

# Bangor Daily News

Statewide edition

**BDN** bangordailynews.com

Wednesday, January 15, 2020 \$1.25

## Maine to fund fewer road projects

### Increasing costs a key factor behind three-year plan

**BY MICHAEL SHEPHERD**  
BDN STAFF

AUGUSTA — The Maine Department of Transportation released a three-year road and bridge funding plan on Tuesday that will use more money to fund fewer projects, a symptom of rising construction costs and chronic underfunding of the state system.

Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note struck a dour tone upon the plan's release, writing in an introduction it "largely consists of spreading what used to be two years of capital projects over three years" and saying his department is "competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system until *See Repairs, Page A2*



MICHAEL SHEPHERD | BDN

Maine Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note speaks at a news conference in Augusta on Tuesday. With the commissioner are (from left) Madawaska Town Manager Gary Picard, Paul Kosiell, president of CPM Constructors Inc. in Freeport, and Dana Connors, CEO of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. Van Note said that the current "level of funding is not sustainable," adding that "bipartisan funding solutions" are necessary.



© 2020  
Bangor Publishing Co.  
Periodicals postage  
paid at Bangor, Maine 04401  
Publication number  
USPS 041000

**Advice** D6-7  
**Business** A5  
**Classifieds** D1-8

**Comics** D6-7  
**Editorial** A6-7  
**Horoscope** D7

**Legals** D3  
**Lottery** A2  
**Obituaries** C4

Volume 131, Issue 181 To subscribe or to report a delivery issue, call 207-990-

# Repairs

Continued from Page A1

bipartisan funding solutions materialize.”

Maine’s transportation system has long been embattled and reliant on annual borrowing to fund routine work, but those existing problems were exacerbated last year when construction costs rose sharply and forced the state to cancel tens of millions of dollars in road work.

“This level of funding is not sustainable,” Van Note said at a news conference at the department’s garage in north Augusta. “The system will not fail immediately and Maine DOT will work to avoid any serious safety impacts, but holding actions only work for a short time and reliability of the system will suffer.”

The plan for the 2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years is funded to the tune of nearly \$2.6 billion. That’s \$150 million more than the last three years because of an influx of one-time federal grants, though 142 fewer projects are expected to be funded amid rising costs.

Notable projects that will be funded over the period include the replacements of the International Bridge between Madawaska and the Canadian province of New Brunswick, the Station 46 Bridge in Woolwich and the Veranda Street bridge over Interstate 295 in Portland.

The Madawaska project is a massive \$85 million rebuild in concert with the New Brunswick government. Federal funds will make up \$36 million of that

project and \$25 million of the \$30 million Woolwich bridge reconstruction. Those grants were announced by U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and the state and federal transportation departments last year.

Van Note’s department took many shortcuts to put together the plan, including \$3.8 million in patching work on high-priority roads that will stand until long-term repairs can be made. The state will maintain \$76 million for light paving on lower-priority roads.

The state’s annual road and bridge funding shortfall — the gap between what the Transportation Department can spend and what it thinks it needs to maintain the system — now stands at \$233 million. As past plans have, that assumes voter-approved borrowing of \$100 million each year.

A Maine blue-ribbon commission is examining funding solutions that could include a politically

fraught gas tax increase, transfers from the state budget or fee increases. That commission was initially supposed to deliver recommendations to the Legislature in December, but it filed for an extension this month to continue work as it revolves around a potential solution.

Van Note said the commission’s work has him “as optimistic now as I ever have been” on the future of funding and that “structural, transformational change is needed that will have bipartisan support allowing it to avoid political whims in the State House in an election year.

“It’s a huge puzzle, right,” said Rep. Tom Martin, R-Greene, who sponsored the bill to create the commission and sits on it. “When we’re done, we want the whole puzzle completed.”

Reprints of BDN photos.  
[store.bangordailynews.com](http://store.bangordailynews.com)

Shop & Stay in **South Portland, Maine** at the

**BW**  
**Best Western.**  
**Merry Manor Inn**  
[merrymanorinn.com](http://merrymanorinn.com)

**\$89<sup>00</sup>** *Plus Tax*  
Per Night  
Up to 2 People  
Additional Adults  
\$10 each

Includes **FREE Continental Breakfast** - with hot items!

**Year Round Heated Outdoor Pool**  
Indoor Hot Tub • Indoor Kiddie Pool  
FREE Wi-Fi • Restaurant  
Pet-Friendly • Fitness Room  
*Check out our newly renovated rooms!*

**(207) 774-6151** 700 Main Street - South Portland, ME 04106  
I-95 Exit 43 or I-295 Exit 2 to the Main Street Exit  
**Book Now Online & Enter Code SHOP - Expires 5/20/20**  
Please present coupon at check-in. Cannot be combined with any other discount offer. Subject to availability.

Front page of this morning's paper in Bangor—YET—not one mention of the I-395/Route 9 Connector project that we know for a fact is moving on in the planning stages and the first phase of the connector project—the \$13.5 million Wilson Street/I-395 Bridge replacement—will be bid this spring with construction to start later this year.