

MaineDOT's RURAL ROAD INITIATIVE (RRI)

HIGHLIGHTS

The Rural Road Initiative (RRI) was created in 1999 to address the capital improvement needs of Maine 's 2,100+ miles of rural "state aid minor collector" highways.

In summary:

- Any and all projects are initiated by the municipality - if a municipality wants to participate with the DOT on a road project, then the DOT will develop the project with the town. However, if the DOT receives no response, or a negative response, then no project will exist. (however, the DOT will continue its "basic" summer maintenance).
- The total project cost is funded with a 33% local share and a 67% State share.
- The local share can come from any type of local source and/or the DOT's Urban/Rural Initiative Program (URIP) payment to the town
- The size, cost, and scope of each project is determined by the municipality after receiving free technical assistance from the MaineDOT's Regional Office
- A project can range from a small intersection project or culvert project to a paving project to a large reconstruction project.
- As of early April, 2006, each project's total cost is currently capped at \$600,000 so that more towns can take advantage of the State's resources. The former limit was \$450,000.
- Most RRI projects are eligible to be "locally administered"... once the Town has a State-certified administrator
- After any and all projects on a certain road, the road remains a State Aid road and maintenance responsibilities do not change.

WHAT IS A "STATE AID MINOR COLLECTOR"?

Maine 's 2100 miles of state aid *minor collectors* are the lowest level of State roads -- sometimes with no route number. They are plowed by towns and maintained by the State in the summer. Traffic volumes are relatively low. They typically connect two smaller towns but aren't major commuter or freight routes. On the other hand, *major collectors* are larger roads with more traffic connecting larger towns. Capital improvements to these roads are prioritized and funded through the normal Six Year Planning process and the BTIP. Many of these roads are posted in the spring time due to their lack of adequate base and pavement materials which severely restricts economic development and activity in rural areas.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF RRI

Goals of RRI: to create a financial and administrative partnership with municipalities throughout Maine for the reconstruction of the rural state aid minor collector road network.

Objectives:

- To build upon recent successful projects and continue this Program in subsequent BTIP's, matching municipal financial commitments
- To allow direct municipal participation in project identification and scoping
- To perform project scheduling, funding, and communication with interested municipal officials in a timely and efficient manner
- To establish a wide variety and scope of projects in a geographically diverse area across the state
- To encourage more municipalities to participate in the program
- To support municipal requests for reconstruction, rehabilitation and improvements of deficient sections of minor collectors to bring them up to current safety and structural capacity standards
- To reduce maintenance costs
- To protect and enhance the environment
- To ensure that MDOT staffing is adequate to deliver this program by developing state and local partnerships which enable local project administration

HISTORY

In 1999, the Local Road Assistance Program (LRAP), more commonly known as the "block grant" program, was restructured and renamed as the Urban/Rural Initiative Program (URIP). The purpose was to provide a funding mechanism to repair the aging and deteriorating conditions of Maine's minor collector highway system and/or the local road system. It created a framework from which to build an aggressive state aid minor collector reconstruction program.

In recent decades, there has been minimal capital investment (reconstruction or major improvements) in Maine's network of collector highways, compared to dozens and dozens of miles of reconstruction each year in the 1970s. The only mechanism for collector investments was the CRDA (Collector Road Development Award) program which required up to 25% municipal match for reconstruction projects on both major collectors and minor collectors. The CRDA program only funded a few projects with small scopes due to limited state funds. MMA and MDOT worked for two years (1997 and 1998) to develop the new URIP to replace the LRAP. The Legislature passed this Initiative after extensive consideration by the Transportation Committee and after extensive municipal outreach by MMA and MaineDOT. A 3 cent gas tax increase provided increased funding of URIP by \$3.5 million in addition to funding other programs. Part of the URIP includes the Rural Road Initiative (RRI) which replaced the CRDA Program. The RRI Program provides partial funding (67%) and incentives for municipalities to partner in capital improvements on state aid minor collector

roads. The local share can come from any municipal funding source, including URIP funds.

To determine the level of municipal interest, MDOT surveyed all municipalities (as well as counties and Indian reservations) in August, 1999. By December, 1999, the DOT had received 227 municipal responses, offering as much as \$ 19 million of local funds over six years, to rebuild portions of over 750 miles of rural highways across all of Maine . In late April, 2000, the 119th Legislature funded this Program with an initial allotment of \$6 million which became available in early August, 2000. The DOT sent letters in May, 2000 to about 65 municipalities which responded in the Fall of 1999 as being interested in participating in this Initiative and had indicated an interest in road projects within the current 2 year biennium. About 40 municipalities stepped forward with about \$2 million to form the first group of towns who were scheduled to participate in minor collector reconstruction. Virtually every town which stepped forward was selected for a project.

Since that time, over 60 towns have participated in this Program ranging from small towns to the larger cities in every county. There were many more interested towns listed in the 2004 to 2009 Six Year Plan. In fact, in 2003, the actual amount of State funds needed to fund all interested towns was \$19 million. In the 2008/2009 Biennial Work Plan, there is almost \$16 million in state funds to finance at least 18.7 miles of minor collector improvements.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The normal process would be through the biennial "solicitation" package mailed by MaineDOT to every municipality. The mailing in early 2004 "wiped the slate clean" of all past municipal interests and asked every eligible town to reprioritize its interests. For more information, contact Bill Croce in the Bureau of Planning at 624-3300 or contact the Regional Engineer in your Regional DOT office.