

MAINE TRANSPORTATION

CONSERVATION LAW FOUNDATION



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For a thriving New England

Three Critical Transportation Challenges for Maine

- Providing a range of alternatives for people served by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Planning Councils (MPO, RPC) which together with the Department of Transportation make key infrastructure planning and funding decisions;
- Assuring basic transportation systems in rural Maine;
- Efficiently moving freight for businesses and consumers.

Each presents opportunities for new approaches to planning and funding, while also promoting good land use practices, reducing consumer costs and minimizing impacts to Maine's natural environment.



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MAINE'S TRANSPORTATION FUTURE: THE NEED TO INVEST FOR A HEALTHY STATE

A robust transportation network is key to Maine's economic development and the well-being of our communities. But resources to restore and enhance our aging infrastructure are scarce. To ensure a vital Maine we need a comprehensive transportation strategy that includes cost-effective alternatives to traditional modes of moving people and goods, and careful attention to protecting our natural and human resources.

Funding the Right Things on a Limited Budget

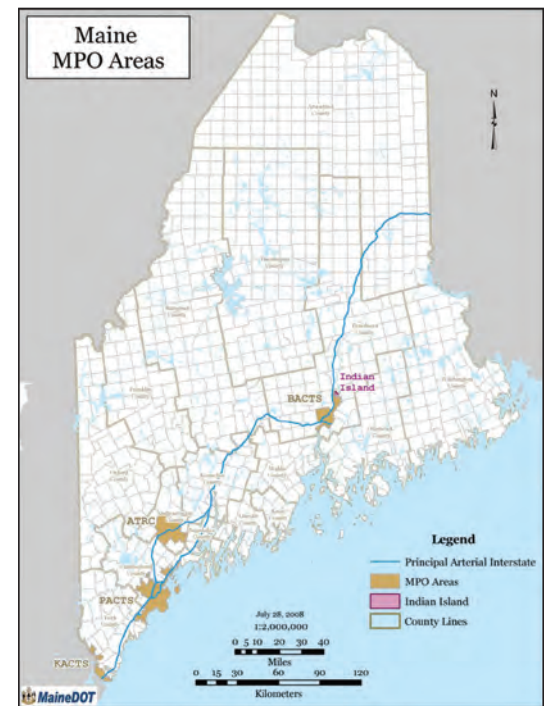
"Transportation infrastructure connects people and facilitates economic activity. Improvements in all modes of transportation — roads, rail, ports, air, and transit — make Maine more attractive to those interested in doing business here, and network Maine to the wider world." [2007 Measures of Growth report]

Maine relies significantly on two sources of revenue for both investment and maintenance of transportation infrastructure: federal highway and transit funds, and the state gasoline tax. The state gas tax produced a peak annual income of \$181 million in 2007, but the recession and increasing fuel costs have reduced this ever since. Less than 8 cents of every gasoline dollar

in Maine currently goes to the state highway fund, and as gasoline prices continue to rise, consumption is likely to decrease, further diminishing highway fund revenues. Corresponding decreases in federal highway and transit funds exacerbate Maine's transportation funding balancing act.

CLF Maine is committed to fostering a common transportation vision that balances enhancement of Maine's existing infrastructure with increased investment in alternatives that lower emissions and promote a healthy environment. We believe in developing a lively partnership among Maine's transportation stakeholders to explore options that can meet these objectives.

WHAT CHOICES SHOULD MAINE MAKE TO MEET THIS CHALLENGE?



New Options for Maine's Population Centers

Nearly a third of Maine's residents live in areas where transportation planning and investment is integrated with land use and economic development under the auspices of one of four Metropolitan Planning Organizations, a federal designation. In the rest of the state, Regional Planning Commissions / Councils of Government provide similar services on a county or regional basis. About 80% of Maine's municipalities belong to one or more of these.

The Challenge: 70% of Maine's transit buses and vans are at or near the end of their useful life just as public transit ridership is increasing. However, the continuing need to repair and improve road and bridge infrastructure can make investment in non-auto programs seem unaffordable. As overall transportation funding is squeezed, and previously set-aside federal funds are amalgamated, it is imperative that available resources for transit are not diverted, and that new sources of support are identified and successfully secured.

The Opportunities: Maine can invest in a diverse range of alternatives with the potential to broaden funding, including: tolling for road maintenance; pay-as-you-drive insurance; and employer incentives for using alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles. Maine can also expand transportation choices with new bus, rail, and van consumer options to link lower-cost housing areas to business sites and retail centers.

Better Serving the Needs of a Rural State

Maine people living beyond the MPO and RPC service centers currently have few transportation options. This is an especially acute problem for seniors and the less able, who may live at increased risk when unable to drive themselves. Low-income rural households rely on personal autos to travel long distances in order to shop, receive medical care, and complete other essential tasks.

The Challenge: Proposed changes to state Medicaid coverage threaten the current partnership between DHHS and rural transit providers that offer ride service for medical appointments for seniors and the less able. As gasoline prices rise, these costs put additional stress on low-income households.

The Opportunities: Maine should create an integrated program of regionally coordinated transportation providers, including single point-of-contact dispatch centers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD DECISIONS

The recent proposal to construct a privately-financed East-West highway is generating close scrutiny and debate. Given its significant impact on natural resources and local communities, and recent investments to maintain rail lines for freight, the value of the project is questionable. CLF will continue to track the proposal carefully to assure that it doesn't divert attention from Maine's real transportation challenges and opportunities.



Portland City Center

Efficient Movement of Products and Goods

Maine's investments in intermodal facilities and the safeguarding of rail right-of-way demonstrate that "freight and trade are two sides of the same coin," as Maine DOT's current long-range transportation plan (July 2010) puts it. The current "three-port" strategy to link ocean shipping and rail has the potential to maximize the use of existing infrastructure. However, motorized trucking currently accounts for almost 90% of Maine freight tonnage, with a correspondingly high cost in highway wear-and-tear, and increasing consumer costs as diesel fuel prices skyrocket.

The Challenge: As diesel fuel and road repair costs increase, there will be a growing need to shift the transportation of goods away from highways.

The Opportunities: Maine has sensibly invested in rail and its ports and needs to keep its eyes on the ball. Maximizing efforts to fully utilize these investments should take priority over new road construction that diverts valuable time, energy and resources.



Maine's intermodal transportation, like the image pictured here, have helped trade and provided additional efficiencies.

Better Transportation for a Healthy Environment

"Reconciling transportation and land-use decision-making is essential to maintaining mobility, protecting our investments in the infrastructure, and preserving the unique character of Maine." [Connecting Maine: DOT Long Range Transportation Plan, 2010, 19] Maine's "Sensible Transportation Policy Act" set a national standard in this regard by linking transportation investment decisions with local comprehensive planning requirements. The "Gateway One" project along the Route 1 corridor in mid-coast Maine showed how municipalities can work together to make better transportation and land use choices.

The Challenge: The dissolution of the State Planning Office risks loss of the essential connection between DOT and local comprehensive planning, and it's still the case that many local land-use decisions do not account for the needs of the regional and state-wide transportation systems, or fully consider the human impacts of infrastructure decisions. Progress on the Gateway One project has been allowed to lapse in the current administration.

The Opportunities: Maine needs to reinvigorate its commitment to assuring that transportation investments fully account for the effects on human health and the natural environment. Programs such as "Complete Streets" and funding for bicycle / pedestrian and rail / trail options can partner with land use planning to improve the health of Maine citizens and assure that "quality of place" is more than just a tag line.

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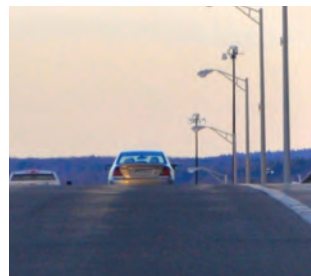
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Meeting the Challenge and Seizing the Opportunity

A truly sustainable Maine requires sensible development that links transportation, economic, and environmental considerations.

- Maine needs a transportation bond in 2012 that provides investment to maintain existing infrastructure while increasing alternatives to driving alone. This will save money otherwise spent on gas and reduce wear-and-tear on that infrastructure.
- Maine's transportation stakeholders must work together to identify and promote other funding mechanisms in the face of declining highway fund revenues, including consideration of options that have previously been politically difficult to discuss.
- Maine's collaborative approach to planning through MPO's and RPC's must be maintained and enhanced to assure local involvement in transportation decisions that support economic development.
- Maine's natural environment and the needs of all citizens must continue to be protected in making transportation infrastructure decisions.

These ambitions call for collaboration to explore new possibilities for systems and structures, creative approaches to funding, and collaborative advocacy. It's our future, and our state; let it be our work, together, that makes it possible.