PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD

Strategic Planning and the Gorham East-West Transportation Corridor Study

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The Gorham (Maine) East-West Corridor Study is a major new transportation and land use study of the Greater Portland region, with a strong focus on transportation corridors immediately west of Portland. This region has historically been the fastest-growing residential and job area in Maine and, as a result, the recipient of many undesirable regional growth challenges. The current crisis in transportation funding, added to rising energy and highway construction costs, makes this a good time to take a step back and fully evaluate the range of opportunities available for this corridor. The study's goal is to evaluate all the options and find the right package of alternatives to protect home owners' quality of life over the long term, increase mode choice, and address regional growth challenges through coordinated local land use actions and transportation system investment, all while striving to maximize the life of existing and future roadway networks.

Background

In 2003, the Maine Legislature directed the Maine Department of Transportation (hereafter, MaineDOT) to work in collaboration with the State Planning Office (SPO) to draft a rule (MaineDOT, 2008) to link the transportation planning processes of the Sensible Transportation Policy Act (STPA) with those of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act. This change was based on the belief that land use and transportation planning must work hand in hand to protect highway safety and mobility and also enhance economic opportunity, community livability, and environmental quality. The law also directs MaineDOT to develop incentives for communities that adopt plans that reduce reliance on the state highway system.

MaineDOT, the Maine Turnpike Authority, and the SPO collaborated on the transportation chapter of both the STPA rule and the Growth Management Act, the goal being for the transportation chapters of these rules to be the same.

MaineDOT also developed a Municipal Handbook (Richert et al., 2008) to guide local planning efforts in meeting the STPA policy objectives. Municipalities or groups of municipalities that develop plans by using the new STPA rule are eligible for transportation planning assistance and other investment incentives, including bonus prioritization points that increase access to funding and incremental reductions in any local match requirements.

The greater Portland, Maine, area has long been subject to growth management issues, including urban sprawl and traffic congestion. Gorham, Westbrook, Scarborough, and South Portland—four communities west of Portland—signed a joint resolution in 2007 requesting a study of the feasibility for a new turnpike spur that would connect to a recently constructed local bypass of Gorham Village. The resolution stated that existing ways to manage traffic congestion, such as widening roads and adding turning lanes, will have a negative effect on their downtowns, village centers, and neighborhoods. Maine Turnpike Authority and Maine Department of Transportation officials believe that integrating all modes of transportation (transit, bike, pedestrian) is an integral part of the study. Additionally, the study was mandated by the Maine's 123rd Legislature in response to the joint resolution and over issues relative to regional growth management.

A parallel goal of this study is, in meeting STPA, to ensure that transportation dollars invested by the Maine Turnpike Authority and MaineDOT be coordinated with local land use management and economic development efforts. Every opportunity for extending the life of the transportation investment should be explored and exploited. For the land use components of this study, the study team will use the policies adopted by Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) in Destination Tomorrow, the long-range transportation plan (PACTS, 2008). The study began in the spring of 2009 and was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2010. Study recommendations are anticipated to include local, state, and regional entity actions, as well as identification of short-term and long-term transportation system, transit, and land use investments.

Major Components of the Study

Three major components are used in conducting this study:

1. Strategic planning and scenario building
2. Public outreach process
3. Integrating transportation systems as part of the regional growth management solution

Each component is described in detail next.

Strategic Planning and Scenario Building

A key element in addressing both existing and future transportation and land use needs is to document and evaluate current and projected traffic and land use outcomes and extract how one relates to the other. Scenario building played a key role in validating the undesirable outcomes that

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are currently trending but also to identify what is a plausible and desirable scenario for the future. The following scenarios were developed, tested, and analyzed as part of the study's strategic planning process:

1. Existing conditions (2009)
2. Future trends/do nothing scenario (2035)
3. Alternate land use scenario (2035)
4. Full transit scenario (2035)
5. Roadway improvement scenario (2035)

For the *existing and future trends scenario*, existing and likely future conditions based on current patterns of growth were evaluated. This provided a baseline for comparison for the more desirable scenarios and also quantified the magnitude of the problems and issues to address.

Through the scenario-building process, we first developed an alternate land use scenario (dubbed *urban* and *rural*) by presenting various land use models in a workshop of local, regional, and state-focused participants. Through a collaborative process involving the public and other stakeholders, a desirable but plausible land use future was developed and analyzed (Figure 1). Similar workshops were then conducted for *transit* and *roadway improvement* scenarios. Each resulted in a specific scenario designed to address problems and issues in a manner that would work in harmony with the other scenarios, not against them.

Public Outreach Process

The study is directed by a *steering committee* that includes the communities of Gorham, South Portland, Westbrook, and Scarborough, along with the PACTS—the metropolitan planning organization for the Portland region. Staff from the sponsors also sit on the steering committee, which provides recommendations to the sponsors.

A broad-based stakeholder *advisory committee*, which will include such diverse interests as land use, conservation, economic growth, smart growth, truckers, transit experts, bike/pedestrian groups, will advise the steering committee. The combination of local, state, and national government organizations help balance the perspectives and provide needed broad-based opinion and input. The study also includes a robust *public meeting* element to ensure that all ideas and values are completely understood.

Integrating Transportation Systems as Part of the Regional Growth Management

The final scenario-building exercise includes identifying the necessary transportation network to match the traffic, land use, and transit needs desired for the future. This ongoing *transportation systems* scenario looks to address the congestion and mobility needs of the region through two distinct approaches:

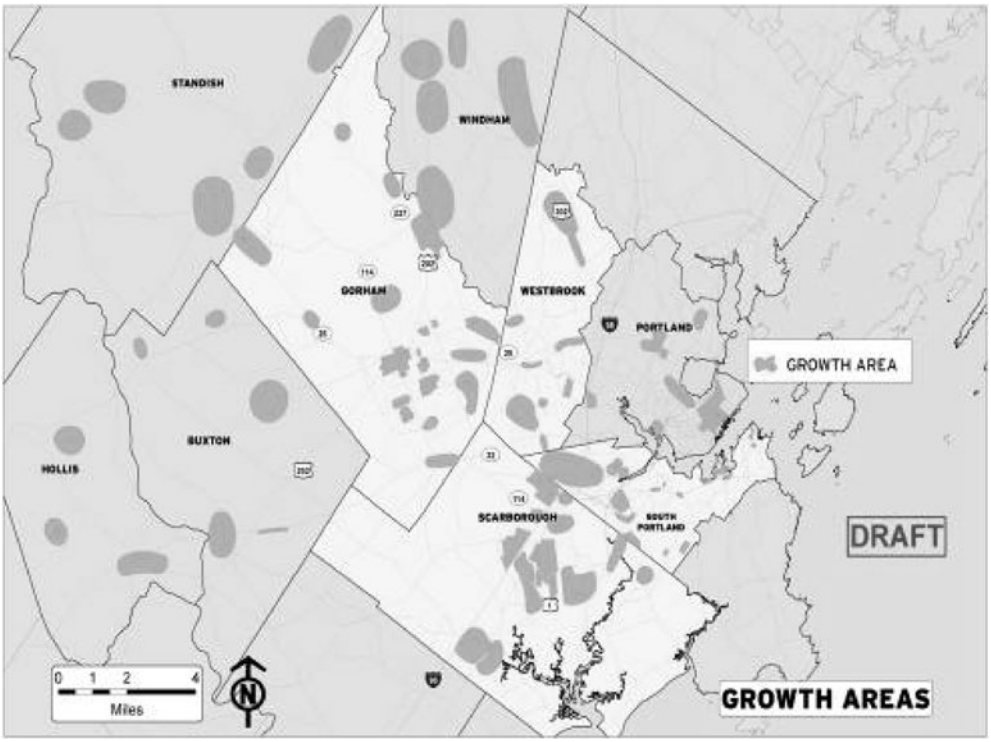

Figure 1. Urban and rural land use scenario: location of future growth areas in Greater Portland, Maine. *Shaded rounded areas* show where population growth is most likely to occur, given current and projected trends. These scattered areas indicate the need for a managed network to accommodate transportation demands.

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1. Enhancement and expansion of existing transportation network
2. Creation of new transportation network

Both approaches will be designed to address congestion and mobility needs and be consistent with regional growth management goals and objectives (Figure 2). This innovative response to long-range transportation and land use planning ensures that infrastructure life and transportation mode choice will be maximized and compatible with local and regional land use policies.

Study Interim Conclusions and Recommendations

Although our study is still ongoing, already some recommendations and preliminary conclusions are evident. We find that an inclusive and transparent process increases stakeholder and municipal buy-in and maximizes opportunity for success. Our seeking and incorporating local, regional, and state input into the scenario-building process ensures that proposed scenarios not only meet identified needs but are also likely to be better received at the local level. A balanced package of improvements and policies (land use, transit, transportation system) will yield the greatest measure of success when compared to a future that trends with recent and undesirable outcomes. Our work reinforces the notion that transportation systems can and should play a key role in regional growth development and management. To ensure that the collaboration started as part of this study is continued and that affected and involved municipalities can communicate in a proactive manner, additional regional cooperation and organization are needed. Although the process is taking more time than simply having experts prescribe solutions, this subscriptive approach is already showing the benefits outlined earlier in this article. It is helping to dispel the notion of transportation agencies as somehow separate from transit planning and regional growth management planning.

Resolve, 123rd Maine Legislature, Chapter 95, H.P. 1203–L.D. 1720, effective September 20, 2007: Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation and the Maine Turnpike Authority to Conduct a Study of Possible Western Connector Roads to Municipal Centers in Cumberland and York Counties[1]

Sec. 1 Study of Existing Infrastructure and Future Capacity Needs West of Route 1 in York and Cumberland Counties. Resolved: That the Department of Transportation, or "the department," and the Maine Turnpike Authority, or "the authority," shall conduct a study of existing highway infrastructure and future capacity needs west of Route 1 in York and Cumberland counties, including the greater Gorham and Sanford areas. The purpose of this study is to develop a series of recommendations to enhance, expand and preserve highway connections between Route 1 and the Maine Turnpike and communities in western Cumberland County and York County. In conducting the study, the department and the authority shall review existing and potential new routes from the Maine Turnpike to municipal centers in western Cumberland County and York County that, in the determination of the department and the authority, would, if constructed, significantly decrease congestion on state and local roads in the area and improve access from communities in western Cumberland County and York County to the Maine Turnpike. The study must be designed and conducted in a manner that will allow the results to be used during future state and federal permitting of any proposal that may proceed to construction, and any potential project must be compatible with state transportation policy in accordance with Maine's Sensible Trans-

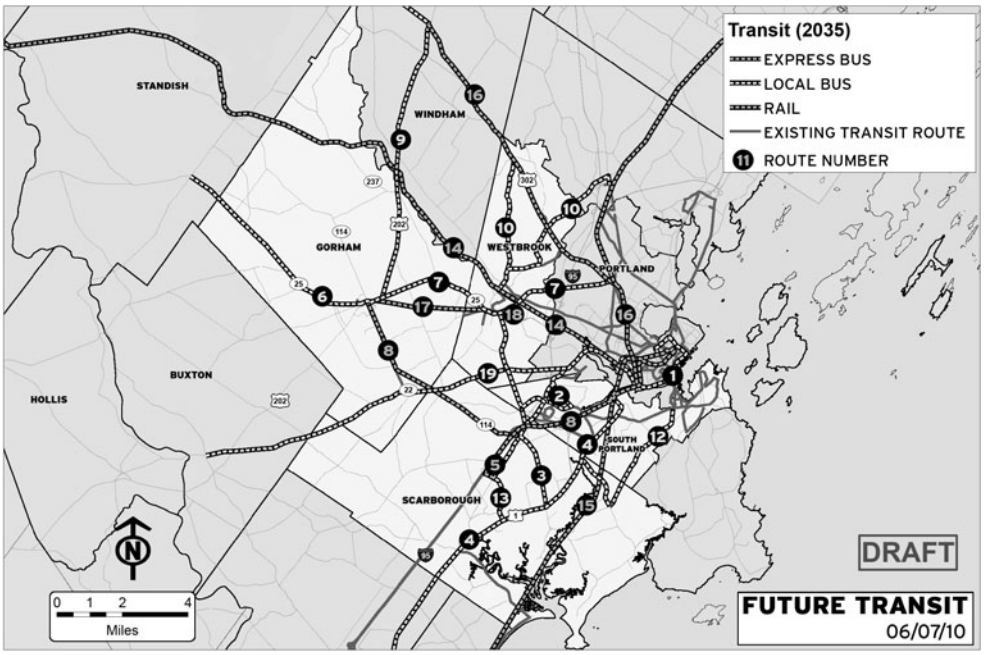

Figure 2. Full transit scenario: diagram of proposed transit network. The scenario is designed to mesh with population growth areas and transportation demand.

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portation Policy Act and the federal National Environmental Policy Act. In evaluating and prioritizing strategies for study, the department and the authority shall consider, at a minimum, the following factors:

1. The feasibility of expanding the existing highway infrastructure to accommodate future traffic and economic demands of the region;

2. The role of transit and other alternative modes of transportation in managing the transportation demand in the region;

3. The feasibility and effectiveness of the new proposed transportation infrastructure strategies to meet the future traffic and economic needs, including:
   A. The traffic impact of the new infrastructure on the existing road network;
   B. Environmental impacts;
   C. Traffic toll revenue projections on any new infrastructure and the effects on toll revenues on the existing turnpike; and
   D. Construction and maintenance costs;

4. Coordinating with area communities and regional planning agencies to evaluate land use impacts of all strategies studied, and developing recommendations to communities for land use controls to protect their community character, economic vitality and future investments in the transportation system; and

5. Any other factors determined relevant by the department and the authority; and be it further

Sec. 2 Report. Resolved: That the department and the authority shall report the results of their study to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation no later than February 28, 2008. Upon its receipt and review of the report, the committee may submit legislation to the Second Regular Session of the 123rd Legislature.

Acknowledgments

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Note

1. 123rd Maine Legislature, Chapter 95, H.P. 1203–L.D. 1720, effective September 20, 2007; available at http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/display_ps.asp?LD=1720&snum=123 *and* http://www.mainelegislature.org/ros/LOM/lom123rd/pdf/RESOLVE95.pdf (accessed October 1, 2010).

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