



Federal influx helps Maine DOT fund more road projects over 3 years

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Construction for the international bridge in Madawaska, Maine continues as contractors add pier shafts on Dec. 18, 2021. Credit: Courtesy of Deschaine Digital

The Maine Department of Transportation floated a three-year plan Tuesday that increased its spending and number of road projects with an influx of federal money despite ongoing high materials costs.

The department plans 2,316 projects from 2022 to 2024, up 13 percent from its [last plan released in 2020](#). The total value of the projects is up 22 percent to \$3.17 billion.

New federal and state funding will allow the department to be more proactive rather than doing the best it can with what it has, said Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note. Maine's transportation system has [long relied on annual borrowing](#) to fund routine work and has often come up short. He said the department will develop an updated transportation plan in 2023.

A big boost for the state is the federal infrastructure bill that became law in November 2021. It is expected to bring \$2.4 billion into Maine in the next five years for broadband, road repairs, port improvements and public transit.

That influx is [not expected to completely plug a maintenance backlog estimated at more than \\$230 million per year](#). Existing problems were exacerbated in 2019 when construction costs rose sharply and forced the state to [cancel tens of millions of dollars](#) in road work.

Contractors are most optimistic about the market for highway and bridge construction along with other [public works projects](#), a survey released last week by the [Associated General Contractors of America](#) found. They remain worried about materials prices, which soared 20 percent in 2021 despite moderating in December.

The department also will get \$106 million from the General Fund proposed by Gov. Janet Mills and approved by the Legislature in 2021. Van Note said the money offset a Highway Fund revenue hole caused by the reductions in fuel tax revenue from the pandemic and high construction costs. Maine voters also approved a \$100 million transportation bond in November.