

Maine Turnpike Authority
Public Advisory Committee Meeting
Portland Area Mainline Needs Assessment
October 5, 2017

1. The Public Advisory Council (PAC) for the Portland Area Mainline (PAM) Needs Assessment was convened for its second meeting at 4:08 P.M. on October 5, 2017, at the Maine Turnpike Authority headquarters located in Portland, Maine.

Council Members present:

Paul Bradbury, *Chair*, Portland Jetport
Lt. Eric Baker, State Police
Josh Benthien, Northland
Chris Branch, City of Portland
Peter Carney, Long Creek
Jim Cohen, Portland Regional Chamber
Kristina Egan, GPCOG
Ed Hanscom, MaineDOT
Greg Jordan, Greater Portland Transit
John Melrose, NNEPRA
Ann Peoples, City of Westbrook
Nathan Poore, Town of Falmouth
Steve Sawyer, MBTA
Mike Shaw, Town of Scarborough
Kara Wooldrik, Portland Trails

Also Attending: John Duncan, PACTS

Staff/Consultants present for the Maine Turnpike Authority:

Peter Mills, Executive Director
Bruce Van Note, Director of Policy and Planning
Sara Zografos, Planner
Erin Courtney, Public Relations
Carol Morris, Morris Communications
Paul Godfrey, HNTB
Matthew Pelletier, HNTB

2. **Review and revise proposed transportation and land use changes.** Paul Godfrey started the meeting by asking the PAC to discuss what they think reasonable land use and transportation assumptions will be for the future (2040). Focusing on the shortlist of potential projects that was provided, he asked what are plausible reasonable projects

that might come forward that we should consider as part of our future—stating that we aren't concerned with all projects, but only those that will really influence how people will move regionally. The goal is to validate and update the list provided and get feedback so that we can use this list in trying to analyze what the future may hold. Carol Morris asked if 1) there is anything on the list that we have missed that would move the needle? 2) Which of these are likely to happen and would change traffic volumes and how people get around significantly? Using the list provided, Godfrey went item by item to discuss which projects the PAC sees as feasible and reasonable assumptions to include.

- A PAC member asked: are we looking at things that would impact any section of the turnpike or only those that would impact the PAC area? Godfrey responded that we should identify projects that would impact the PACTS region and projects that would impact capacity.
- John Duncan, Executive Director of PACTS, who attended the meeting by invitation to provide clarity on PACTS projects, identified that Exit 32 corridor is unlikely to happen.
- Godfrey asked Peter Mills to give update on the Gorham Spur status and what had recently happened with the Maine Legislature. Mills explained that we needed to know if the MTA was able to even consider building a spur, as he wasn't sure if the authority existed within our enabling act. Mills explained that MTA asked the legislature if congestion in this area was something the MTA should consider addressing. The Legislature's response was to approve MTA's authority and bonding capacity for this potential project.
- A PAC member commented that the extension of METRO should be categorized as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) expanded service. And we should be thinking about how this changes the landscape for the future if it becomes a full service with all the amenities of light rail. Godfrey commented that this would be important to include, but will need more clarity in terms of when and where it might be implemented by 2040. Morris asked for the projected ridership numbers from Greater Portland METRO.
- A PAC member commented on the I-295 Exit 4 Interchange project listed. Currently travelers taking Exit 4 don't have the ability to get from South Portland to I-295 south. This project would add a ramp to allow for this movement. However, the impact is local in terms of how traffic in South Portland gets to I-295.
- A PAC member commented on the State and High Street Two-Way Conversion project, stating that the City of Portland has no plans to do this.
- A PAC member noted that the Portland HUB Link Bus Circulator is a concept for which there has been a study done, linking the Jetport, the Portland Transportation Center and the Amtrak station.

- A PAC member said that the City of Portland is looking at an autonomous vehicle route in Portland from Portland Transportation Center to the Casco Bay Ferry.
- A PAC member asked about the interchange improvements to Cumberland listed: Does this mean a new interchange? Mills answered that both the town and MTA have agreed that a new interchange for Cumberland is off the table.

After further discussing what PAC members thought was worthy of being on the short list, Godfrey asked if there are any **other transportation or land use changes we should be considering in modeling future conditions out to 2040.**

- A PAC member suggested we add the PACTS short-term regional transit development plan, which will provide a plan to optimize the system from the user perspective. It is a system-wide improvement that will be small, but should be considered.
- A PAC member said Portland would be doing a smart signal corridor on Forest Avenue from I-295 to Woodfords Corner, using smart traffic signal technology to help with traffic flow. This has the ability to give buses priority.
- A PAC member commented that there are issues with I-295 and that it could be helpful to improve the Falmouth intersection at Route 1, 295 and the I-95 spur. Also, promotion of the equidistance in terms of using the spur vs. I-295. The member also stated that the corridor that has the most problems right now is I-295. Bruce Van Note added that a key factor in MaineDOT's ongoing study to address I-295 is the assumption that the MTA will add capacity to the Turnpike in the Portland area.
- A PAC member asked if there would be other improvements to Route 22/114? Mills responded that MTA would likely be obliged to study this as an alternative to a Gorham spur. Godfrey stated that a new road would have a big impact. He said if a spur is built, it would put a significant amount of traffic on the Turnpike. He asked, do we include the spur in the Traffic Demand model? Or not? Do we test both assumptions: One with a new spur and one without a new spur. It was generally agreed by the PAC that both options should be looked at for this study.
- A PAC member asked are we trying to capture housing starts? Should we be trying to measure new housing demand? Godfrey responded that it is reasonable to assume in the future there will be more homes and more development. PACTS is working to figure out to what degree should this occur and where. What is important for this study is *where* the growth is occurring.
- A PAC member brought up the issue of autonomous vehicles – how will this potential change in transportation affect modeling? Paul noted that, to date,

there is no agreement in the industry as to what it will mean in terms of transportation patterns and numbers.

- A PAC member suggested that investments to the Portland Transportation Center should be on the list, as the talk is of a \$40 million investment and affiliated parking garage, which would have an effect on highway demand.

Mills then gave a quick update on the corridor under discussion. In preparation of potential future widening, MTA is preparing to adapt the Cummings Road Bridge. There are three other impediments to adding lanes: Stroudwater Bridge, the railroad bridge and the bridge over Warren Avenue. All of these are in the mid-range planning stages. Another major project is Exit 45 itself, as the interchange is old and in need of replacement.

- A PAC member commented that there is real growth in the region now, not just recovery from the recession, and there were congestion issues with both I-295 and the Turnpike this summer, which affects the Jetport. The Jetport is half as busy in January as it is in August, and the peak airport traffic airport overlays the time period when the Turnpike is at its busiest.

Godfrey then asked the PAC to shift their attention to the land use list. One of the major items on the land use list is the new Dirigo Plaza in Westbrook, now being called “The Ridge”.

- A PAC member said that this project has now been approved and the property sale closed. This is a significant retail development project that will add 1500 peak hour trips and improvements to nine intersections around the area. Two of the intersections are at turnpike exits.
- A PAC member commented that there is development opportunity in Falmouth at the intersection of I-295, the 95 spur and Route 1. If the layout changes and ramps were removed, it would create frontage on Route 1, with open, available acreage. It’s not a matter of if, but when, and certainly within the range of this study’s time frame.
- A PAC member noted that people want more parking and wondered what the study would assume about parking.
- A PAC member commented that the West End in South Portland has done rezoning so as to need less parking.
- It was also noted that West Commercial Street in Portland has received approval to go ahead with the enlarged cold storage unit. Another PAC member commented that this should not affect traffic to a large extent.

3. **What we heard at the first PAC meeting (existing conditions).** Godfrey began by discussing that based on the first meeting, PAC members seemed surprised at the level of service results information on the Turnpike, and didn't necessarily see the slower speeds and traffic as a big issue. He reminded them that some folks mentioned that the Turnpike might be underutilized when compared to I-295, so why are there concerns about potential capacity issues on the Turnpike?
4. **When is it appropriate to address highway capacity and safety issues?** To help answer these questions, Godfrey went through a brief presentation on the MTA's financial obligations and how the MTA differs from the MaineDOT with regards to its funding model.

MTA Financial Obligations and Funding Model

- MTA is funded differently from state DOTs
- Turnpike sells bonds to investors in order to run the Turnpike, and there is the expectation that the Turnpike will maintain their investment (the road). The MTA must maintain the road to meet their responsibilities.
- Having a good bond rating means the MTA can secure good interest rates when borrowing.
- If the MTA does not maintain the road appropriately, it can lose control of the road. Bondholders can step in and MTA's control can cease.
- MTA creates 4-year and 30-year plans to identify future improvements
- MTA understands that users pay a premium to travel the turnpike, and turnpike users expect and deserve a high level of service.
- MTA "flow of funds" provides funding for needed capital improvements
- The MTA has a history of implementing projects in advance.
- MaineDOT funding limited to gas tax, state bonds, and federal support; their funding sufficient for preservation and maintenance only.

Godfrey also talked about the benefits of directing traffic to the Turnpike, noting that the Turnpike is designed to accommodate higher volumes of traffic and it is more appropriate to direct regional and long-distance traffic there as opposed to I-295. This can reduce traffic on I-295 as well as on local roads. There has been an increase in short distance trips between Exits 45 and 53 and much of the growth in the Portland region is because people are using the Turnpike as their local road.

- A PAC member commented that we have never seen traffic like we saw this past summer.
- A PAC member asked if there is any kind of Origin/Destination traffic information. What are these travelers' ultimate origins? Godfrey responded that the latest was from 2010 and that we can share this data.

5. **What does an STPA study look like?** Godfrey explained that this Portland Area Mainline Needs Assessment is being done under the guidelines of what would be consistent with the Sensible Transportation Policy Act (STPA) and the Turnpike's enabling act, as amended.

- STPA is a State of Maine law focused on transportation planning process
- STPA enacted in 1991 as part of a statewide referendum
- Requires that all transportation planning, capital investment, and project decisions must:
 - Minimize effects of transportation projects on public health, air and water quality, land use and other natural resources
 - Evaluate a full range of transportation alternatives; including TSM, TDM, transit, and existing system improvements

Godfrey explained that we would need to evaluate a full range of reasonable alternatives before widening and asked the PAC to consider what these might be for a limited access highway. Godfrey then presented the draft list of alternatives that are currently within the scope of the assessment:

List of Alternatives in Current PAM Study Scope

- No Action (required as a benchmark)
- Congestion Pricing, including tolling alternate routes
- Bus Transit (expanded, new)
- Travel Demand Management (TDM), Transportation System Management (TSM)
- Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)
- Enforcement and Incident Management
- Land Use Alternatives
- Widening
- Capacity improvements to local streets
- New local road alignments

Godfrey asked the PAC to consider what are the requirements of a reasonable alternative? He suggested that the alternative must address all or part of the problem, and must be within the control of the MTA, as if it isn't with their control, is it a reasonable alternative to evaluate? He also noted that alternatives couldn't negatively impact the MTA revenue.

- A PAC member commented that although this isn't about I-295, directing traffic to I-95 helps mitigate I-295 issues and asked how does this study play into this? Godfrey responded that there is a fair amount of traffic on I-295 that could be readily shifted to the Turnpike. He also said that I-295 is more congested than the Turnpike, but we need to be mindful of how any changes would affect the Turnpike, as well as every place else.

- A PAC member suggested that Rail be added to the list of alternatives
- A PAC member suggested that inner city bus/carpool be added to the list.
- A PAC member asked why bike/ped isn't on the list. Godfrey responded that bicycles and pedestrians aren't currently allowed on the Turnpike, so should it be considered? Another PAC member said that bike/ped activities, just like land use, need to be considered, but it is not a strategy that the MTA could employ. Godfrey suggested bike/ped should be attached to capacity improvements to local streets. A PAC member responded that lot of the list isn't within the turnpike control. Turnpike can't employ all alternatives listed.
- A PAC member commented that we should figure out what is most rational and the widest ranging action to take, saying it is better to have a wide range of things to look at.
- A PAC member commented that the best alternative may be a combination of alternatives, all things that move the needle cost effectively.
- A PAC member asked if it is okay for us to not be in the mindset of combinations of approaches and with that said, many interchanges are not close to town centers – how do you bridge the transportation gap from interchanges to downtowns if folks are using transit?
- A PAC member commented that a transit improvement isolated to the Turnpike is not going to move the needle; it needs to be more comprehensive.
- A PAC member was concerned about reasonable alternatives needing to have no impact to the MTA revenue, and doesn't want this to be an overarching impediment. The PAC member wondered if that criterion was necessary. Another PAC member suggested that the criterion be changed to “an alternative cannot affect MTA's bond rating.
- A PAC member asked what proportion of traffic on the Turnpike is freight related, saying if trucks themselves become problematic, what should we do? Godfrey responded that we are seeing growth in commercial traffic – the question might be to what degree does it have an economic impact in terms of the importance of the ability to move goods freely?
- A PAC member said we should make sure look closely at the STPA to consider all alternatives even though it may be that we look at all of them and still realize we need to widen.
- A PAC member commented that transit improvements should be reviewed in a tiered basis.

6. Public Comment:

A member of the public stated that it was helpful to discuss the potential conflict between a narrow focus on not affecting revenue vs. not affecting the bondholder. The way this process is done, reasonable people would see this as a thorough process.

A member of the public commented that he agreed the MTA should add bike/ped and rail to list of alternatives. He also commented that STPA requires that we must examine all alternatives and must give preference to other modes before widening.

A member of the public commented that he was confused by comments about the rail to Lewiston/Auburn and asked if folks were aware that a Lewiston/Auburn rail study has been mandated? Godfrey said he was not aware; a PAC member commented that the study is close to being awarded and MaineDOT has funded \$250,000 for the study and tasked NNEPRA with managing the study.

The meeting ended at 6:45 p.m.