

State and High Streets Two-Way Conversion Study

PAC Meeting #1 - Minutes Room 24, Portland City Hall July 30, 2014,

In attendance:

PAC Members: David Marshall, Kevin Donoghue, Steve Landry, Marie Gray, Ian Jacob, Anne Pringle, Ron Spinella, Frank Turek, David Robinson, Michael Connolly, Bruce Wennerstrom, William Barry, Lauren Wayne

CA Members: Chris O'Neil, Greg Jordan, Pat Moody, Damon Yakovleff, Zack Barowitz, Chris Cantwell, Ben Shambaugh, Michael Mastronardi, Bill Bray, Sean Dundon, Hawley Straight

City Staff: Mike Bobinski, Jeremiah Bartlett, Alex Jaegerman, Christine Grimando

Also attending: Greg Fenton (Metro), Kevin Miller (PPH), David Harry (Forecaster), Kristine Keeney, Patrick Costin, Steven Scharf, Alex Landry

Consulting Staff: Tom Errico, Carol Morris, Scott Hastings

Meeting started at 6pm

Kevin Donoghue and Dave Marshall, co-chairs of the committee, opened the meeting and facilitated introductions.

Carol Morris of Morris Communications took the floor. She began with making the point that everyone in the room is likely to have opinions on this topic before coming into the process, and asked in spite of that, that the committee members keep an open mind during the process. She reviewed the committee's responsibilities, saying that the Public Advisory Committee, consisting of strong stakeholders immediately affected by the study, was the core of the advisory group and was ultimately held to 15 members. A group of citizen advisors representing additional key groups was there to provide oversight and ensure that the points important to their groups were not overlooked. In addition to this, a technical advisory committee of MaineDOT and technical city staff was going to be available to the consulting team to clarify points and vet technical feasibility as needed. Carol then turned over the floor to Tom Errico of T.Y.Lin International.

Tom began by reviewing the scope of the project. The public involvement component includes three meetings of the PAC and CA committees and two public meetings. A purpose and need statement has been drafted and is on the agenda for the committee to review. The consulting team will undertake a collection of data to establish existing conditions in the study area. This effort is already well underway and some of the findings would be presented that evening.

Forecasts would be created to model traffic for the larger area for both two-way and one-way possible scenarios. A limited set of alternative possibilities within those two would be created. The results would then be analyzed and recommendations arrived at through the public process. At the conclusion, a final report will be generated.

Tom also noted that there would be a significant contextual element, with efforts to look at and coordinate with other work and concerns present in the area. He specifically mentioned the work being done at Congress Square Plaza, Spring Street, Franklin Street, and the Commercial/High Signalization project, and acknowledged there were many others that would be part of the mix.

The schedule of the project includes a future PAC and CA meeting near the end of the year and again in late winter/early spring of 2015. The public meetings will take place in the fall of 2014 and then in late winter of 2015 before the final PAC/CA meeting. The final report would be delivered in April of 2015. Exact dates of the 2014 meetings would be established as soon as possible.

Tom then gave an overview of the existing conditions starting with the high crash locations. Seven intersections and eight road segments met or exceeded MaineDOT qualifications for high crash locations. The team had not yet fully examined the types of crashes involved but he noted that some of the segments were primarily parking and sideswipe related. He also noted that these numbers included all types of crashes for all modes and that the team would be breaking them down into more detail in the future. He then reviewed existing and currently planned bicycle infrastructure and transit service in the region.

The consulting team has established baseline travel times (AM and PM peaks) for traveling between I-295 and York St. on both State and High Streets. This work also included snapshot speeds that traffic was traveling on certain segments. Traffic counts were conducted at 20 major intersections along the corridor. These counts included vehicular traffic, heavy truck traffic, and bicycle traffic making all turning movements at each intersection. Pedestrian crossing movements were also counted. Peaks were noted at 8AM and 5PM with the PM peak being the highest. High Street carried more traffic than State at all times of day.

A question was asked if the team would look at diversion effects and the Fore River Parkway.

Tom replied that the traffic modeling would include an in-depth analysis of traffic diversions on all streets in the larger area and he agreed that particular attention would be paid to the Fore River Parkway.

A committee member asked if the traffic counts were done on a school day. It was determined that the day had been a school day as well as a voting day (though turnout had been very low).

In response to another question Tom explained that the PM traffic counts were higher across the board and that the team's initial conjecture was that this was due to less commercial activity happening in the morning.

A committee member noted that on-street parking was a major concern for many people and wondered if the team would be counting the existing parking or evaluating how many of the current spaces are in use at any given time.

Tom responded that scope of work does not include counting spaces in use but will calculate the maximum number of existing spots based on curb cuts and car lengths and will include a maximum number of lost or gained spaces in each alternative.

Tom then reviewed the 2013 Annual Average Daily Traffic Counts from MaineDOT for added context. He noted that these numbers would not be a significant part of the team's analysis.

Carol then took the floor. She asked the committee what potential benefits and challenges they felt there would be in changing State and High to two-way streets. The committee members put forth the following:

Benefits:

- Improved safety for all modes
- Slower traffic speeds
- Making Congress Square more pedestrian-friendly
- Increasing access to the view corridors up and down the roads (such as allowing traffic to approach the front of the art museum)
- Potential to improve non-vehicular access to Deering Oaks and the Casco Bay Bridge
- Potential for uphill bike climbing lanes
- Increased potential for improved transit service
- Improved connectivity/increased routing options
- Shortened trip distances
- Improved crosswalk safety (crossing pedestrians will be visible from both lanes of traffic)
- Improved perception of the roads as safe places
- Less circling traffic/more direct routes
- Improved access to businesses and services
- Improved wayfinding/opportunity to better direct traffic
- Potential to lower vehicular traffic volumes by improving pedestrian experience
- Diversion of traffic to routes better equipped to handle it (Fore River Parkway)
- Return streets to their historic residential use and feel
- More intuitive (eliminate the problem of unfamiliar drivers turning on to the streets in the wrong direction)
- Potential to reconnect (or better connect) the portion of Deering Oaks north of State Street back to the rest of the park.

Challenges

- Possible increased congestion in other areas
- Reduced parking
- Trucks at the State Theater are forced to block traffic while backing into the loading area; this is easier with one-way traffic.
- The Westin Hotel main entrance is on High Street and patrons loading and unloading cars often block traffic, manageable with two lanes going the same direction but would be a challenge in a two way road
- Back up from the drawbridge could be more of an issue without two lanes to stack traffic
- Midblock left turns would become an impediment to traffic
- Certain times have high demand for parking (for example church services)
- Potential increase in travel time between the highway and the South Portland side of the bridge
- Resistance of current users
- Potential for more complicated snow removal
- Two-way traffic could take more space, particularly when accommodating all modes
- Diversion traffic to neighborhoods
- Increase in points where traffic modes come into conflict
- Potential for head-on crashes

During this discussion a question was asked if the team would be modeling the effects an open bridge would have on a two-way scenario. Tom replied that they would not be doing this. He believes that it is not frequent or severe enough to warrant planning around.

Carol then led the committee in reviewing the draft purpose and needs statement:

“The Purpose of the State and High Streets Two-Way Conversion Study is to study the effects of re-introducing two-way traffic flow on State and High Streets. The study will evaluate whether changes in transportation infrastructure would be compatible with the existing land uses and neighborhoods in the study area. Both streets will need to serve automobiles, trucks, transit, pedestrians and cyclists equally. From a safety and health perspective, new infrastructure will be designed for lower speeds to accommodate pedestrian and cyclist safety and increase livability. From an urban design perspective, changes will provide a positive gateway experience, and actively connect historic neighborhoods. Changes will also serve the transportation needs of those living off the peninsula by creating convenient access to city amenities and work places. Changes should be compatible with other related City planning projects, including the redesign of Congress Square.”

Going through sentence by sentence the committee agreed that:

1. “be compatible with” should be changed to “support” and the words “mix of” should be added after the word “existing”
2. “need to serve” should be changed to “balance the needs of”, the word “equally” should be changed to “equitably”, and a comma should perhaps be added after pedestrians. A desire was expressed to see mention of different trip types as well as modes.
3. The words “for lower speeds” should be removed.
4. The word “will” should be changed to “should” and the word “gateway” should be removed.
5. The words “and coordinate with” should be added after the word “compatible”.

The revised statement reads:

“The purpose of the State and High Streets Two-Way Conversion Study is to study the effects of re-introducing two-way traffic flow on State and High Streets. The study will evaluate whether changes in transportation infrastructure will support the existing mix of land uses and neighborhoods in the study area. Both streets need to serve automobiles, trucks, transit, pedestrians, and cyclists equitably, as well as serve both those who are traveling within the City as well as through the City. From a safety and health perspective, new infrastructure should be designed to accommodate pedestrian and cyclist safety and increase livability. From an urban design perspective, changes should provide a positive experience, and actively connect historic neighborhoods. Changes should also serve the transportation needs of those living off the peninsula by creating convenient access to city amenities and work places. Changes should be compatible and coordinate with other related City planning projects, including the redesign of Congress Square.”

Tom then took the floor to review the goals and objectives of the project:

- Improve Safety and Mobility for All Users
- Improve Neighborhood Livability
- Reduce Vehicle Travel Speeds
- Reduce Through Traffic Volumes
- Improve Accessibility for Vehicles, Pedestrians, Transit, and Cyclists

These were developed in response to the identified needs:

- Reduce High Crash Locations
- Reduce High Vehicle Speeds
- Moderate High Traffic Volumes
- Improve Limited and Difficult Pedestrian Crossings
- Improve Lack of Bicycle Facilities
- Improve Circuitous Neighborhood/Business Access Routing
- Improve Poor Access to Park

A short discussion about levels of service and its role took place. While levels of service measures are not used by the city to evaluate projects, MaineDOT requires their use in this case. Steve Landry, the MaineDOT representative, also noted that a recent traffic study they undertook showed that only around one third of the traffic on State and High Streets was through-traffic traveling directly between I-295 and South Portland.

A question was asked why improving the pedestrian experience was not a goal. Tom explained that they felt it was included as part of the livability goal.

A committee member voiced the opinion that they felt “livability” was a soft term and they would prefer “urban design”.

A short discussion was had about the “reduce vehicle travel speed” goal. The committee felt this should be changed to “moderate” vehicle traffic speed.

Tom then presented the proposed evaluation criteria:

- **Mobility for All Users**
 - Corridor Travel Times – Increase/Decrease
 - Intersection Level of Service
 - Transit Service
 - Large Vehicle turns/Delivery Needs
 - Accessibility and Connectivity
 - Pedestrian LOS
 - Bicycle LOS
- **Urbanism and Neighborhood Livability**
 - Vehicle Speeds
 - Traffic Volume Change and Diversion
 - On-Street Parking
 - Increase in development opportunities
 - Number of adverse impacts on historic sites
 - Increase/decrease in access to parks and green space
- **Implementation Cost**
 - No-Build base Improvement Cost
 - Alternative Cost
- **Environmental Impacts**
 - Increased Congestion
 - Fuel Consumption
 - Air Quality

A committee member noted that they felt on-street parking west of Cumberland was not an issue.

Some discussion about additional metrics ensued. An evaluation of evacuation route impacts and some measure of the impacts to winter operations were suggested. It was also put forth that the committee would like to see some measure of the return on investment that alternatives could have, such as its impact on property values.

A committee member asked if there was a state or local requirement that the project include sea level rise in its evaluation. It was felt that no such requirement existed but Tom said he would check the flood maps to see if the area was impacted.

A committee member asked if there could be a trial two-way experiment.

Tom responded that a trial would be very expensive if it was feasible at all. The need for new signals and adjusted roadway geometries would make any trial very difficult.

The committee wanted to see some examples of similar projects that had been undertaken in other cities. Tom said that there were many examples and that he would put together information on a few of them and send it to the committee members.

The next steps of the project would be the public workshop in the early fall. After that the consulting team would develop alternatives and do the analysis. The next PAC/CA meeting would be in November or December.

Carol asked if the committee would like monthly updates by email. The committee felt this would be helpful and so Carol said she would do so.

The meeting ended at 8pm