	D+
Parks	**Ports**	**Rail**	**Roads**	**Wastewater**
C	B-	C+	D	D+

SOURCE: © 2020 ASCE's Infrastructure Report Card

STAFF GRAPHIC | MICHAEL FISHER

"Unfortunately, despite being essential to our lives and economy, we have allowed our infrastructure to languish," said Daniel Bouchard, president of the American Society of Civil Engineers Maine Chapter.

"We hope state policymakers look at the report and take it into account," he said. "It really all comes down to funding, and the investment in Maine's infrastructure."

Just two of the categories analyzed in the report – airports and ports – received a B rating, meaning the infrastructure is generally good but will require more investment. Ports and airports in Maine have received substantial federal and state investment in recent years.

Most of the categories – bridges, drinking water systems, energy, levees, parks, rail, schools, solid waste disposal and storm water drainage were graded in the C range. That means the network is mediocre. It is largely in fair to good condition, but shows general signs of deterioration.

Bridges in particular have been an issue for the state for decades. About 13 percent of Maine's 2,460 bridges spanning 20 feet or more are structurally deficient, far above the New England average of 8 percent and the 7 percent national average, according to a 2019 assessment.

Energy production has improved in Maine with new renewable power projects such as wind farms and a reduction of natural gas generation, but the state's power lines and power stations are in trouble, Bouchard said.

"Maine's transmission and distribution network is starting to reach the end of its useful life, (and) combined with extreme weather events is leading to widespread and prolonged power outages," Bouchard said.

Roads, dams, hazardous waste sites, public transit and wastewater systems all received grades in the D range, meaning they are in below standard condition, and at risk of failure with many elements reaching the end of their service life.

Maine's ranking is slightly better than the D+ national average assigned by the engineers society. The state report is not directly comparable to other New England states because it measures different variables and is produced in different years.

The state's roads and bridges were of similar condition to those in Vermont and New Hampshire, according to the most recent scorecards from those states.

Maine's sprawling, underfunded network of state and local roads has been in bad shape for years. Maine roads received a D grade in all four report cards since 2008.

"To be honest with you, we should be very concerned with any of our infrastructure that is graded a C or lower, because that just shows how precarious the situation is," said Irv Smith, president of the Maine Better Transportation Association, in a statement.

"So we hope that the new Maine Legislature is listening, that they read this report and that its members take its findings to heart and step up investment in transportation."

The budget for highway and bridge repair and construction is presently $233 million a year below what is needed, according to the Maine Department of Transportation. The state has not raised the 30 cent gas tax since 2011, despite soaring construction costs. State government has instead relied on borrowing hundreds of millions of dollars and relying on uncertain federal funding to pay for highway improvements, said DOT Commissioner Bruce Van Note.

"The years of chronic underfunding is clear to anyone who reads this report and drives on our roads, especially in the spring," Van Note said at the news conference.

"We are cutting it too close," he said of the highway budget. "None of us went to engineering school to manage assets this way. The Maine Department of Transportation is an efficient engine, but it is constantly at risk of running out of fuel."

Funding priorities are becoming more complicated as state government moves ahead with a four-year action plan in its effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent in the next 10 years.

Transportation makes up more than half the state's CO2 emissions. The climate plan to reduce miles traveled by conventional fossil fuel vehicles includes putting tens of thousands of electric cars on the roads, improving public transit, increasing fuel efficiency and encouraging development that helps reduce driving.

Ultimately, those goals will take funding, Joyce Taylor, chief engineer at the Maine DOT and co-chair of the transportation working group on the Maine Climate Council, said in an interview.

"We did not come to a place where we could all agree on funding options, but what we could agree on is these kind of climate initiatives have to be part of what we talk about when we talk about funding," Taylor said. "Electric vehicles need safe roads and bridges too, that is the challenge."

Climate change brings different infrastructure challenges for the department. It builds a 4-foot sea-level rise into its coastal bridges and has greatly widened culverts to avoid washouts as extreme weather becomes more common, Taylor said.

Now the department is starting a vulnerability assessment to find out what communities could be at risk of being cut off if a bridge or road is destroyed in particularly intense storms.

"Typically, as a department we say 'we have to look at that bridge or pave that road,' " Taylor said. "Now we have to look at the system and how it works, how it is going to perform with sea level rise and more extreme weather events."

BDN BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Bangor intersection has the most crashes in Penobscot County

Charles Eichacker | December 23, 2020 | Click here to view online.

Bangor-area transportation officials are considering improvements that would lessen the number of crashes at the intersection of Odlin Road and Interstate 395 in Bangor, which had the most crashes of any intersection in Penobscot County from 2017-19. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

Penobscot County's most crash-prone intersection in recent years has been the busy confluence of I-395, Odlin Road and outer Hammond Street in Bangor. As a result, the city has started looking at how to make the interchange safer.

Between 2017 and 2019, 55 crashes were reported in the intersection — which has a traffic light and is heavily used by trucks going to nearby industrial sites and pedestrians and vehicles heading to nearby hotels and restaurants as well as Bangor International Airport — according to a new draft study from the Old Town engineering firm Sewall. However, just 18 percent of those crashes resulted in injuries.

The study was requested by the city of Bangor and commissioned through the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System, a regional nonprofit that evaluates projects that may receive state and federal funding.

In the study, Sewall recommended improving the flow of traffic through that intersection by adding double left-hand turning lanes in two areas: on the eastbound section of Hammond Street and the southbound section of Odlin Road.

The firm also recommended adding rumble strips onto I-395 westbound and the exit ramp from the southbound lanes of I-95, as the area where they merge was the location of a significant portion of the crashes.

More than half of the crashes in that intersection involved one vehicle striking the rear-end of another, and 14 of those rear-end collisions happened as drivers had to rapidly reduce speed as they approached the intersection on westbound I-395, according to the most recently available state data. During those same years, another 17 crashes happened in a neighboring intersection, as drivers exited the southbound lanes of nearby I-95 southbound and merged onto I-395 westbound.

Other crashes from those years in the Odlin Road and I-395 intersection were the result of drivers running red lights, sideswiping other vehicles or running off the road.

Representatives from Sewall and the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System presented the draft report at a meeting of the Bangor City Council's infrastructure committee on Tuesday night and will incorporate any public comments into the final version.

Bangor-area transportation officials are considering improvements that would lessen the number of crashes at the intersection of Odlin Road and Interstate 395 in Bangor, which had the most crashes of any intersection in Penobscot County from 2017-19. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

The city would then be able to request state and federal funding for the project, and the regional transportation group would evaluate it and decide whether to move into the queue of regional projects to help fund, according to Dianne Rice-Hansen, transportation project manager at the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System. If it goes through that process, the "very earliest" it could be started is 2024, she said.

It would cost between $1.5 million and $2 million to add the double turning lanes on Odlin Road and Hammond Street, according to preliminary estimates in the Sewall study.

As part of the study, the firm considered how several different approaches would change the intersection over the next decade. For example, it modeled how converting the intersection from a traffic light to a roundabout would affect traffic, but it found that change could actually add new delays and would be more expensive, at an estimated cost of $4 million to $5 million.

Welcome to 2021, the 21st year of this I-395/Route 9 connector boondoggle. The first phase of this controversial project, the Wilson Street Bridge over I-395, is proceeding. The $61 million total project construction cost in 2012 has ballooned by $43 million to $104 million—a 70.49% increase!!

- 22% of Maine's roads are now rated poor by the ASCE.
- 13%—one in every seven or 326—of our 2,458 bridges, over 20 feet long, are rated as structurally deficient by the ASCE. 58% of Maine's bridges are over 50 years old and 470 bridges that were once rated functionally obsolete by the U.S. Department of Transportation, a rating of 19.3% that was eliminated at the end of 2015. At the end of 2015, 34.1% of Maine's 2431 bridges were rated as deficient (structurally deficient + functionally obsolete) and magically 19.3% were removed from the 2016 ratings making it look like our bridges were not as bad as once reported—but they still are just as bad!!
- The DOT has already spent bond money in 2020 that was supposed to fund 2021's road and bridge projects.

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