A survey was sent to various business with the following questions:

What does your business need “right now” for assistance to help?

To prompt needs and ideas we are thinking in terms of barriers and/or opportunities in the areas of

- Workforce
- Regulations and possible regulation changes
- Infrastructure
- Fiscal stimulus
- Innovation opportunities

Please take the time to provide information from the above to have input into the groups work. Focus on the immediate needs to hopefully occur by end of July or sooner and then follow up with longer term ideas for changes.

On the short term list now are PPE needs, testing needs to have employees return to work and/or be confident they are going to be safe at work and also not bring impact their families.

Please forward this to the appropriate people in your organizations if needed.

Responses by 12 June or earlier would be appreciated.

Summarized responses for consideration follow:

Short term

What is the current status of your business at this time regarding impacts of changes due to the Covid-19 virus?

- The coated graphics market as seen a recent decline of 30-50% due to the pandemic and, therefore, we are not able to keep our operations running full. Uncertainty remains regarding how long this will last.
- We are a global supplier of textured release paper. Our biggest regional markets are in Asia and Europe which have been significantly impacted by the virus as well. In general, volumes are off dramatically leading to under-utilized assets and rolling equipment shutdowns. Our products are utilized as part of the automotive/aerospace, fashion and decorative surfaces supply chains; all of which rely on consumer spending to drive demand.
- We are seeing secondhand impacts from our manufacturing clients seeing some downturn in markets generally – individuals and businesses are putting off purchases or cutting back expenses (including labor) due to either actual market shrinkage or perception that the economy may not fully recover for some time. Manufacturing in general has adapted to the social distancing requirements as much as practicable. However, many of Maine’s most important manufacturers have not been eligible for federal assistance to date – many because they are slightly too large for the federal PPP program, and most because they are not big enough for a special bail-out.
What does your business need “right now” for assistance to help?

- **Workforce**
  - Assistance to encourage manufacturers to maintain employment levels is more important than increasing unemployment benefits. PPP was a good program – just a little too limited for Maine’s needs. Keeping the workforce employed is important for both the economic health of employers and the personal/financial health of employees.
  - Continuation of expanded unemployment benefits to ease curtailment related impacts.
  - PPE supply chain/logistical support to ensure businesses have what they need to operate safety when social distancing is not a viable option.
  - More available testing, testing, testing particularly for essential businesses; both virus and anti-body testing to provide return to work guidance.
  - Clear guidance needed for school/daycare reopening so children can resume education and parents can focus on reintegrating into the workforce. Also important of higher education facilities to reopen as they are significant drivers of Maine’s economy.

- **Regulations and possible regulation changes**
  - Pine Tree development Zone (PTDZ)
    - Extension of program past 2031 and extend deadline to apply from the end of this year to end of 2025
  - Inclusion of all manufacturing facilities with 50 or greater employees without restrictions

- **Renewable Energy Credit Class IA Opt Out Option**
  - Extend Class IA opt out option provided to Large T&D consumers to 2031 or make exemption permanent

- **Efficiency Maine Funds**
  - Fully Fund Large Impact Efficiency Maine Projects up to $5M / Company per year per site
    - The intention here would be to fund worthy projects. Instead of the 1 yr. payback or 50% funding mechanism is to fully fund the project (since most capital money is tight). Also raise the limit to funds available per year to companies. Right now I think it is $1.5 M between all the programs (I may be off with that figure)
    - Since most companies will cut capital expenditures for the next year or so, that means less construction jobs, and losing out longer term in regards to energy efficiency and sustainability.
    - I have seen good response from some of Maine’s agencies trying to accommodate requests from manufacturers. More could be done – for example, Efficiency Maine Trust could loosen its rules and shift funds to encourage investment from manufacturers at a time when they are somewhat afraid to do so – such investments increase competitiveness of Maine’s manufacturers while also helping to secure existing jobs.
  - Putting a delay any regulations that have the potential to impact us are of concern – perhaps putting a hold on any new regulations until we get through the pandemic should be considered.
  - For my businesses, we need the state to be more consistent in its guidelines and oversight. For example, events are limited to 50 people or fewer – apparently unless
you’re demonstrating because then as many people who want to protest/support can
attend as evidenced around the state this weekend.

**Infrastructure**
- Improved broadband access for those working from home in rural areas
- Unfortunately, infrastructure investment tends to be too long-lead time to help at this
time. Roads, bridges, rail, and even telecommunications are vitally important but can
be years away from providing benefits in the current environment. Such investments
need to occur but the benefits to manufacturers, while very real, will be years away.
One item that might help across multiple fronts (climate, economy, etc) would be grants
to manufacturers to develop low-carbon transportation hubs at Maine’s rural
manufacturing facilities.

**Fiscal stimulus**
- Consider expanded lines of credit for distressed businesses.
- A state PPP-type program to encourage Maine manufacturers to maintain payroll levels
through the second half of this year would be very positive.
- Avoiding additional governmental taxes/assessments for the next year or two is
important to allow recovery and send the right signals to retain and attract investment.
- Consider restoring the Regional Green House Gas Initiative (RGGI) rebate program for a 2-
3 year period.
- Reduced taxes through July. We see the Governor extended the State of Emergency into
July which does some of this.
- **Energy Credit**
  - Give $10/ton tax credit to facilities who generate power and buy Maine sourced
    solid biomass that is used for power generation from now till the end of next
    year
    - This keeps money in Maine vs buying power/fuel from out of state
    - Improves Carbon footprint
    - Helps manufacturing/ Maine forest product industry
- The highest tax that is paid in Maine on “consumer” items (besides gas & tobacco) is
lodging tax. If we don’t get the state opened up to more tourists in safe states (those
with consistent decline in viral spread) then we’re going to be in serious trouble with
next year’s budget – if we’re not already. The lack of available funds to support needed
social services (DHHS) and education spending is going to undermine the very safety net
that the state is trying to establish.
- A three year reduction in Sales Tax to entice consumers back to purchasing and help
restart small businesses over the next couple months.
- Suspend excise tax and sales tax on registration of vehicles to stimulate purchase of new
and used vehicles; use federal stimulus funding to make up losses to municipalities.
- We need to make sure that our employees are receiving unemployment compensation in
a timely manner – I understand the recent increase in fraud activity may delay
payments, so getting this resolved quickly will be important for our employees. As I
understand, the additional $600 of unemployment compensation from the federal fiscal
stimulus is scheduled to end July 25 so getting an extension would be helpful as I
anticipate we could continue to have curtailment into August.
Where possible, tax relief to support cash flow and/or incentivize employers to maintain staffing levels as our markets recover.

- **Innovation opportunities**
  - One item that might help across multiple fronts (climate, economy, etc) would be grants to manufacturers to develop low-carbon transportation hubs at Maine’s rural manufacturing facilities.
  - Incentives and/or credits for investments to reduce exposure (Workstation redesigns, air purification, barriers, temperature screening, etc.). Highlight successes and innovation examples to encourage more private sector involvement.
  - Use stimulus dollars go into shovel-ready projects around the state. I think that part of the problem is (actually I know it) that the unemployment payments exceed many people’s salaries so there’s little incentive to return to work prior to that money running out. To that end, I have a bunch of jobs on our Web site that my members cannot fill: [https://midmainechamber.com/cms/job-postings/#s=1](https://midmainechamber.com/cms/job-postings/#s=1). Perfect example: cooks. Eric’s, China-Dinah and Joseph’s Fireside have all closed permanently. Silver Street Tavern is now closed on Monday’s because it can’t find a cook. Pointe Afta has been advertising for a cook for a year. Amici’s needs an asst. head chef. Lots of openings in construction as well.

**Longer Term**

- **Workforce**
  - Develop career opportunities and paths for
    - Forest product industry operations and transportation
    - Renewable energy industry construction and operations
    - Electric vehicle use and infrastructure

- **Regulations and possible regulation changes**
  - amending programs such as the PTDZ to allow more businesses to qualify as they rehire employees. Even if it is a restart rather than a new business, perhaps offer 3 – 5 years of the PTDZ benefits to help get the companies reestablished vs the 10 for new companies.
    - Extension of program past 2031 and extend deadline to apply from the end of this year to end of 2025
  - inclusion of all manufacturing facilities with 50 or greater employees without restrictions

- **Infrastructure**
  - Electrical vehicle use and associated infrastructure
  - Microgrids for power systems to optimize addition of renewable projects

- **Fiscal stimulus**
  - Allow a higher percentage of ETIF for state withholdings to be returned to companies.
  - Offer more programs like Opportunity Zone and New Market Tax Credit financing for areas in need.

- **Innovation opportunities**
- Develop and implement a renewable energy action plan that expedites construction of solar, onshore and offshore wind power generation and infrastructure whereby the focus is stimulating construction employment and long-term employment of technicians and operation employees of facilities. New graduates and existing students at the states technical colleges would be the developed workforce to do this work and supplement the existing industry employees. Once in place the states long term climate goals would be advanced.

- Electrical vehicle use and associated infrastructure

- One item that might help across multiple fronts (climate, economy, etc) would be grants to manufacturers to develop low-carbon transportation hubs at Maine’s rural manufacturing facilities.