



# MaineDOT View

## Prioritizing: Same job, better tools

**T**HIS IS THE TIME OF YEAR for making lists and checking them twice. MaineDOT's list has nothing to do with being naughty or nice, but priorities certainly do factor in. Of course, we're talking about MaineDOT's biennial Capital Work Plan. Typically released in March of odd numbered years, this plan represents our strategy of wisely investing available resources by listing specific capital projects to be delivered over the upcoming two-year period starting July 1, 2011.

Prioritizing candidates for the work plan is nothing new, but the underlying concepts we are using are being better defined and communicated. Why? In a word: necessity. Compared to other states, Maine simply has a lot of miles of roads and relatively few people spread out over a large area. For example, New Hampshire has less than half the state roads located in less than one-third of the area, yet it has about the same population and state transportation funding. This means the Granite State has about twice the funding per mile that Maine does. Our state needs to prioritize very aggressively to target projects that achieve the most value to Maine businesses and travelers.

So how do we do that? At its essence, it means asking two simple questions.

1) What is the priority of the road (or other transportation asset)?

2) Given its priority, what level of service can customers reasonably expect?

### 1. Highway priority

We intuitively know the interstate is more important to our economy than a dead end road that carries 100 hundred cars a day. The interstate obviously has to be wider, straighter, stronger, and smoother. Though we know that every road is important to someone, most can agree that we need to use objective, understandable criteria to determine priority. MaineDOT

has gathered and analyzed straightforward, common-sense factors including the economic importance of the road as determined from input from regional economic development districts, federal functional classification, heavy haul trucking use and the amount of relative traffic on the road by region. With this and

**Priority 5 roads** are 2,500 miles of minor collector highways, almost all on the "state aid" system. They represent 11 percent of miles, but carry only 7 percent of traffic.

**Priority 6 roads** are local roads and streets, and are the year-round responsibility of our municipal partners. Though they carry just 13

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other data, MaineDOT has classified all 23,400 miles of Maine public highways into six, easy-to-understand priority levels.

**Priority 1 roads** include the Maine Turnpike, the interstate system and key principal arterials like Route 1 in Aroostook County, the Airline (Route 9), Route 2 west of Newport, and Route 302. The 1,400 miles of Priority 1 roads represent only 7 percent of the miles, but carry fully 40 percent of all vehicle miles traveled in Maine.

**Priority 2 roads** total about 940 miles. They are non-interstate, high value arterials that represent about 4 percent of the total miles of road but carry 11 percent of overall traffic.

**Priority 3 roads** generally are the remaining arterials and most significant major collector highways. These 2,050 miles represent only 9 percent of miles, but carry 19 percent of the traffic.

**Priority 4 roads** generally are the remainder of the major collector highways, often also part of Maine's unique "state aid" system, in which road responsibilities are shared between the state and municipalities. These 1,900 miles represent about 8 percent of total miles, and carry 10 percent of the traffic.

As a subtotal, Priority 1 through Priority 4 roads are only 29 percent of public road miles, but carry fully 80 percent of all the vehicle miles traveled in Maine.

percent of the statewide traffic, these 14,300 miles make up 61 percent of the total miles. That sounds like a lot, and it is, but Maine actually has the lowest percentage of local roads in New England, and the ninth lowest percentage in the country. In comparison, 74 percent of public roads in New Hampshire are local.

### 2. Customer service levels

The next step is defining easy-to-understand customer service levels appropriate to the priority of the state's roads (1-5). We are using another intuitive scale: A, B, C, D and F. Using existing data on the safety, condition and service of the road, we can determine its customer service level. The result is a fair, consistent measure of how a road compares to other roads of the same priority across the state.

When you combine priority with customer service levels, project candidates can be better evaluated. Obviously, a high priority road with a D rating needs work, and addressing it will yield high value. Though it's just a part of the analysis, it will help focus resources on good projects all over the state, and better refine long-term capital goals and needs.

So we're making a list, and checking it twice (actually, three and four times). With a clearer, more transparent prioritization process in place, we continue to move in a good direction. ■

### **IT'S THE FUTURE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.**

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