

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **DATE**

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***Public asked to participate in final Wiscasset Bypass public process.***

AUGUSTA – The Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has announced it is accepting public comments on the three final choices for a bypass route around Wiscasset's downtown.

Comments will be accepted by the USACE through **February 19, 2010** and can be emailed to Jay Clement at [jay.l.clement@usace.army.mil](mailto:jay.l.clement@usace.army.mil) or mailed to him at:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Maine Project Office  
675 Western Avenue, #3  
Manchester, Maine 04351.

The USACE is the federal agency with the responsibility of ultimately issuing a Clean Water Act permit to construct the bypass. Over the past months, they have been reviewing the Maine Department of Transportation's (MaineDOT) Phase II Alternatives Analysis in order to determine which of the three bypass alternatives (N2a, N2f, or N8c) should be named as the "Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative" (LEDPA).

MaineDOT's recent Phase II Supplement to the October 2007 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is the culmination of a 10-year effort to identify a long-term solution to traffic delays in downtown Wiscasset. Ed Hanscom, MaineDOT study co-manager, says, "We are now very near the end of the environmental studies. The Phase II Supplement incorporates responses to hundreds of public

comments gathered from the DEIS and dozens of public and committee meetings." As part of the public process, MaineDOT worked with the Midcoast Bypass Task Force, an advisory group that provided guidance on important community issues. As a result of the public process, MaineDOT is recommending Alternative N2a (see map) as its "Preferred Alternative". While the Task Force was unable to agree to support a single alternative, they agreed not to oppose Alternative N2a.

The USACE is not required to accept MaineDOT's recommended Preferred Alternative and is seeking public comments to help guide their decision on which alternative qualifies as the LEDPA.

According to Gerry Audibert, the study's other co-manager, the public's key to making this last piece of the process successful is to provide what is known as "substantive" comments. "The Corps is primarily concerned with measurable environmental impacts," he said, "although they do also consider the economics, aesthetics and cultural effects of a proposed project. Therefore, the kind of comments that they are seeking should include factual data as opposed to opinions."

Audibert also noted that there is a second category of comment needed. "MaineDOT understands that all of the routes will have unavoidable impacts to water-based resources (the Sheepscot River, streams, wetlands, fish and wildlife, for example). The Corps is looking for specific suggestions or recommendations for potential mitigation opportunities throughout the general project area that would offset these impacts." Audibert added that local land trusts and conservation organizations often have good insight on potential

mitigation projects and might be a good point of contact for interested citizens.

The USACE hopes to render a LEDPA decision by the spring of 2010. Once it is announced, MaineDOT will make the Final Environmental Impact Statement available to the public and the Federal Highway Administration will issue a "Record of Decision". Once this takes place, MaineDOT will be able to seek funding for design and will begin purchasing the required rights-of-way for the ultimate construction of the bypass. This next phase will likely take several years due to the number of properties involved and the anticipated \$85 million construction cost. In the meantime, MaineDOT will continue to work with the Town of Wiscasset to identify and implement intermediate measures to alleviate traffic delays in downtown Wiscasset.

It should be noted that the USACE LEDPA decision is not a permit decision. Any future USACE permit decision will require the submission of a complete permit application, evaluation of avoidance and mitigation measures and the development of a detailed mitigation plan. A permit will also be required from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Permit applications will be filed prior to construction during final design of the selected bypass route.

"We at MaineDOT will be very glad when this process is completed so that we can finally solve a Route 1 traffic congestion problem that has plagued the Midcoast Region for many years. We are also pleased that the citizens of Wiscasset and Edgecomb can finally know for certain which properties will be affected by the bypass route and which will not be. It has been a long and difficult period of uncertainty," Audibert

said, “and MaineDOT appreciates the involved communities’ and volunteers’ patience and assistance in identifying a solution to this long-standing problem.”

The DEIS, Phase II Reports and detailed maps of the proposed routes can be found at <http://www.wiscassetroute1corridor.com> or at the MaineDOT Web site, <http://www.maine.gov/mdot>.