

MERIT CRITERIA

North Windham Moves: Regional Mobility - Local Access Project

Safety:

Improving safety is a primary Project strategic goal. In 2022, Maine suffered its highest traffic fatality rate in 15 years.¹ The Agency has increased messaging to bring public awareness to this trend and combat unsafe driving. It is simultaneously redesigning and modernizing roads throughout the state to meet Agency and Federal safety guidelines. Constructing the numerous safety elements on Project roads is expected to reduce vehicle crashes by 21 percent.

Cumberland County ranks above average for the concentration of roadway fatalities denoted on USDOT's *Concentration of Roadway Fatalities Map* under the National Roadway Safety Strategy.² The numerous required and desired safety improvements to be implemented through the Project will aid in reducing crashes and injuries in a commercial area that has grown rapidly around outdated safety features – or no safety features at all.

Vehicle safety measures: The Project zone had seven high crash locations (HCLs) in a three-year period from 2018 to 2020. The nucleus of the congestion, Boody's Corner, saw 41 crashes in the period while US 302 road segments north and south of Boody's Corner had 32 crashes and 58 crashes, respectively in the same three-year period. Three intersections were identified as HCL's (Route 302/35/115 intersection, Route 302/Abby Road intersection, and Route 302/Sandbar Road intersection) as well as three Route 302 roadway segments identified as HCL's (River to Route 35/115, Route 35/115 to Windham Shopping Center, and Landing Road to Franklin Drive). This is also one roadway segment on Route 35 (Rustlers Drive to Boody's Corner) that is an HCL. All those locations have had eight or more crashes in a three-year period and a critical rate factor of 1.0 or greater. In total, there were 201 accidents over a 3-year period (2018-2020) in the project – that's 1.3 per week – an unacceptable figure for the Project area which only has 70,570 average daily traffic traveling through it.

Additional detail is shown on the map located in the Attachments section.

To increase safety, access to businesses will be redesigned by consolidating access points. This will lead to the removal of many dangerous left turns available today as a result of continuous center turns lanes and intersections in close proximity – all created by unconstrained growth over time. Connector roads will aid in siphoning local traffic from US 302. Other Project elements that will augment safety include driver sight-distance improvements such as the removal of overhead signage, traffic calming features, smart traffic signals, better access and mobility for emergency services and installation of street lighting.

Pedestrian Safety Measures: In October 2022, a bicyclist riding north on US 302 and attempting to cross the road was hit by a vehicle heading south. The incident occurred at the intersection of US 302 and River Road. This incident highlighted the need to weave vehicle and pedestrian safety measures into the Project. Crashes involving pedestrians is projected to be reduced by 40 percent, based on the FHWA Clearinghouse Crash Modification Factor (CMF

¹ <https://www.mainepublic.org/maine/2022-12-28/maine-highway-fatalities-reach-15-year-high>

² <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9e0e6b7397734c1387172bbc0001f29b>

#11246). The Project will make the area safer for pedestrians while simultaneously creating active transportation multi-use pathways that do not currently exist and it will expand and encourage more pedestrian access. Sidewalks will be wider and better able to connect residents to the commercial center without dangerous obstructions. Crosswalks and sidewalks will be built/rebuilt to comply with Federal and Agency ADA guidelines. Crosswalks will be highly visible to motorists. The safety improvements will make areas where vehicles and pedestrians interact much safer. Bike lanes will be added for safety. Sidewalk and street lighting will be added in locations currently without it and all current and future lighting will consist of energy-efficient LED bulbs. Crosswalk, median and bike lane design will all comply with the Department's *National Roadway Safety Strategy* plan.³ A commercial district that discouraged pedestrian access because of its lack of safety and pathways will be an area that encourages it due to the Project's added access features.

All safety improvements enumerated above help drive USDOT's Strategic Goal of 'making the transportation system safer for all and advancing a future without transportation-related serious injuries and fatalities.' Meeting this important goal is a primary objective of the Project.

Environmental Sustainability:

MaineDOT is methodically focusing on statewide environmental improvements of significant importance. Maine's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, illustrates the Pine Tree State's statutory goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045, reduce emissions 45 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050 and transition to 80 percent renewable energy by 2030 with a goal of 100 percent by 2050.⁴ This overarching state goal is in line with USDOT's focus on climate and sustainability. The Project will "help combat the climate crisis by ensuring that transportation plays a central role in the solution."

The Pine Tree State recognizes the importance of environmental health because eco-tourism plays an important role in the economy and US 302 is a primary thoroughfare connecting tourists arriving in Portland to rural areas of interest. The Project will aid in avoiding continued adverse environmental impacts to air quality by reducing vehicle idle time and making active transportation more viable. Gridlock on US 302 at intersections throughout the commercial district leads to long waiting periods at stoplights or for a clear path to make a left turn from center turn lanes. The Project is estimated to reduce vehicle idle time by 26,000 hours per year.

The Project will result in a reduction of vehicle miles traveled by creating convenient options for a modal shift to active transportation. The Project is estimated to create 26,000 bicycling trips per year to the commercial center businesses that do not exist today as well as 24,000 walking trips per year that do not exist today. It creates opportunities for nearby residents to commute to the commercial district by way of sidewalks, bicycle lanes and multi-use pathways – many safely located away from the congestion of US 302 and the state roads.

Like MaineDOT, the Town of Windham is dedicated to modernizing infrastructure that will

³ <https://www.transportation.gov/NRSS/SaferRoads>

⁴ https://climatecouncil.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/MaineWontWait_December2020.pdf

improve environmental conditions. In 2022, voters approved funding a \$40 million sewer upgrade project to replace septic systems in the commercial district with a state-of-the-art sewer system.⁵ Much of the new system will share the right-of-way with improvements this application supports. Use of the current private septic systems is having long-term adverse effects on water quality, the aquifer and adjacent water bodies. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection recently ranked the sewer project the second most important of 77 applicants. The town has received authorization to borrow \$39 million to fund the project. Construction begins in summer of 2023. MaineDOT and the town will coordinate planning and construction, as they always do, to ensure both are complementary and do not impede overall work progress.

Quality of Life:

Improving quality of life is a primary Project goal. The Project will significantly improve the quality of life for those living in North Windham and the surrounding region (which includes five Census Tract Areas of Persistent Poverty to the north [205, 209, 9657, 9659, 9664]).⁶ It will

also augment convenience for tourists visiting the region and the movement of freight. The plans follow a smart growth economic development strategy of supporting businesses, supporting workers and supporting quality of life. That is done by providing multiple ways for residents to access the commercial district and shifting away from the thinking that motor vehicles are the only option. In a recent podcast, Jarrod Maxfield, member of the Windham town



council said, “...over the last 40 years it’s grown fairly haphazardly and not the best layout and not conducive to having people move around particularly with their feet. We are a place where people move around with their tires.”⁷ The Project will significantly improve *access to* and *the time it takes to access* everyday destinations like grocery stores, restaurants, pharmacies, medical facilities, schools and recreational areas. Attributes such as smart traffic signals will reduce unnecessary idling and driver frustration which will improve quality of life.

A common theme among survey respondents was the need to make North Windham more inviting by adding streetlights and landscaped medians. Respondents also encouraged transit improvements in the study area and building additional bus stops. Following Project completion, the region’s public transportation vans will avoid needing to pull into the mall parking lot, as they currently must, to use the mall as a bus stop. The system will be more convenient and

⁵ <https://www.windhammaine.us/771/North-Windham-Sewer-Project>

⁶ <https://maps.dot.gov/BTS/GrantProjectLocationVerification/>

⁷ <https://open.spotify.com/episode/63LCcU2i2z1My5eulr4pA5?si=aed4c214ee0b4149&nd=1>

visible to potential riders when the bus stop moves streetside.

The area where development has not yet occurred, located alongside the proposed East and West Connector roads, is zoned for mixed-use development. The Project will foster the tremendous benefit of reducing transportation and housing cost burdens as land is eventually developed for commercial or residential use for affordable housing. The infrastructure improvements will support market rate, senior and workforce housing. Additional business growth will broaden the tax base.

MaineDOT and the Town of Windham are constantly reviewing plans to coordinate and integrate land use, affordable housing, and transportation planning. Both greatly understand the need to create a more livable community and expand travel choices simultaneously. The town and Agency recognize that gridlock is not healthy or sustainable.

Mobility and Community Connectivity:

The Project creates three distinct transportation segments that either did not previously exist or did not exist *in concert* with the others: regional through-traffic mobility, local traffic access and active transportation connections. By limiting and consolidating the number of entrances to businesses that have built up around US 302, the Project is able to increase mobility along the region's primary route. Freight will be able to move more quickly along US 302 and be better integrated with pedestrian safety improvements. The mobility improvements will help millions of drivers annually decrease time spent in traffic and reduce wear and tear on their vehicles. Connector roads to alternate business entrances will siphon local traffic off US 302 and SR 35 and 115, adding convenience and reducing travel time for residents visiting the commercial district. The 2022 feasibility study concluded that the amount of traffic on US 302 would be reduced by 34 percent if the connector roads were built. Wide active transportation pathway connections will be constructed and thoughtfully linked to ADA-compliant safety features. Accessibility will be designed with a Complete Streets approach to improve safety and mobility.

The Town of Windham and MaineDOT recognize the need to incorporate convenient community connections into Project plans. When asked about the most valuable transit option in the future, 70 percent of respondents selected more regular, frequent METRO/Lakes Region Explorer bus service while 41 percent selected a van providing transportation service locally or regionally.

Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity:

Excessive congestion prevents a regional economy from participating in the state, national and global economy as competitively as it could otherwise. A reliable and predictable supply chain is a critical component necessary to build economic opportunity. Reducing traffic bottlenecks creates more efficient routes for freight and a better experience for tourists. While there is not an abundant amount of freight moving on the corridor, the Project is very meaningful to a large number of tourists because it will restore the convenience of gathering supplies in the commercial center. The Project fosters opportunity by providing safe, affordable and accessible connections to the commercial district while reducing transportation-related disparities, adverse community impacts, and negative health effects.

Building the connector roads will open a number of economic doors for residents beyond the

immediate commercial district, including increasing public and private investment in adjacent land, much of it to be utilized for housing, including senior housing, that is affordable. Decisions will be driven locally and include public input about what is best for the community regarding mixed-income residential development after the Project is complete. The new East and West Connector Roads provide access to additional land in a mixed-use zone intended and capable of hosting mixed-income residential housing – in a county with a per capita income of \$34,821 in 2021.⁸ The Project will create a more viable commercial district with a downtown feel which will also increase property values and create generational wealth. The connector roads will allow North Windham’s growth to be better managed and less reliant on regional roads intended to be thoroughfares, not local streets and boulevards.

The Project creates better access to health care, education, energy, housing, and economic opportunities. The commercial center provides full- and part-time jobs for regional residents. The retail and food service jobs are ideal for residents who require a short travel time to their employment, a job with flexible hours and one that fosters a connection to the community. It will help encourage small businesses, entrepreneurs, and those with community-based expertise to thrive.

State of Good Repair:

The Project calls for replacing and/or repairing current infrastructure which has exceeded its useful life, is cosmetically and technologically outdated and can be a safety hazard. Increases in traffic have led to increased deterioration of road surfaces, increasing the cost of pavement preservation. The increase from three to five lanes on U.S. 302 in the 1990s without upgrading drainage capacity has led to road flooding following intense rain.

A changing climate subjects the network of roads and sidewalks to temperature changes not felt in previous decades. Today’s construction materials are better equipped to withstand drastic temperature changes. Many improvements will take place within the existing infrastructure footprint with the exception of the three connector roads which will be built on land not previously developed. The Project aims to replace outdated and non-compliant safety features including turn lanes, crosswalks, sidewalks, signage and traffic lights. Existing sidewalks will be repaired.

Following construction, the Town of Windham will assume control and maintenance of the three connector roads, drainage components and other infrastructure as well as the pathways adjacent to the connector roads. The town will also maintain traffic lights while MaineDOT will assume maintenance of traffic signal control boxes and associated electrical and detection-related technology components.

Partnership and Collaboration:

Residents living in five Census-designated Persistent Poverty zones north of town rely on the commercial district for their everyday needs. North Windham and MaineDOT are committed to making the commercial district convenient for economically disadvantaged residents while collaborating to reduce congestion that can quickly impair the rural area. The Town and Agency

⁸ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/northwindhamcdpmaine,US/PST045221>

also work diligently to engage the public to notify them of potential infrastructure changes and seek public comment. MaineDOT and the town already hosted numerous town hall meetings, both in-person and online during the Covid pandemic, to obtain public input and provide Project design updates.

The Town and Agency are also coordinating construction plans for the \$40.6 million sewer upgrade project and plans for a future new fire station at Franklin Drive and East Connector Road as well as a new elementary school. A number of sewer project components will be located in the right-of-way of this improvement Project.

The region's Westbrook Housing Authority, through its HUD *Community Housing Development Organization* ("CHDO") – Westbrook Development Corporation – depend on completion of the connector roads and sewer projects to commence a land purchase for housing. Plans include the need to acquire frontage land on the West Connector Road for construction of 200 to 250 senior housing units for households age 55 and over with incomes at or below 60 percent of the HUD Area Median Income ("AMI"). Census data identifies 1,570 regional households living at 60 percent or below the AMI. The town also plans to build 500 additional housing units over the next three years; all will be served by the commercial district.

The Project area is located primarily in a commercial district supporting retail and food service jobs; therefore, the opportunity to join a union is not expected to connect with this Project.

The Project is located in the 2023 Edition of *MaineDOT's Three-Year Work Plan*.⁹ It will be added to the *Statewide Transportation Improvement Program* (STIP). Area transportation studies date back to the 1980s:

- 2020 MaineDOT Approved MPI Project: *Route 302 Adaptive Traffic Signals*
- 2016 *21st Century Downtown Master Plan PDR*
- 2013 *North Windham 21st Century Downtown Master Plan*
- 2013 *Multi-Modal Corridor Management Plan for Route 302 and the Lakes Region*
- 2011 *North Route 302 Corridor Plan*
- 2011 *Lakes Region Transit Service Study*
- 2007 *Service Road Study*
- 2001 *Windham to Portland Commuter Bus Study*
- 1992 *Connector Road Feasibility Assessment Windham Mall/Windham Shopping Plaza*
- 1989 *Route 302 Corridor Study Phase 2*
- 1988 *North Windham Route 302 Corridor Study*

Elements of these studies, in accordance with numerous opportunities for public input, culminated in the *North Windham Moves: Regional Mobility, Local Access Transportation Planning & Feasibility Study Final Report* dated January 10, 2022. Traffic analysis and

⁹ <https://www.windhammaine.us/DocumentCenter/View/8030/NorthWindhamMoves-FinalReport-01102022>

https://www.maine.gov/mdot/projects/workplan/docs/2023/WORK%20PLAN%20FINAL%202023_2024_2025-3.pdf, begin page 70

computer simulation modeling were completed for each element of the Project, examining conditions today and projected conditions through year 2040. The Study completed the same simulation for a no-build scenario. The study details the final recommendation for transportation investment in the area and is the foundation of the Project application and improvements.

In Spring 2021, city planners received 81 responses to the first phase of public input. One-third of all respondents believed that traffic volume increased in the past decade and 21 percent felt that traffic and transportation issues have gotten worse. Some residents responded they avoid area congestion by taking a longer route and shopping elsewhere. Respondents identified increased traffic issues on US 302 in the past ten years resulting from drive-through facilities, a lack of alternative transportation and seasonal tourism traffic. Fifty percent favored the Town designing and developing a local street network, as the Project intends to construct.

When asked about transit, 70 percent of respondents desired more regular bus service. Most respondents agreed that alleviating traffic and development impacts in the form of minimizing growth and increasing local business should be the main priorities of a street network.

Below is a summary of meetings that have occurred during the study process. Public meetings were video recorded and were posted on the town's website for viewing following the meetings:

- Public meetings on May 13, 2021, and September 29, 2021
- Public council meetings on January 26, 2021, April 13, 2021, October 12, 2021
- Virtual meetings with town officials on November 30, 2020, weekly meetings in March and April 2021, biweekly meetings in May, June and July 2021 and a meeting on August 26, 2021

The above list of meetings indicate the frequency with which the public has been thoroughly consulted – and their opinions entered – into Project design. Additional public hearings will be scheduled frequently throughout the design and construction stages and the public will be strongly encouraged to contact MaineDOT or the Town of Windham with any questions or concerns at any time.

MaineDOT is a very experienced, thorough, and responsible recipient of previous TIGER, FASTLANE, INFRA, CHBP, BUILD and RAISE grant funding. USDOT can rely on MaineDOT to fully fund and begin construction well prior to the September 30, 2027 obligation of funds date and complete the Project well prior to 2032 without risk.

Innovation:

A number of innovative Project measures will ensure the Project incorporates today's technology to prevent infrastructure from becoming obsolete as it did in the 1990s. Innovations include:

- Adaptive signals able to interact with Windham's emergency vehicles which are equipped with Emergency Vehicle Preemption (EVP)
- Smart roadside units capable of managing vehicle-to-everything (V2X) technology – enabling sensors, cameras and wireless connectivity allowing vehicles to share real-time information with their drivers, other vehicles, pedestrians and roadway infrastructure like

traffic lights

- Crosswalks with accessible pedestrian signals

MaineDOT’s Federal Guidelines Commitment:

Climate Change and Environmental Justice Impact Consideration: All MaineDOT projects include consideration of climate change and environmental justice impacts. MaineDOT utilizes the EPA EJSCREEN for all Federally-funded projects. The team will engage the public and work to ensure impacts will not disproportionately affect people of color, low-income individuals or disadvantaged populations. MaineDOT recently updated its Public Involvement Plans, which outline the Department’s efforts to ensure disadvantaged populations are afforded meaningful opportunities for public involvement. The Plan is available at:

<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/env/NEPA/public/index.shtml>.

Racial Equity and Barriers to Opportunity: MaineDOT recently updated its Public Involvement Plans to ensure disadvantaged populations and underserved areas are afforded meaningful opportunities for public involvement, available at:

<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/env/NEPA/public/index.shtml>. MaineDOT has an equity statement outlining a commitment to ensuring that all Mainers have access to safe and reliable transportation options.

Labor and Work: MaineDOT is responsible for managing and funding the transportation system statewide. The Agency also manages the state’s relationship with transportation-related private entities. Employing approximately 1,600 people, the agency expends and disburses more than \$1.25 billion annually in Federal, state and local funds. MaineDOT works to create good-paying jobs that incorporate strong labor standards.

Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience: The State of Maine takes physical and cyber security threats seriously and works closely with Federal agencies to ensure cybersecurity systems are in place. The state considers security when designing and constructing infrastructure that could be vulnerable to physical or cyber attack.

Domestic Preference Requirements: MaineDOT follows all applicable domestic preference laws including Executive Order 14005, *‘Ensuring the Future Is Made in All of America by All of America’s Workers’* (86 FR 7475) and ensures the use of goods, products and materials produced in the United States for all infrastructure projects.

Civil Rights and Title VI: MaineDOT complies with all Federal civil rights obligations and nondiscrimination laws. “In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other authorities, MaineDOT is committed to ensuring that the fundamental principles of equal opportunity are upheld in all decisions involving our employees and contractors/consultants, and to ensuring that the public-at-large is afforded access to our programs and services. To that end, no person shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any MaineDOT program or activity on the grounds of race, color, or national origin.

MaineDOT will work with staff, sub-recipients, contractors and service beneficiaries to promote awareness for the provisions of Title VI and the responsibilities associated with that Act.”¹⁰

Federal Contract Compliance: As a condition of grant award and consistent with EO 11246, Equal Employment Opportunity (30 FR 12319, and as amended), MaineDOT will make good faith efforts to meet the goals of 6.9 percent of construction project hours being performed by women as well as meeting or exceeding goals for work being performed by people of color or those with disabilities.

¹⁰ <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/civilrights/title-vi/>