

Sparking New Life into Maine's Star City Project

Maine Department of Transportation

U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)
FY 2025 Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant Program

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As a part of the *Sparking New Life into Maine's Star City Project* (“Project”), the Maine Department of Transportation (“MaineDOT”) and the City of Presque Isle (“City”) will construct needed safety and connectivity improvements in downtown Presque Isle, Maine (Figure 1). Presque Isle has been designated by the State as a priority Service Center in rural northern Maine—a medical, employment, and retail hub for the greater Aroostook County region, including the nearby Mi’kmaq Nation and Amish communities. Small family farms are prevalent and account for nearly 95 percent of the county’s 720 farms.¹ As a result, Project design and improvements will reflect a variety of transportation modes including personal vehicles, freight trucks, farm equipment, snowmobiles, ATVs, horse-and-buggies, bicycles, and pedestrians.

The Project will revitalize the city’s downtown business and retail district by restoring the deteriorating transportation infrastructure along the Main Street/U.S. Route 1 (US 1) corridor while simultaneously reintroducing the character of downtown lost decades ago as infrastructure aged. US 1 is a key trade lane for exports of American goods, primarily from Maine and the northeast, into Canada. The county boasts one-third of the State’s agricultural sales and has been home to numerous military installations since World War II. US 1 has long been the primary freight route in the region for these industries; however, the route bisects downtown Presque Isle. Because of growing freight and regional traffic, downtown transportation infrastructure suffers significant deterioration, contributing to unsafe conditions for users of all transportation modes.

In 2022, MaineDOT and the City implemented a [Village Partnership Initiative](#) agreement. The initiative aims to address key infrastructure challenges along US 1 while enhancing the character and aesthetics of downtown Presque Isle. This Project, born out of the initiative, will provide substantial benefits to local and regional residents, as well as visitors, in order to safely navigate to and through the city regardless of transportation mode and will spur economic development opportunities.

The catalyst for the Project is a related US 1 bypass project which will reroute heavy freight traffic around the city. The [Presque Isle Freight and Mobility Priority Corridor Project](#)—awarded an FY22 INFRA grant—will create a roadway for trucks to travel around the city, allowing safer and less congested conditions in downtown Presque Isle. This will reduce the need for significant ongoing maintenance necessary due to heavy



Figure 1. The City of Presque Isle is in rural northeastern Maine on U.S. Route 1.

¹ [2022 Census of Agriculture](#)

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trucks and farm equipment damaging downtown streets over time. The bypass allows the City to realize its [2020 Downtown Redevelopment Plan](#), focused on historic and cultural preservation and beautification. The Project also aligns with the City's *Main Street 4-Point Approach* which addresses downtown economic revitalization efforts. The plans recognize how revitalization will benefit city and rural residents who rely on downtown for their everyday needs.

The Project meets numerous USDOT goals consistent with the [FY 2022-2026 U.S. DOT Strategic Plan](#), including Safety, Economic Strength, and Transformation. The following outcomes are primary Project purposes and align with BUILD Merit Criteria:

1. **Safety** and efficiency for non-motorized travelers and motorists through Complete Streets design and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.
2. **Environmental Sustainability** through transportation-efficient design that complements features of a historic village and allows for fewer and shorter vehicle trips in the village.
3. **Quality of Life** by increasing affordable transportation options and convenience in a sizeable, rural, disadvantaged community and improving multimodal access to daily destinations such as employment, healthcare, and grocery stores.
4. **Mobility and Community Connections** through modern and uniform multimodal transportation systems by reconnecting communities, including a vast rural area, to direct, affordable transportation options.
5. **Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity** by promoting rural main street revitalization, including designs that will facilitate Maine's economically important all-season tourism.
6. **State of Good Repair** by restoring and modernizing existing infrastructure and reducing construction and maintenance burdens.
7. **Partnership and Collaboration** through ongoing neighborhood engagement and coordination with public and private local organizations, leveraging the Village Partnership Initiative to reinvigorate a regional service center's downtown district.
8. **Innovation** by employing efficient and cost-effective project delivery and incorporating technologically advanced traffic control devices.

The Project consists of numerous multimodal mobility improvements (Figure 2, Attachment A). A detailed statement of work is included as Attachment B.

US 1/Main Street Improvements (Figure 2: Green):

- Retrofitting one mile of Main St. South/US 1 from the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) campus to Blake St. to reduce travel lanes, add new or improve existing sidewalks, build an esplanade-separated pathway, allow for wider on-street parking, and includes intersection signaling and enhanced crosswalks to improve safety.
- Upgrading sidewalks and intersection signals on 1.1 miles of Main St. North/US 1 from Blake St. to Maysville St./Connector Rd.

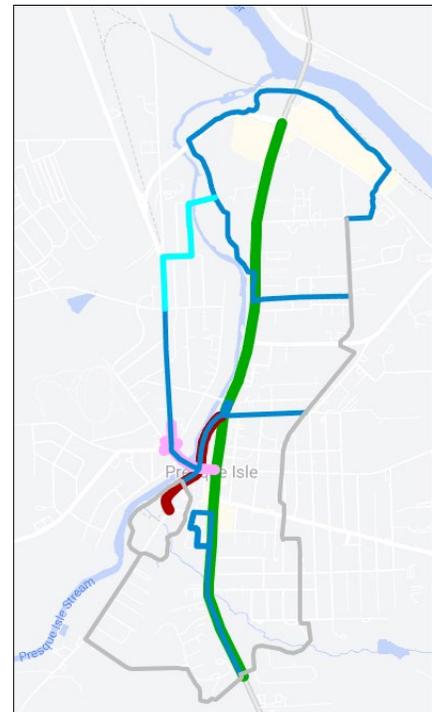


Figure 2. The Project consists of multimodal improvements throughout downtown Presque Isle (Details for each component included as Attachment A and [here](#)).

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Riverside Drive Improvements (Figure 2: Red):

- Converting 0.5 miles of Riverside Dr. North from two-way to one-way and reappropriating the space to include separated shared-use facilities and greenspace.
- Constructing a 0.5 mile shared-use path on Riverside Dr. South.

State Street Improvements and 5-Fingers Intersection Reconfiguration (Figure 2: Pink):

- Reconfiguring the State St. bridge and approaches to reduce travel lanes, reappropriate space with a separated multiuse pathway, and increase traffic calming features.
- Converting the existing 5-way intersection of State, Mechanic, Parsons, and Dyer Streets, also known as the “Five Fingers Intersection,” to a safe and logical 4-way intersection with improved crosswalks and signals.
- Reconfiguring Dyer St. approaching the new 4-way intersection.

Shared-Use Path Additions and Pedestrian Bridge Construction (Figure 2 Dark, Light Blue):

- Constructing separated shared-use pathways to and through the downtown business/retail district, completing a city loop.
 - Segments (not related to previously listed roadway improvements) include Harris St./Pedestrian Bridge, Davis St. loop connector, Riverside/Blake connector, Presque Isle North End bike path, and the Ryan/Roberts St. alternative path.
- Building a pedestrian bridge over the Presque Isle Stream between housing and the city’s primary supermarket.

Project Location

Presque Isle is northern Maine’s largest city with a population of 8,700. Downtown Presque Isle is a center for services and commerce for the surrounding rural agricultural community. The city is designated by the State as a [primary Regional Service Center](#) (RSC), classifying it as a regional hub for healthcare, employment, retail, and recreation. According to the [Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry](#) (DACF), the State and its residents depend upon its RSCs’ “vitality for [the State’s] economic and social well-being.” The city is located in a very rural area—although the city is part of a Census-Designated Urban Area (UACE 72154), the UACE has a total population of 5,361 which falls significantly below the [BUILD threshold](#) defining Urban Areas (200,000).

Table 1. Project Location Details

Location	City of Presque Isle Aroostook County, Maine
GPS coordinates	46.68122, -68.01550
Census Tracts (2010 and 2020)	23003951800 (9518) 23003951900 (9519) 23003952000 (9520)
Census-Designated Urban Area	Rural Presque Isle UACE: 72154 ¹ Population: 5,361(2020)
Congressional Representation	ME’s 2 nd District Jared Golden (D) U.S. Senators Susan Collins (R) and Angus King (I)

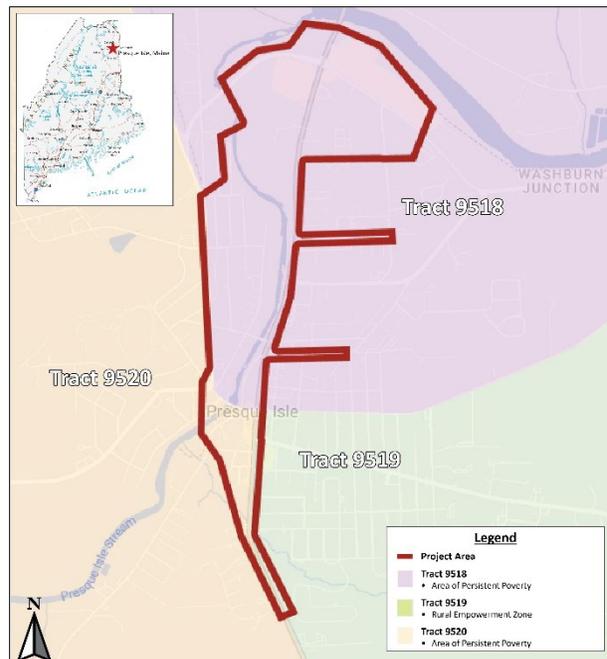


Figure 3. The Project spans three Census Tracts. (Also included as Attachment C and [here](#).)

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The Project area includes the Main St./US 1 corridor spanning approximately two miles between the UMPI campus to the south and Connector Rd./Maysville St. to the north, as well as State St. and Riverside Dr. approximately 750 feet west of Main St. The shared-use loop includes a four-mile perimeter surrounding the roadway improvements. The Project spans three Census Tracts—9518, 9519, and 9520 (Table 1, Figure 3, Attachment C). Tracts 9518 and 9520 are designated [Areas of Persistent Poverty](#) (APP). According to the Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer, Tracts 9518 and 9419 are also [Transportation Disadvantaged](#) due to high transportation burdens. Additionally, Tract 9519 is a [Rural Empowerment Zone](#) (Round III). US 1 creates the border of these three tracts and is the primary connector in the city. The [dynamic project map](#) illustrates the proximity between Project components, Census Tracts, and local points of interest.

Regional History

Lumber and agriculture industries have been fundamental to Presque Isle and Aroostook County's economy and development since the 1800s. The area's vast forests provide abundant resources for the lumber industry, which supports local sawmills and related businesses, and the climate and soil provide ideal growing conditions for agricultural products—primarily potatoes. Until the 1950s, Maine led the nation in potato production, and the State remains a [top ten potato production state as of 2023](#). According to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [2022 Census of Agriculture](#), Aroostook County accounts for 33 percent of Maine's agriculture sales; 94 percent of the county's farms are small family farms.

Regional military installations also impacted the city and county over the last century. As the closest point in the continental U.S. to Europe, northern Maine held significant strategic value for the U.S. military's air operations during World War II and the Cold War. The U.S. Army Air Corps, later the U.S. Air Force, established several air bases in and around Presque Isle. The activation—and eventual deactivation—of these military installations resulted in population fluctuations since the 1940s. County population peaked at 106,000 residents, with Presque Isle accounting for 13,000, in the 1960 Census. However, since the final regional base closure in 1994, the area's population declined to numbers not experienced since the early 1900s. As of the 2020 Census, the county had 67,000 residents with approximately 8,700 in Presque Isle.

Transportation Challenges

Since the 1950s state and local agencies have studied transportation alternatives that would improve the region's economy by improving transportation mobility. The primary objective of the most recent evaluation, the *Aroostook County Transportation Study* completed between 1999 and 2013, was to identify transportation improvements that would help stem the economic downturn that had occurred over the past several decades and spur future economic growth within the study area. Recommendations from that study included the nearby completed Caribou Connector and related Presque Isle Bypass, which is currently underway.

While the lumber and agriculture industries and military installations have been transformative to Presque Isle's culture and history, the impacts of moving heavy goods and equipment on US 1 through the heart of Presque Isle have left lasting marks on the transportation infrastructure. While periodic minor repairs have been made, the city's transportation infrastructure has not been improved or modernized since the 1950s. The existing roadways were designed for vehicles as a priority and to move freight through the city, although not efficiently. In much of the Project area, the infrastructure consists of four through-lanes on US 1, confusing turn lanes, narrow on-street parking, and limited pedestrian facilities. The existing infrastructure is reaching the end of

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its useful life after decades of heavy use, exposure to the cold weather, and deferred maintenance. When the related bypass project is completed, the city will be left with inefficient streets that are too wide and with speeds that are too high for the remaining roadway users—conditions that do not align with visions and plans for an accessible, revitalized downtown.

Current conditions create hazards for users of all transportation modes, but risks are especially heightened for those requiring pedestrian or bicycle access. Based on crash data from 2019 to 2021, there are four High Crash Locations (HCL) in the Project area (See *Merit Criteria, Safety*). One HCL at State St. and Riverside Dr. includes pedestrian incidents. In their *2024 Route 1 Main Street Downtown Transportation Feasibility Study*, engineers focused on proposed improvement strategies for pedestrian and bicycle safety, lack of a comprehensive multimodal system, and high vehicle speeds. Project improvements will address each of these identified problems.

Transportation Solutions

The Project will transform transportation in downtown Presque Isle, enhancing safety and connectivity. By right-sizing US 1 and implementing Complete Streets principles, the infrastructure improvements will create a more balanced and accessible transportation network. The redesigned US 1 corridor will accommodate various modes of travel, including motorists, pedestrians, cyclists, and snowmobilers, as well as transportation by horse-and-buggy and the movement of farm equipment. Project improvements will provide residents and visitors with safer, more diverse transportation options, reducing reliance on personal vehicles and facilitating continued economic and tourism growth in the region. Key multimodal features include:

- Realigned vehicle lanes to optimize traffic flow and reduce speeds;
- Reconfigured intersections to enhance safety and efficiency;
- Additional and improved crossings for increased pedestrian safety; and
- Separated alternative transportation facilities.

Project Design

Initial project designs from the 2024 feasibility study are at the 10-percent design level. Preliminary engineering is underway and is expected to advance project design to the 30- to 50-percent design level by 2026. There are no previously completed Project components. The Project is related to:

MaineDOT's Presque Isle Freight and Mobility Priority Corridor Project (FY22 INFRA)

- Currently underway, expected completion in 2029
- Diverts freight traffic around downtown on a new 6.3-mile two-lane bypass

MaineDOT and the City of Presque Isle's Village Partnership Initiative: Route 1 Main Street Downtown Transportation Feasibility Study (2024) – Included as Attachment D

- Studied existing pedestrian/bicycle safety issues, gaps and lack of a comprehensive multimodal system, high vehicle speeds, and roadways that serve vehicles as a priority
- Recommended short- and long-term multimodal accessibility and safety improvements
- Additional rural downtowns on the US 1 corridor are part of the [Village Partnership Initiative](#) and are undergoing similar planning
- Awarded “Exemplary Smart Growth Plan” from [GrowSmart Maine](#)

MaineDOT's Presque Isle Route 1 Reconstruction Congressionally Directed Spending (2022)

- To provide preliminary engineering funding for improvements to a two-mile stretch of Main Street/US 1 in Presque Isle.