

Maine Turnpike Authority

Public Advisory Committee Meeting

Portland Area Mainline Needs Assessment

January 24, 2018

1. The Public Advisory Council (PAC) for the Portland Area Mainline (PAM) Needs Assessment was convened for its third meeting at 4:00 P.M. on January 24, 2018, at the Maine Turnpike Authority headquarters located in Portland, Maine.

PAC Members Present: Josh Benthien, Kristina Egan, Mike Shaw, Ed Hanscom, John Melrose, Chris Branch, Paul Bradbury, Nathan Poore, Greg Jordan, Kara Wooldrick, Peter Carney, Eric Baker,

Staff/Consultants present for the Maine Turnpike Authority: Peter Mills, Bruce Van Note, Sara Zografos, Ralph Norwood, Rachel Lambert, Paul Godfrey, Elizabeth Roberts, Ariel Greenlaw, Matthew Pellatier, Carol Morris

Members of the Public Attending: Phelps Turner, Conservation Law Foundation; Alan Reed, Gorham, George Rheault

2. **Review traffic projects through 2040.** Paul Godfrey started the meeting by explaining the purpose of future no build condition as being used as a means of measuring how effective potential alternatives may be. Elizabeth Roberts presented estimated traffic growth rates for 2025 and 2040. Traffic engineers at HNTB determined that an annual growth rate of 1.5% was appropriate and conservative after reviewing historical data and previous studies. The historic Maine Turnpike annual growth from 1996-2016 was 2.3%.
 - A PAC member asked: In past exercises like this, was the growth rate chosen at that time – how did that number compare to the actual 2.3% historic growth rate?
 - Paul Godfrey responded during the previous study in the mid-nineties a 2.75% growth rate was used. It was specific to the southern section of the turnpike.

- A PAC member asked: Is the 2.3% growth rate stated for the entire turnpike or just the Greater Portland area being considered?
 - Godfrey responded that the 2.3% rate is specifically for the Greater Portland area.
- A PAC member asked: If growth is heavy on the southern section of the turnpike and starts running into capacity problems and it is determined that that section of the turnpike needs to be expanded to four lanes in each direction, how would that impact the Greater Portland area? Has what's been going on in the southern section been considered in this process?
 - Godfrey responded that every 4-5 years the Turnpike Authority does a safety and capacity study that takes a 20-30 year look at the turnpike and uses it as a basis for understanding when capacity problems may begin to arise. There are sections in the south that may need to be evaluated in the upcoming years. This is not included in current analysis and right now it is assumed that out to 2040 there are no other major transportation improvements included.
- A PAC member asked: Indirectly I-295 is impacted through this study, what have been the growth rates on I-295 during the same timeframe of 1996-2016 in the Portland area? Does anyone have this information and has it been reviewed?
 - Godfrey responded that DOT has the information, but they have not focused on it for this study. There is information in upcoming slides on what the projected growth on I-295 is going to be in coming years. Another PAC member responded that during the last 20 years in the Portland area has been about a 10% total increase. Godfrey noted that increases vary based on location on I-295, with some locations at 10% and others at 20%, but all are less than Maine Turnpike increases.

Roberts presented Level of Service (LOS) during PM design hour in the northbound direction. LOS is the industry standard that traffic engineers use to measure a roadway's available capacity (number of vehicles that a road can accommodate). This provides a quantitative method of evaluating potential

improvement alternatives. LOS is assigned a letter grade from A through F. By 2025, sections of the Turnpike from mile marker 46 to 48 will reach a rating of F, meaning that the section will be operating at a higher demand than there is capacity, creating traffic issues. Sections from mile markers 45-46 and 48-52 received an E rating, meaning these sections will be operating near capacity.

- A PAC member asked: Based on the memo sent ahead of the meeting, this information is based on the 30th busiest hour, so there's thousands of other hours during the year where we're doing better than this to varying degrees?
 - Godfrey explained that the 30th highest hour is the standard for design hour. A graph of traffic volume for every hour would typically flatten out around the 30th hour. So while the 30th hour is a higher hour, the hours below would be similar in volume. The 30th hour used in the analysis is a summer hour; a fall peak hour would only have 3% less traffic.
- A PAC member asked: As the LOS deteriorates does the traffic growth rate change because people will find alternate routes so they don't have to deal with the traffic congestion?
 - Godfrey confirmed that people will find other routes when LOS declines.

Roberts presented information on Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Vehicle Hours Traveled (VHT). By 2040, VHT will grow faster than VMT, meaning that people will be spending more time in their cars to go less distance. Ideally, VHT and VMT would be similar. Greater growth in VHT than VMT indicates more traffic congestion.

- PAC Member: I understand that many people are moving into Portland to be able to walk, use public transportation, etc. That does not match the increased traffic growth projections.
 - Godfrey responded that there are people are moving into urban areas for these reasons, but the greatest growth in residency is still in towns west of Portland.

Godfrey and Roberts presented traffic simulations.

Conclusions:

- The turnpike has sections today that are operating at an undesirable Level of Service (LOS E-F) during design hour.
- As traffic and congestion increases, crashes will also likely increase.
- If growth continues as expected, in the next five years we will see more sections operating at an undesirable LOS, which will cause more breakdowns in operation. To the driver, this will result in increased travel time, difficult maneuverability (lane changes, merges, and diverges), reduced corridor reliability, and a higher number of traffic incidents.

Summary of Alternatives and Pro/Cons Brainstorm

- **Alt#1 Future No Build (baseline comparison for all other alternatives)**
 - No comments
- **Alt#2 New/Expanded TDM Programs**

Description: This alternative will evaluate potential benefits from the Park and Ride lots, GoMaine, telecommuting, etc.

- Pros
 - Aligns well with design hourly volumes and peak hour transportation rates previously presented
 - Energy efficient
 - Low cost to implement
 - More environmentally friendly
 - Potential for programs to grow (it is currently underutilized) through organizations working on this goal
 - Technology is advancing
 - Younger generation is more open to idea of shared economy and may be open to these options; Uber and others breaking barrier of riding with those they do not know
- Cons
 - Some people like freedom and independence

- Less likely to alleviate through-traffic
- Other comments:
 - May not solve problem but could be a component. May be worth looking into creating a regional transportation association toward this end
 - This alternative is under-utilized and under-incentivized

- **Alt#3 Congestion Pricing on the Turnpike**

Description: This alternative will evaluate the implementation of Congestion Pricing on the Maine Turnpike to reduce demand

- Pros
 - Will relieve traffic on Turnpike
 - Low cost to implement
 - Technically feasible to implement
 - Will help push people to alternative forms of transportation
 - Will flatten peak demand
 - Equity for those causing congestion
- Cons
 - Currently against the law
 - Will increase traffic on other arterials and local roads
 - Lower income users may be priced out of mobility
 - Will be VERY unpopular with public
- Additional comments
 - Should be socially equitable, so low income users could still afford

- **Alt#4 New/Improved Intercity Bus Service**

Description: This alternative will evaluate the expansion or enhancement to Intercity Bus Service to the Portland Region.

- Pros

- This has regional implications
- Is a relatively low capital cost (would subsidies be welcome?)
- Established network in place
- Potential growth through things like a Breez-type service, possibly only during peak hours / airport and other connections
- Opportunity for Bus Rapid Transit
- Cons
 - Would mostly help only through-traffic - would not alleviate commuter traffic
 - Only cause a small movement of the needle

- **Alt#5 New/Improved Local Bus Service**

Description: This alternative will evaluate expansion or enhancement to Local Bus Service within the Portland Region

- Pros
 - Six-year plan to boost ridership already in the works
 - Opportunities for growth exist either through increased and better commuter times and new routes/stops
- Cons
 - None stated

- **Alt#6 New or Expanded Commuter Rail**

Description: This alternative will evaluate expansion or enhancement to Commuter Rail Service to Portland Region.

- Pros
 - Greater attraction to train than bus for consumers
 - Currently Brunswick line is expanding
 - Portland station is now one of top 10 in New England, more active than Hartford, CT
- Cons

- High cost to implement
- Freight rail has priority

- **Alt#7 New or Improved Intermodal Freight Service**

Description: This alternative will evaluate expanded or enhanced intermodal freight rail service.

- Pros
 - None stated
- Cons
 - Would not influence high volume, high speed truck freight
 - Private industry, no leverage

- **Alt#8 Land Use Scenario**

Description: This alternative will evaluate increased bus and transit ridership, reduced trips and trip lengths based on enhanced land use scenarios

- Pros
 - Planning is constantly evolving, this is an opportunity to educate municipalities
- Cons
 - Turnpike Authority has no ability to influence
 - Implemented locally. Would take a long time to implement

- **Alt#9 New/Expanded TSM Programs**

Description: This alternative will evaluate potential benefits from the implementation of new/expanded TSM programs such as ramp metering and enhanced ITS. This also includes evaluation of autonomous vehicles.

- Pros
 - Makes existing system more efficient

- Low cost to implement
- Could work together with ITS technology for improvements on I-295 and other major local connectors
- Cons
 - Lots of unknowns

- **Alt#10 Tolling Strategies**

Description: This alternative will evaluate the impacts/benefits of different tolling strategies, such as tolling I-295 in addition to Maine Turnpike (*current federal law severely restricts tolling of existing interstates and this is not currently being evaluated by MaineDOT or Maine policymakers*), and Regional Tolling, which would involve removing interchange tolls (*potential MTA revenue impacts*).

- Pros
 - Could be used in combination with other systems (like widening) to balance with I-295
- Cons
 - Likely to add traffic to the Turnpike
 - Can't toll the interstate without exceptions

- **Alt#11 Widen Turnpike**

Description: This alternative will evaluate the impact of widening the Maine Turnpike from Exit 44 northward up to Exit 53, as the traffic analysis indicates.

- Pros
 - Consider potential opportunity to add zip lane instead of lanes both Northbound and Southbound
- Cons
 - High initial capital cost
 - More impervious surface

- **Alt#12 Widen Other Roadways**

Description: This alternative will evaluate the impact of widening other existing roadways based on future congestion levels.

- Pros
 - None stated
- Cons
 - I-295 has lots of elevated road – expensive
 - Also lots of ROW concerns for I-295

Public Comments:

- Conservation Law Foundation: Would like to see sensitivity analysis for oil and gas prices. Is Turnpike’s revenue allowed to be used for alternatives mentioned? If so, many seem very feasible, but less so without the funding from MTA? Is MTA able and willing to consider this structure change?
 - Comment from Peter Mills: MTA already funds/partially funds GoMaine and other initiatives. Bondholders have tolerated this, but is also not a blank check. Has to be a project with strong results.
- A member of the public: Would like to see greater public outreach about this project and public hearings. Thinks there’s some gaps in alternatives mentioned. Studies show that adding lanes alone will not solve congestion issues. Encourages group to seriously look at other alternatives other than adding lanes. (Note: Peter Mills is drafting a response to CLF’s follow up letter, both of which will be available to the PAC shortly.)
- Turnpike Commuter from Gorham: Commutes daily on the turnpike. Would also like more public notice for meeting. Would like to have meetings at times that are more convenient times for public. Very against alternatives that increase tolls. Thinks Amtrak should be a good alternative. Would like to see added bus routes/more frequent routes. Would like electric vehicle charging stations (Mills noted that this is in process). Thinks to reduce

traffic and congestion toll booths should be eliminated and gas tax should be increased to compensate.