Portland – South Portland Smart Corridor Plan

Portland – Forest Avenue South / University of Southern Maine Public Input Meeting

Summary Notes and Public Comments

April 26, 2017, University of Southern Maine

This summary comprises notes taken by Tom Doolittle, along with later updates and editing, and a summary of comments provided by participants on large and small corridor maps.

Introductory Presentation

Bruce Hyman, City of Portland Transportation Program Manager – Welcome and introduction to Smart Corridor Plan process

Ned Codd, WSP Consultant Team Project Manager

- Working with Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS), Cities of Portland and South Portland to develop ways of improving land use and transportation conditions in the Forest Avenue – Route 302 – Casco Bay Bridge – Broadway Corridor
- Address land use changes and traffic demand, while also improving safety and access in all modes
- Calling this the Smart Corridor Plan for several reasons
    - Corridor connects several institutions of higher education, build upon the opportunities of the educational sector
    - We want to manage these challenges in a manner that is smart and creative – doesn't just rely on increasing traffic capacity, but provides travel choices and potential for balanced multimodal system
    - Want to use advanced technology (traffic signals, real-time traveler information, vehicle communication systems) to ensure that the corridor is as efficient as possible
- We are currently reviewing current plans and evaluating existing conditions
- Engaging public and corridor stakeholders to better understand issues and opportunities
- Based on this input and analysis, we will develop ideas for improvements in all modes
- Then we will develop recommendations and an implementation plan

- Current meeting is for the segment of the corridor from Woodfords Corner along Forest Avenue through the University of Southern Maine (USM), the Interstate 295 (I-295) interchange, to Deering Oaks Park and the intersections with State Street and High Street
- Corridor is developing as economic pressure moves north from Peninsula
- USM is an anchor; it is growing and that brings concerns about increasing traffic
- Development opportunities along Forest Avenue
- Transportation demand from development there will affect the corridor
- Well-planned development could have a positive effect on the corridor
- Some intersections along the corridor have poor levels of service, poor pedestrian and bicycle access
- Metro bus serves the corridor with Routes 2 and 4

Tom Doolittle, Alta Planning + Design, Consultant Team Ped – Bike Task Manager

- Pedestrian and bicycle issues
- We have identified key destinations for pedestrians and cyclists
- We have identified existing and planned bicycle facilities
- We have evaluated the Forest Avenue South bicycle network and mapped it by comfort level/level of traffic stress – this indicates where different types of bicyclists (beginner, intermediate, advanced) would feel comfortable riding, and helps us to identify bottlenecks/obstacles/areas that require improvement
- We have also identified areas that have the highest incidence of bike and pedestrian crashes

Discussion / Questions & Answers

What do you like about the corridor and would like to be preserved?

- Residential areas
- Corridor should be local, residential, retail, small businesses, more pedestrian and bike friendly
- Need to understand how to integrate State Street/High Street pair
- Access to businesses – parking on street (no off-street available)
- Deering Oaks – defend and improve current character
- Forest/Pitt – this is a real neighborhood, but there is a perception that is not a nice place to go
- Green paint for bikes helps

What would you like to change about the corridor?

- Drivers go too fast – too much like a highway
- Pedestrian/bike connections to Deering Oaks Park, Back Cove – make it accessible

- Priority should be on pedestrian/bike – cars can look after themselves
- Opportunity for change – Morrill's/Woodfords
- Pine Street pedestrian crossing – not safe
- Make I-295 crossing more visually inviting for pedestrians/bikes – Beacon Street – slower traffic will help
- Reconstruction at I-295 helped cars, not pedestrians/bikes
- Missed opportunity – Forest Ave USM to Woodfords – not walkable, not inviting. Businesses need to service more than vehicles. Make neighborhoods feel busier – neighborhood oriented
- Pedestrian signals don't support use – long waits, people jaywalk – opportunity to make flow better
- Slow down traffic but keep it moving – prohibit left turns at some locations
- Connection between Deering Oaks and USM – bridge over highway; remove State Street from Deering Oaks
- Improve access to Deering Oaks Park – one way loop through park, give moms and dads access
- Red light running has become a problem – safety for pedestrians
- Model cities: Barcelona – pedestrian accessibility; San Francisco – street cars in center of street; Montreal

Any other advice or ideas for the project team?

- Look at State/High as part of this project
- Safety of pedestrians – lots of near misses that aren't part of the statistics
- What is the nature of the corridor? Thoroughfare? City street? Not conducive to pedestrians, bikes, businesses. Scale down to local street instead of highway.
- Bump-outs – too big, can't see at night, striping not visible
- State/High one-way circulation hurts traffic, businesses, less safe – higher speed – other routes to South Portland
- Smart Corridor Plan should decide the outcome of the State Street/High Street circulation question
- Forever making up for I-295 corridor cutting city in half – visually punishing for pedestrians
- Increasing year-round bike commuting – city can help with better snow removal
- Chicago, Miracle Mile – road diet, with center median planters – converted 6 to 4 lanes
- Riverton – property values are hurt by Woodfords Corner congestion
- Contraflow lanes
- Fore River Parkway is underused – Shift Route 77 from State-High Streets to the Fore River Parkway

- How do you get across Forest Avenue to/from Deering Oaks Park and Back Cove safely?
- There are distinctive uses in different segments of the corridor
- The traffic data does not capture the actual experience of safety on State Street/High Street – direct traffic tot Fore River Parkway instead
- Driver behavior is worsening
- The State Street/High Street one-way configuration hurts access and increases speeds, danger
- The Pine Street crossing is not safe
- Evaluate alternative ways to get between Portland and South Portland
- The I-295 interchange is "visually punishing" – if Forest Avenue were more visually appealing (like Beacon Street in Boston), many more people would walk along it – it would be beneficial to State/High
- Between USM and Woodfords Corner there is a dense neighborhood – it is a lost opportunity for inducing pedestrians to frequent businesses by making the street more attractive, inviting
- WalkScore is good, but can be deceiving – there may be lots of destinations in the area, but it could still be uninviting
- Barcelona has no pedestrian push-buttons, no jaywalking – pedestrians are "equal" with vehicles
- There are good opportunities to make things flow better
- Montreal cycling network cited as a model – it is really busy but still works well for bikes
- Better snow clearing/removal from roads and sidewalks
- Look for opportunities to "green" the corridor – e.g. planted center median/refuge
- Forest Avenue is perceived as not a nice place to go or to be – ban some left turns
- Woodfords Corner lights are poorly timed
- Build a pedestrian bridge between USM and Deering Oaks
- Eliminate the State Street leg through Deering Oaks Park
- Deering Oaks Park is used less than other parks because of poor access to and within the park – re-assess the one-way circulation pattern
- Red light running is increasing
- Low pedestrian use – high crash incidence
- Should we make traffic capacity increases just for peak hour traffic benefit?
- Contra-flow traffic lanes considered?
- More green-painted bike lanes

Comments on Maps

Overall Corridor

- Land Use
  - Old Port for window-shopping, destination-only on Forest Avenue (people go to Old Port for experience of place, but only go to Forest Avenue to visit a specific destination)
  - (Old Port) is visually inviting and busier
- Roadway and Traffic
  - Tunnel vision/self-fulfilling prophecy (on designing to accommodate traffic demand)
  - Forest Avenue – High accident vs. low usage
  - Encourage use of Fore River Parkway as an alternative to Forest Avenue – install signs on I-295
- Public Transit
- Pedestrian – Bicycle
  - Walk score is deceiving

Specific Locations

- Woodfords Corner
  - Land Use
  - Roadway and Traffic
    - Constant gridlock on northbound Forest Avenue approach to Woodfords Corner
  - Public Transit
  - Pedestrian – Bicycle
- Forest Avenue Mainline
  - Land Use
  - Roadway and Traffic
  - Public Transit
  - Pedestrian – Bicycle
- University of Southern Maine
  - Land Use
  - Roadway and Traffic
  - Public Transit
  - Pedestrian – Bicycle
    - Build a pedestrian bridge between USM and Deering Oaks
    - No direct access from USM to Deering Oaks Park – create a connection

- Interstate 295 Interchange
    - Land Use
    - Roadway and Traffic
    - Public Transit
    - Pedestrian – Bicycle
        - Build pedestrian bridge over I-295 from USM garage
- Deering Oaks Park – State Street / High Street
    - Land Use
    - Roadway and Traffic
        - Access to Deering Oaks Park is exceptionally bad
        - Allow right turn into Deering Oaks Park from State Street
        - Allow left turn from Forest Avenue onto State Street at Deering Oaks Park
        - Roundabout inside Deering Oaks Park
        - Red light running at State Street/Park Avenue
        - Red light running at Longfellow Square
    - Public Transit
    - Pedestrian – Bicycle
        - Pedestrian push-button on west side of park near King School not at crosswalks