

Executive Summary

Connecting Maine: Planning Our Transportation Future is the state's integrated, long-range, multimodal transportation plan for the next 20 years. The plan is a compilation of the challenges facing Maine's transportation system. Most importantly, however, *Connecting Maine* serves as an outline of the key investments that must be made to Maine's transportation infrastructure to meet the strategic goals identified by its citizens and transportation partners.

Beginning in 2003, the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) began *Connecting Maine* by conducting approximately 680 phone surveys, which asked users a series of questions focused on overall performance of transportation services. This survey led to a series of focus group meetings, workshops, regional forums and public consultation meetings spanning a five year period resulting in a multi-layered strategy to help guide future transportation planning.

Participants in the development of this long-term plan included statewide and regional planners, transportation experts, leading economists, business leaders, municipal leaders and the general public. More specifically, participants also included the Maine Turnpike Authority, Maine Indian Tribal Governments, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and Maine's Regional Planning Councils and Economic Development Districts.

Connecting Maine represents a shared vision from the various stakeholders to maintain a healthy economy and enhance the quality of life for Maine citizens. The following five strategic goals were developed as a tool that MaineDOT can use as it examines and prioritizes its transportation investments. The five strategic goals are:

1. Ensure a Safe and Secure Transportation System;
2. Ensure the Sustainability of Maine's Transportation Systems;
3. Promote Economic Vitality and Competitiveness through Transportation Investments;
4. Develop and Implement Transportation Programs that Enhance Quality of Life; and
5. Enhance Public Awareness and Participation.

In 2005, two workshops were held within MaineDOT with the distinct purpose of identifying where Maine could be in 20 years based upon past policy decisions and their effect upon future transportation investments. The challenges discussed included statewide disparities in growth rates and demographics, increases in vehicle-miles traveled, traffic congestion and climate change, improved coordination of human service transportation for the elderly and other transportation disadvantaged populations, workforce and housing shifts, and balancing economic growth with environmental stewardship, as well as federal and state requirements.

As these topics were fully examined, the challenges facing Maine became readily apparent. Diminishing revenues, the rise in construction costs, aging infrastructure, and reduced federal flexibility in spending were noted as major contributors to this challenge. However, no other two issues combined play a more critical role to the future of Maine's transportation system than those of diminishing funding levels and increasing transportation investment needs.

Many infrastructure investments have been made over the last decade, including unprecedented levels of investment of \$100 million in 2007 and \$200 million in 2008. Unfortunately, even that level of investment is not enough to keep up with the increased stress on Maine's transportation system caused by our aging transportation network, the new demands of global trade, technology and increased traffic volumes. To achieve the goals of *Connecting Maine*, an additional \$3.3 billion will be needed over the next ten years alone. The funding gap is even greater for the subsequent 10 years.

Connecting Maine reinforces the thought that transportation infrastructure investment can create opportunities for Maine businesses to better compete in the world economy. Yet the need to maintain existing transportation infrastructure exceeds available resources, and future opportunities to invest wisely in Maine's transportation infrastructure will not be realized if the funding crisis is not addressed. Maine must supplement its current transportation funding with bold, new initiatives that can provide for a transportation system that stimulates the economy and promotes sustained economic growth. Maine must take practical measures to integrate the various modes of transportation to ensure that a seamless, multimodal transportation system evolves in order to best meet the needs of an ever changing world.

Increasingly, policy-makers are asking not only how the underfunding of our transportation system came about, but more importantly, what can be done to assure that Maine is in a position to invest in emerging opportunities. The inability to adequately invest in the transportation system did not develop overnight, nor is it the result of any individual or particular governmental action. It is largely due to changes in the funding formulas and reduced state revenues.

In building upon *Connecting Maine's* goals and recognizing the challenges and forces that influence transportation, the MaineDOT and various regional and economic planners developed new initiatives and strategic plans for the next 10 to 20 years. These initiatives and plans reflect a vision by which Maine citizens can rely on a transportation system that is safe, effective, supports economic vitality, introduces innovation, enhances quality of life, and protects the cultural and natural environment.

The various initiatives and plans from both state and regional perspectives were vetted through a resource allocation analysis that weighed limited resources against system needs, investment for all modes, transportation management and alternatives, targeting resources to highest priorities, and an assessment of social and economic needs. During that process, Regional Transportation Assessments (RTAs) were created, including an identification of 38 Corridors of Regional Economic Significance for Transportation (CRESTs) and their associated transportation, land use and economic objectives.

Connecting Maine summarizes the findings of the analysis and reports on the resulting transportation investment initiatives of MaineDOT and the regional perspectives and priorities, as well as the strategic goals of several planning and economic development organizations. Specifically, MaineDOT investment initiatives reflect careful consideration of the transportation deficiencies that are impacting economic growth and those which address public safety. The key initiatives identified were those in areas such as Highways, Bridges, Multimodal Connections, Quality of Place, Aviation, Economic Connections and Public-Private Partnerships.

In addition, the regional perspectives of the Maine Turnpike Authority, Tribal Governments, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and Regional Councils/Economic Development Districts have been captured in *Connecting Maine* and serve as a comprehensive view of regional priorities and how they relate to the statewide long-range plan. Specific strategic investment plans were also developed by the eleven regional councils and are summarized and illustrated in the various maps of the six economic development districts (Northern Maine Development Commission, Eastern Maine Development Corporation, Midcoast Economic Development District, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments, Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments and Southern Maine Economic Development District).

Connecting Maine serves as a resource for statewide organizations, policymakers and local communities to use as a way to understand the initiatives, priorities and strategies needed to lead Maine's transportation system into the future. Sharing Maine's transportation vision with the public will assist in developing integrated land use and transportation planning in a way that helps identify the funding needed to gain the best return on transportation investments.

To keep pace with economic needs identified in this long-term strategic plan, substantially more transportation funding will need to be identified and new and renewed investments made. The funding crisis is now; the need to change how we support transportation investment in Maine is immediate. It is essential that the state and MaineDOT take bold and decisive actions to ensure that the infrastructure does not slip further into a deteriorated condition. Without support, Maine's economy will continue to suffer; with support, it can flourish.

The solutions are going to be costly and we know that there is no silver bullet to address these funding needs. However, several options were brought forward throughout our fact-gathering process. These options include exploring additional cost-saving efforts by MaineDOT, increased motor-fuel taxes, long-term borrowing, new alternative financing sources, increased use of tolling, mileage and other user based fees, increased use of public-private partnerships and broadening the base from which transportation revenues are derived. "Doing more with less" is no longer the reality – it is now "doing less with less." *Connecting Maine* tells the story of how Maine is losing ground in the struggle to maintain and improve the transportation system that is vital to its economic well-being.

Connecting Maine provides a sobering look into Maine's future if funding levels are left unchanged and critical infrastructure investments not made. Inadequate public information and disaster response plans will jeopardize safety and security measures needed to protect the public. Similarly, limitations to highway reconstruction and repairs to functionally and structurally deficient bridges will impede safety, economic vitality, mobility and quality of life for Maine citizens. Freight, aviation, and other forms of transportation such as transit, bicycle and pedestrian initiatives will go unrealized and will negatively impact Maine's ability to compete in the global market, not to mention negatively impact local communities.

Despite the challenges, we have an opportunity to get it right. We know that transportation is underfunded and increasing in demand. Most importantly, we also know that transportation is an investment with proven returns. Investment strategies in transportation system maintenance and preservation are increasingly becoming a matter of rationed choice driven by crisis, as opposed to rational choice based on an investment strategy that maintains the system in its entirety. The retrenchment to a preservation-first policy, though sound from the perspective of our absolute responsibility to maintain the public's investment, leaves little funding for system improvement or expansion.

This long-range strategic transportation plan captures the historical and collective efforts of many stakeholders in redefining how the delivery of transportation services can best be achieved knowing that Maine's quality of life and economic future is dependent upon its transportation infrastructure. Despite the complexity of the issues, this plan offers a clear picture that meets the needs and anticipates future demands, showing that multiple modes of transportation must work together seamlessly in ways that they do not today.

Connecting Maine: Planning Our Transportation Future is more than just a blueprint on intermodal and intercommunity connectivity. It is a living document by which MaineDOT can achieve its mission by providing a safe, efficient and reliable transportation system that supports economic opportunity and quality of life. It connects Maine citizens, business leaders and policy-makers with one another and provides a realistic view of the existing transportation system and the future demands that will be unmet unless changes are made - starting now.

Note: *Connecting Maine* complies with various federal and state mandates that require MaineDOT to develop long-term planning, and prioritize transportation investments in an equitable manner. Specifically, the plan meets the Planning Assistance and Standards outlined in Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 450, the Safe, Accountable Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the Sensible Transportation Policy Act found in the Maine Revised Statutes Title 23, Section 73 and 73-A, as well as other sections of the Maine Revised Statutes, such as Title 23 “Highways”, Title 29 and 29-A “Motor Vehicles.”