Governor’s Economic Recovery Subcommittee Infrastructure  
(Transportation, Construction, Broadband, and Banking) 

AGENDA Thursday, 6/11/20

2:00pm-3:00pm The subcommittee will receive presentations from and discuss transportation issues with:

The general format will be 15-20 minutes of presentation by the guest speakers followed by 10-15 minutes of discussion and Q&A with the subcommittee.

1. 2:00pm – 2:30pm: Andy Bickmore, Director of Results & Information Office, Maine Department of Transportation:
   
   Maine’s Transportation Infrastructure; baseline overview of transportation system in Maine – perspective of Maine DOT

   Key Takeaways:

   Maine DOT puts out reports highlighting the needs of different sectors within transportation – available on Maine DOT website

   - Maine DOT Statistics:
     - 8,812 centerline miles of highway
     - 2,967 Bridges and minor spans (includes 199 LURBs)
     - 3 major ports (Eastport, Searsport, Portland)
     - 35 publicly owned and funded airports
     - 337 miles of state-owned & operating rail lines
     - 22 public transit providers
     - 425+ accessible buses and vans
     - 68 miles of ferry routes, serving 6 islands
     - 54 Park & Ride facilities

   Customer service level (CSL); Safety, Condition, Service

   2011 – Maine Legislature set goals for the Maine DOT (available on the Maine DOT website) – the DOT needs more funding in order to meet these goals; Federal funding accounts for about 1/3 of DOT funding

   HCP; Highway Corridor Priority (priorities level 1-4 depending on how busy the roadway is; 1 being highly trafficked national highways, 4 being sparsely trafficked country roads) – local roads and streets are the responsibility of individual towns

   - Worst road in Maine is US Route 201, which is an HCP 2

   Maine’s infrastructure has been in steady decline since 2006 – Maine DOT is now closing nearly as many bridges each year as they used to post each year (bridges in poor condition are closed); there is nothing within the system that will cause an immediate failure
- PUNT – Paving Until Normal Treatment – patching and paving to sustain roadways until funding becomes available to completely repave roads

Climate change affects infrastructure depending on the resiliency of the systems – it is necessary to invest in the resiliency of infrastructure systems

**Blue Ribbon Commission to Study and Recommend Funding Solutions for the State’s Transportation Systems** – presented a Dec, 2019 report of findings – program was extended into 2020 to put forward recommendations:

- (1) Assuming an annual $100 million general obligation bond package, the current unmet annual transportation funding need in Maine is approximately $232 million.
- (2) The federal government should be challenged to continue providing one third of Maine’s transportation funding need.
- (3) Given findings (1) and (2), the pragmatic state level funding target that Maine should address is approximately $160 million – about two thirds of $232 million.
- (4) Once the annual transportation funding need is met, Maine’s reliance on bonding to supplement transportation funding should be reduced in a fiscally responsible manner.
- (5) Given the complexity and importance of the issues inherent in transportation funding, the commission did not have enough time to fully develop a funding solution framework that it could support recommending to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation.

**COVID-19 Impacts:**

April 1st, 2020 – traffic was 48% of the traffic seen in 2019 (we are down 28% as of the beginning of June, 2020)

What does Maine DOT need to survive and recover?

- Flexible funding to replace lost revenue – near term infusion of $110M (Federal Emergency Relief Funding and/or vote approval of the $105M bond to be voted on in July)
- Recover – stable and predictable funding

Maine DOT accelerated 10 projects in early May 2020 – almost $200M will be distributed in 2020 through Discretionary Grant Funding

Maine DOT continues to deliver at a 97% rate while working remotely

**2. 2:30pm – 3:00pm: Tony Grande, Board Vice President, Maine Better Transportation Association:**

Maine Better Transportation Association – non-partisan organization that advocates for safety in Maine transportation – 700+ member in the public and private sector

Provides scholarships to students looking to study transportation-relate fields

**Key Takeaways:**

**Current infrastructure conditions:**

- Current Infrastructure Conditions – ASCE Report Card
  - Bridges: C-
Roads: D
Transit: D+
Non-Highway
  1. Ports: B-
  2. Aviation C+

ARTBA Bridge Report: Maine ranks 7th worst in the country in percentage of structurally deficient bridges

Federal Gov. has not increased fuel tax since 1993

Maine gets the same amount of federal funding as NH, but has twice the roadways

Each penny in fuel tax (gas and diesel) generates about $7.5M in funding for roadways

Funding Needs – Bonds;
  - MaineDOT work plan is based on receiving a $1M bond each year
  - #2 on the ballot on July 14th – transportation bond

Funding Needs – Grants;
  - Maine has received funding for each round of competitive federal grant funding

Current Industry;
  - Aviation numbers are down
  - Transit providers have reduced capacity
  - Freight is down by workforce is stabilizing since there was already a shortfall
  - Some segments seeing a sharp decline (flatbed and fuel haulers) while other have maintained revenue (relief supplies)
  - Municipalities having varied success -- some planning for a shortfall for next year’s budget (cutting or postponing projects, etc.)

What can be done moving forward;
  - Provide MaineDOT with funding to carry programs forward
  - Advocate for MaineDOT use of relief funds
  - Passage of Transportation Bond, Q2

Q&A (both presenters):

Q: Seeing that the gas tax has not been changed since ’93 – what has been the political temperature for the changing of that tax?

A: Was discussed extensively in the last session of the Legislature – it will most likely not happen. If people can afford electric vehicles, who will be paying this gas tax? Followed by a conversation about funding roads. Senator Collins has discussed this; many states have already increased that gas tax, so the federal government does not have a lot of interest in raising the gas tax.
Q: Why doesn’t Maine have more funding than NH?
A: It has to do with road traffic – we have about the same amount of traffic as NH.

Q: Are bond funds being quickly moved into the pipeline?
A: Yes – MaineDOT spends bond money on highways and bridges almost as quickly as it is approved for use.

Q: Has there been a debate in the Legislature around funding (partisan debate)?
A: Many different areas in Maine need funding. The resulting fight for funding is what we see in the Legislature. This issue becomes very political in nature. The first step in the process is agreeing on the need for transportation and MaineDOT funding. Voter education on these issues is important in building understanding about the need for funding.

Q: Are COVID-19 relief funds currently allowed to be used for replacing revenue loss in MaineDOT funds?
A: Currently, the Treasury has deemed that an unacceptable use of funds. Senator Collins has introduced the Smart Act to allow more flexibility in use of COVID-19 relief funding. If the bill passes it will also allow for these funds to replace revenue loss.

Q: Are fieldwork employees for the DOT encountering barriers with social distancing, PPE, or other CDC guidelines?
A: Concerns have been expressed and the MaineDOT has worked to address them. PPE is being provided, crews have been split, vehicle occupancy has been lowered, and other measures have been taken to ensure the safety of workers while continuing to work.

Q: Pre-COVID were you experiencing any shortage of skilled workers? Would it be possible to couple training and recruitment into new initiatives?
A: Pre-COVID we experienced the same shortages as other sectors. We have started programs with community colleges to address shortages in MaineDOT workforce. The goal is to educate skilled workers and get them out into the field.

Q: Has the drop in the price of oil allowed MaineDOT to do more work for less money?
A: Early on the advertised MaineDOT schedule prices were trending upward but now seem to be softening. As far as asphalt specifically, we don’t have a good handle on that for the season. A lot of work has been done on I-295 in the daytime, which could never be done under normal traffic conditions. Timing has allowed more paving projects to be taken on during this period.