

Portland – South Portland Smart Corridor Plan
Portland – Forest Avenue, Morrill’s Corner – Deering Oaks Park
Public Input Meeting
Summary Notes and Public Comments

November 1, 2017, University of Southern Maine Abromson Center

Introductory Comments from Bruce Hyman, City of Portland Transportation Program Manager

- Thanks to everyone for coming
- Welcome to the third round of neighborhood meetings for the Portland – South Portland Smart Corridor project
- Introductions of key people in the room
 - John Duncan, Director, PACTS
 - Hugh Coxe, Regional Planner, Maine DOT
 - Chris Branch, Public Works Director, City of Portland
- There are about 2 months left in the study process and then there will be several steps following that, with additional opportunity for public input and to shape recommendations for roadway improvements
- Forest Avenue is a high priority road for Maine DOT – much of Forest Avenue is part of the National Highway System
- About 1/3 of people in attendance have attended a previous meeting
- About 1/4 of the people in attendance are business owners along the corridor
- We are here to present our latest ideas to improve the corridor
- This study is being done jointly with South Portland, who have several similar transportation issues

Presentation from Ned Codd, WSP USA Consultant Team Project Manager

- At the first round of neighborhood meetings, we presented analysis of existing conditions and gathered reactions about issues and opportunities
- At the second round of meetings, we presented several conceptual ideas for roadway improvements, summarized the technical analysis of those alternatives, and got further feedback
 - Heard from business owners about parking
 - Heard about the appearance of the street
- At tonight’s meeting, we are going to focus in more detail on the options that have shown the greatest benefits and are the most promising, based on the technical analysis and feedback that we got at the last meeting and in continuing discussions with city and MaineDOT staff
- Overview of the Study
 - Bug Light Park all the way to Morrill’s Corner
 - The corridor serves as a connector but also as a main street for several neighborhoods
 - We are focusing on a few key segments

- Forest Avenue from Morrill’s Corner to Woodfords Corner
- Forest Avenue from Woodfords Corner to Deering Oaks Park
- Broadway in South Portland, from Mill Creek to Bug Light Park and Southern Maine Community College
- Goals and objectives
 - Encourage high quality development
 - Improve safety in all modes – we have heard a lot about safety in earlier meetings and through comments on the website – some “proven safety countermeasures” we have proposed at different places in the corridor
 - Pedestrian crosswalk upgrades – median refuges, rapid rectangular flashing beacons (RRFBs)
 - Road diets – potentially reducing lanes where they are not needed
 - Roundabouts
 - Leading pedestrian intervals
 - Improve vehicle access and traffic congestion – address traffic bottlenecks and congestion points
 - Improve multi-modal access
 - Transit, pedestrian, and bicycle access and safety
 - Provide more roadway and sidewalk space for other modes where traffic is uncongested
 - How to help busses travel through lights more efficiently through such measures as transit signal priority and queue jump lanes/signal phases
- Corridor Improvement Alternatives
 - Focus in tonight’s meeting is on intersection and corridor redesign and improvements
 - In all proposed improvements, ensure that we are taking a “Complete Streets” approach to accommodating all roadway users – make the corridor safe and functional for all users, including drivers as well as pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, the young and the old, disabled
- Like at the previous meeting in September, the presentation is divided into three parts, each addressing one of the three segments of Forest Avenue that we will be focusing on tonight:
 - Forest Avenue North, from the Morrill’s Corner area to Woodfords Corner
 - Forest Avenue from Woodfords Corner to USM
 - Forest Avenue through the I-295 Exit 6 interchange and Deering Oaks Park

Morrill’s Corner and Forest Avenue to Woodfords Corner

Overview of Issues

- The biggest issues in Morrill’s Corner are the amount of traffic funneling through the intersection and the poor accommodation of pedestrians and bicyclists
- There is too much traffic for the road network and there are no parallel routes
- The biggest traffic issue is that the southbound Forest Avenue traffic has to funnel from two lanes at Allen Avenue to one lane releasing through the Bishop Street/ Stevens Avenue intersection – this is especially bad in the morning peak period
- This problem is exacerbated by accommodating lots of minor movements; the railroads are also in the way
- Pedestrian crossings are widely spaced (north side of Allen Avenue and south side of Stevens Avenue)

- There are bike lanes on Forest Avenue to the north of Morrill’s Corner and to the south, but no bicycle accommodation between Arbor Street and Warren Avenue
- At the last meeting, we presented several options for improving traffic and multimodal safety and access
- Based on results of the technical analysis, public response at the last meeting, and discussions with City staff, the following alternative is most beneficial across a range of criteria

Features of Preliminary Preferred Alternative

- Provides two Forest Avenue southbound through-lanes at and past a relocated traffic signal at Stevens Avenue – merge from two lanes to one lane south of Stevens Avenue
- Separates Stevens Avenue from Bishop Street, better organizes traffic flows, reduces paved area, and creates a public space
- Eliminates traffic signal and left turns (in and out) at Bishop Street
- Relocated bus stops with shelters in between Stevens and Allen, enables easier transfer from Route 2 and 9
- New crosswalks on the south side of Allen Avenue and north side of Stevens Avenue
- Provides continuous bike lanes to Allen Avenue in Morrill’s Corner
- Eliminates on-street parking in front of Samuel’s
- Traffic level of service, congestion, and multimodal access (transit, pedestrian, bicycle) would all significantly improve if this recommendation were implemented
- We also looked at a sub-option/variation that would add a northbound right turn lane from Forest Avenue to Allen Avenue
 - Addresses northbound Forest Avenue congestion, especially in the evening peak period
 - Eliminates small plaza area at front of Wok Inn property

Public Comments and Questions

- It seems like a lot of parking has been disappearing on Stevens Avenue and Forest Avenue - this is a substantial concern among business owners
- What is being done to replace parking that would be taken away by this plan?
Response, Bruce Hyman
 - The City of Portland is looking into the potential for creating public parking in neighborhood centers such as Morrill’s Corner and Woodfords Corner
 - Perhaps shared off-street parking lots near the Forest Avenue corridor
- When is the next time that we will get to raise concerns again about parking?
 - Response, Bruce Hyman – Sign in with your email address and you will be notified about future developments
 - Response, Ned Codd – This is a planning study, and comes at the beginning of the process of pursuing improvements. It is about identifying potential solutions, and any solutions would need to go through further development, design, get funding, and eventually be built. There would be more opportunity for public input and change to design at all stages of the process.
- Why aren’t you considering a roundabout?
Response, Ned Codd
 - We evaluated a two-lane roundabout at Forest Avenue/Allen Avenue, and discussed it at the last meeting

- It didn't function as well as the intersection proposal, in terms of traffic operations, space constraints (it would have impacts on several adjacent properties), pedestrian and bicycle access
- We are not being allowed to see data on alternatives. You are only showing us one, not the roundabout. Is the roundabout off the table?
 - Response, Ned Codd
 - All the alternatives that we considered will be included in the final study report
 - The roundabout is not off the table, but it does not perform as well as the preliminary preferred alternative across a range of criteria
- Another alternative worth considering is to close off Bishop Street Extension to Warren Avenue
 - Response, Ned Codd – The issue is the impact of Bishop Street traffic on Forest Avenue operations. Closing the Bishop Street access to Warren Avenue would not alleviate that.
- Closing Bishop Street would have significant impact on the local neighborhood – it would have the effect of pushing Bishop Street into another neighborhood
- The Warren Avenue Extension keeps trucks off of Forest Avenue
- Bishop Street is a residential street that needs to accommodate school buses and services. The people who live on Bishop Street need to be able to come and go freely.
- It feels like you are dismissing Bishop Street residences – put yourself in our place.
- Concern about lack of on-street parking in front of Samuel's. The business is growing and relies upon on-street parking.
- Losing 8 parking places is extremely significant for the several local businesses
- Seems like you are making Morrill's Corner into a freeway
- Increasing lanes will make crossing more difficult and could reduce customer traffic
- Seems like some of these ideas will improve moving cars through but not make the neighborhood a nicer place
- Can't we just improve pedestrian and bike access and safety?
- Focusing on helping non-Portland people travel into Portland should not be our focus – and it will be a hard sell to get Portland City Councilors to pay for that
 - Response, Ned Codd
 - The proposed alternative is intended as a multimodal, Complete Streets enhancement for Morrill's Corner
 - It seeks to address the major traffic bottleneck, but also makes significant improvements for pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit riders
 - It is intended to balance the different modes, but pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit riders are central to the proposal
- Couldn't we use connector streets to move traffic off Forest Avenue and onto Canco and other parallel streets?
- Please improve bicycle and pedestrian safety at the neighborhood level
- Currently, you have to be a very confident and good cyclist to ride in these areas
- Like the idea of adding parallel routes, if not for cars at least for bikes and pedestrians
- Please look at the UNE plan

Forest Avenue – Woodfords Corner to University of Southern Maine

Overview of Issues

- Reviewed LOS, crash data to identify issues, opportunities for improvement in the segment of Forest Avenue between Woodfords Corner and USM

- There is some congestion in this segment of the corridor, but it is not uniform
 - Woodfords Corner is a bottleneck, but the ongoing improvement project will address a lot of those issues, especially outbound queuing in the evening peak period
 - The section of Forest Avenue south of Woodfords Corner has minimal congestion, with intersections that operate mostly at LOS A or B
 - In the south of the corridor, the Forest Avenue intersections at Falmouth Street/Preble Street and Bedford Street/Baxter Boulevard operate with moderate congestion and queuing (LOS C and D)
- Lot of crashes in this area – many locations have crash rates higher than the state average

Features of Alternatives Evaluated

- We have carefully reviewed the Forest Avenue alignment; the curb-to-curb width available; and opportunities to improve multimodal accommodation:
 - New and improved pedestrian crossings through new crosswalks, median refuges, and RRFBs
 - Public transit improvements such as new bus shelters (in particular for inbound bus stops), transit signal priority, and queue jump lanes/phases
 - Continuous bike lanes to extend the city bike network on this important travel and commercial corridor
- Ongoing improvement project at Woodford’s Corner (which we are not proposing any changes to, we are taking that as a given future condition):
 - Three outbound lanes at Woodford Street: one left turn lane, two through lanes
 - One inbound lane to the traffic signal at Revere Street
- South of Revere Street, there are no bottlenecks until Dartmouth Street – no signals except at Ashmont Street/Belmont Street, which has minimal turns and cross street traffic, minimal congestion
- Therefore, proposal includes continuing the one inbound lane from Deering Avenue/Woodfords Street in Woodfords Corner (in the current project) to Noyes Street, where it would widen to two lanes for the southbound approach to Dartmouth Street
- Other features
 - Consolidated bus stop with shelter at Woodfords Corner across from Revere Street for outbound transit users
 - Crosswalk with a median refuge between Lincoln and Arlington Streets
 - Crosswalk with a median refuge at Noyes Street
 - Add the missing 4th crosswalk at Belmont Street
 - Two lanes inbound south of Noyes Street
 - Improved pedestrian crossing at Fessenden Street
 - Add continuous bike lanes from where they terminate at Bedford Street/Baxter Boulevard to Revere Street
 - Eliminate the median at Falmouth Street/Preble Street and Bedford Street/Baxter Blvd
 - Improved pedestrian crossing at Fenwick Street
 - The southbound bike lane would widen to become a shared bus and bike lane between Fenwick Street and Bedford Street/Baxter Street
 - Move the bus stop and create a bus shelter in front of the USM library
- If these improvements were made, level of service would not be significantly worsened, and there would be significant improvements for biking, pedestrians, and transit
- The proposal would eliminate 27 out of 117 on-street parking spaces

- Clarified that on-street parking on the west side between Ashmont Street and Noyes Street would not be changed
- On-street parking between Noyes Street and Dartmouth Street would be eliminated
- Project team has also evaluated other options for the corridor, including a more ambitious “road diet” option for this segment of Forest Avenue
 - Similarities with previous alternative
 - Pedestrian crossing upgrades
 - Continuous bicycle accommodation (more reliance on shared bus-bike lanes – mostly used by bikes, provide much improved access and travel time for buses)
 - More roadway with reduced traffic lanes
 - Ashmont St – Belmont St:
 - Eliminate one lane, provide shared bus-bike lanes
 - 3-lane cross-section: TH-RT + Opposing LT each direction
 - Dartmouth St:
 - Eliminate one lane, provide shared bus-bike lanes
 - 3-lane cross-section: TH-RT + Opposing LT each direction
 - Falmouth St – Preble St: Eliminate southbound lane, provide bus-bike lanes
 - SB: LT + TH-RT
 - NB: LT + TH + TH-RT
 - Bedford St – Baxter Blvd: Eliminate southbound lane, provide bus-bike lanes
 - SB: TH + TH-RT
 - NB: LT + TH + TH-RT
 - Functions with modest increases in congestion and queuing at the intersections of Forest Avenue/Dartmouth Street and Forest Avenue/Falmouth Street/ Preble Street

Public Comments and Questions

- Biking from Old Port to USM is a challenge
- Thank you for not eliminating parking in front of my business (Great Lost Bear)
- When you eliminate parking on Forest Avenue, people will drive through those adjacent neighborhoods to look for parking
- Pedestrian crossing at Noyes Street is currently super dangerous – great to see the proposed crossing improvement
- Likewise with the crossing improvement at the Great Lost Bear
- I’m a confident cyclist, but I will not currently ride my bike on Forest Avenue – glad to see the bike lane improvements
- Great that bike stress measurement goes from 4 to 3 under your proposal, but even 3 is very high stress bike riding
 - Response, Ned Codd
 - The changes proposed here would provide continuous bike lanes, but it is still a wide roadway with high traffic volumes
 - The bike lane improvements we have proposed require very few curb line changes
- Concern about eliminating parking in front of Crown Chicken at Fessenden Street
- There is actually not much parking for retail businesses, as much as we might think
- If we better synchronized the lights that would eliminate a lot of the problem
- How about the City buy property near Forest Avenue to create parking?
 - Response, Bruce Hyman – That is under consideration
- Pedestrian refuge medians can damage cars, don’t seem to provide much value for pedestrians

- Response, Ned Codd – Pedestrian median refuges break up crossings, especially for wide roads, and they do have a track record of reducing pedestrian crashes
- Improving pedestrian crossing is essential
- Adding crossing refuges with beacons is good
- One lane southbound from Woodfords Corner is a good idea
- Like the transit shelters
- When will the urban design issues along the corridor be considered?
 - Response, Ned Codd
 - We have been trying to recognize those issues along the way, as shown in the graphics
 - As property is redeveloped we are always looking for way to improve the property frontage
 - We are trying to create some plaza space at Preble Street, as well as that shown in Morrill’s Corner earlier
- The urban design and streetscape issues are so important. It needs to have a look and feel that pedestrians and business owners are valued
- Good that we are improving crossings across three lanes
- On-street parking is not as much of a concern as suggested. Plenty of parking available if one is willing to walk a block. That is less than the distance one might walk in a big box parking lot.

Forest Avenue through the I-295 Exit 6 Interchange, Deering Oaks

Overview of Issues

- There are some safety and crash issues at the Interstate 295 Exit 6 interchange
- The cloverleaf interchange design is generally functional, but it is an older interchange design that requires on-ramp traffic to “weave” across off-ramp traffic in a relatively short distance, which creates conflict and can be unnerving
- MaineDOT made significant improvements at the interchange in 2015, in particular pedestrian crossing, bike lane, and ramp improvements
- There are quite a few crashes at State and Marginal Way

Features of Preliminary Preferred Alternative

- Single Point Urban Interchange at I-295 Exit 6
 - Safer intersection design with a smaller footprint
 - Similar to a “diamond” interchange (with ramps parallel/close to highway)
 - Differs from diamond interchange – instead of two intersections (one on either side of the highway), there is just one signalized intersection under the highway, which opposing left turns to flow simultaneously
 - Would improve safety and make a significant amount of land available for redevelopment
- Signalizing the I-295 North Off-Ramp
 - This would enable elimination of the median for southbound cars and allow the intersection to be a bit tighter, more efficient, safer and better access for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Reorient Kennebec Street
 - Connect to Forest Avenue near current High Street intersection
 - Bayside Trail to run along northern edge of Kennebec Street, connection to Deering Oaks Park

- Consistent with City of Portland planning for Kennebec Street
- Reconfigure High Street so it connects to Forest Ave. closer to Park Ave.
 - Would make more contiguous park space
 - Would improve traffic operations
 - Would also improve pedestrian and bike access
- Could have a buffered bike line along High Street and through the park
- We have also evaluated a variant of the preferred alternative with the following features:
 - Two southbound right-turn lanes from Forest Avenue onto State Street to address the heavy right-turn volume
 - Single southbound through-lane along Forest Avenue through the State Street/Marginal Way intersection all the way south to the relocated High Street approach, where it widens to two lanes
 - Two southbound lanes on State Street
- This variant would have the following benefits:
 - Reduced congestion and queuing, especially for the heavy southbound right turn movement from Forest Avenue to State Street
 - Narrow Forest Avenue adjacent to Deering Oaks Park and reduce the crossing distance for the Bayside Trail

Public comments and questions

- Any consideration about bringing I-295 down to street level, as at-grade boulevard?
 - Response, Bruce Hyman – We have not considered that as part of this study although others have proposed it
- The City should seriously consider making I-295 a boulevard instead of an expressway, for many reasons
- Would be good to do a cost benefit analysis of the Single Point Urban Interchange to account for land freed up for development
- Let's give some serious thought to providing public transportation for all the commuters coming in on Forest Avenue
 - Response, Bruce Hyman
 - METRO bus service is considering it and is already adding new commuter services
 - We are also considering satellite parking for commuters

Last General Comments

- What are the future opportunities to weigh in on this?
 - Response, Bruce Hyman
 - We hope to be presenting ideas to the City Council soon and whenever the Council considers issues they look for public input
 - When we turn our recommendations into a draft report, which the public will be able to comment on
 - There will also be further opportunities for public input as any proposals move forward
- In addition to providing feedback tonight, you can also provide feedback via email at info@MaineSmartCorridor.com – there is also an interactive map at the website and we welcome your comments there at www.mainesmartcorridor.com
- Thanks for coming everyone