

65 Woodridge Rd.
Brewer, ME 04412

January 28, 2015

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
Room 126
State House
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Resolve to remove I-395 – Route 9 connector option 2B2 from consideration

I would like to start by thanking the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation for taking the time to consider the testimony of citizens in regards to the proposed bill that would remove alternative 2B2 from further consideration as part of the proposed highway project to connect I-395 to Route 9 – locally known as the Airline Rd.

I have spent roughly 27 of my 40 years living in Brewer; most of those living on outer Eastern Avenue, roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile from where the proposed alternative 2B2 would pass under Eastern Avenue. After attending college in Orono and subsequently moving to the Boston area after school, I was fortunate to be able to return to Brewer nine years ago. I purchased a home about a half-mile from my mother's home on Eastern Ave., in a wooded subdivision aptly called Woodridge Road. My home is also located approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from where the 2B2 connector would pass under Eastern Avenue, on the other side of the 2B2 connector in relation to my mother's house.

I have spent countless hours walking through the fields in between Rte 1A/I-395 and Eastern Avenue in my youth, ice skating on Felt's Brook, riding ATVs, snowmobiling, and hiking. Since I returned to Brewer nine years ago, I have spent numerous hours hiking with my golden retrievers, often walking up through the fields where the connector would pass to catch the abandoned railroad tracks that cross under Rte 1A near the I-395 interchange all the way to Rte 46 in Holden. I can attest that it really is beautiful in that area. There are many species of wildlife in the area, including deer, bears, foxes, coyotes, and many species of birds. I have witnessed two pileated woodpeckers perform this really neat mating dance – something you just don't see every day. There are folks who trap beaver on Felt's brook in winter, tree stands for archers, and multiple snowmobile trails that connect local folks to a major trail along the Brewer-Holden town line. Although it may look like a corn field, there's actually quite a bit of activity in the area. I cannot count how many people I have run into who walk their dogs in those fields. It's one of the few undeveloped areas left in Brewer, and one of the few areas where people can still hunt. I see hunters daily during November big game rifle season. I would assume that if this route is chosen then that will mean the end of hunting in Brewer.

Interestingly, and especially in light of the rationale for bringing this alternative back from the cutting room floor, (a very similar route had been removed from consideration long ago, only to mysteriously reappear under a new moniker 2B2 as the "preferred option") as the reconsideration of 2B2 was heavily steeped in environmental concerns, I have personally seen blue and white cardboard signs near the abandoned railroad tracks leading up to Rte 1A (the tracks have been used as a snowmobile trail for years) that say "Wetlands" for as long as I can remember. Remnants of some of these signs still can be found on the ground (at least as of a year ago). And it is very wet in that area – dab smack in the middle of where the connector 2B2 would pass. Admittedly I have no experience as a biologist or environmental

scientist; empirically I will say that there are many wet areas where all alternatives would pass, and that building in another location would not do substantially greater damage to the environment than the preferred option 2B2.

Admittedly, I am saddened by the prospect of a highway, or as it is now being billed as a “rolling access route”, being constructed in that area as I will not be able to continue my outdoor activities in tranquility. The proposed connector would pass right through what I refer to as the “dirt pit” into “Eddie Campbell’s field”. Although my mother’s home is less than ½ mile away “as the crow flies” from my home, I will no longer be able to walk to her home though the fields (as 2B2 is described as going underneath Eastern Ave – it will bisect the area where it goes under Eastern Ave). I also worry that I might not even be able to drive there quickly if this project comes to fruition. As my mother is in declining health, I have asked myself, “Will I be able to drive to her house quickly if I need to, or will I be required to drive miles out of my way to ‘go around’ the construction”. Currently, by car I live 0.6 miles from my mother’s home; if I had to take another route (the only other option), it’s 6.1 miles. Also, past the construction phase, will the bridge crossing Eastern Ave become a dangerous zone due to deer and other wildlife crossing at that one location, resulting in increased car accidents? Another concern I have is how much my property value will plummet, as I anticipate that the construction of 2B2 will act as a deterrent to people willing to pay a premium to live in a nice scenic neighborhood.

I am also saddened at the thought of hearing the noise from construction and then noise from traffic. I do feel that there is somewhat of an expectation when you live in a somewhat sleepy town of 9,000 in a wooded subdivision that a highway will not be built in your “backyard” (my house appears to be just outside the ROW zone, as does my mother’s home). As I look at the map, I see other alternatives that would logically seem more suitable and less impactful to property owners. But I sincerely do not wish any connector on anyone else either, just to satisfy my own concerns. I can sympathize with some residents on Rte 46, as it is not an ideal road for 18 wheelers. I also share similar concerns as those citizens who have spoken out against the proposed East-West highway. Properties were already acquired through eminent domain to facilitate the original I-395 in the 1980s in Brewer.

I question the notion that Rte 9 or Rte 46 experience “heavy” truck traffic, or enough to warrant a new highway connector. I would ask, “heavy as compared to where?”, as without a reference to compare against, these definitions are solely subjective. I have lived outside of Boston, and in my mind there is just no comparison between truck traffic or any vehicle traffic for that matter on Rte 9 or Rte 46 in Eddington compared to the suburbs around Boston. I cannot envision Rte 9 or Rte 46 ever experiencing a similar level of 18 wheeler traffic as near a major city in the next 100 years or more. I had to laugh when I read through the latest Maine DOT report that predicted the wait time at the intersection of Rte 1A and Rte 46 could increase from 6 seconds to 120 seconds (by 2035) – yes, in percentage terms that is a huge increase, but in actual time 2 minutes isn’t the end of the world, and certainly is not worth removing any people from their homes, nor spending \$60-\$100 million dollars on a new road, regardless of the source of funding. Perhaps another solution would be to reconstruct that intersection into a traffic circle or roundabout. The 6.5 seconds was also an estimate; I drive through that intersection often, and the only way you can get through in 6.5 seconds even in the dead of winter when there is little traffic out that way is if the light is already green. The estimate was made in 1998 – 17 years ago. Little has changed in my opinion – I believe the 120 second wait estimate for 2035 is severely overestimated.

Some data from the study is quite stale in my opinion (some of it was measured in the 1990s). Even the authors of the study have reforecast traffic volumes as they overestimated them originally. The report

also does not factor in recent events that may impact future truck traffic. For example, the shutdown and proposed scrapping of the Verso mill in Bucksport seems imminent, but six months ago who could have predicted? Could the dismantling of the mill lead to reduced truck traffic on Rte 46? Perhaps – I'm not sure – but I do believe Maine's economic future will involve a shift towards services and away from manufacturing. From a purely economic standpoint, I'd rather see funds go toward maintaining our existing legacy road infrastructure, and money targeted toward new projects like the connector reallocated to better build out and connect the state's lagging fiber-optic infrastructure, as without better access to high-speed internet our economic prospects are bleak.

I do not want to dwell on the process that the numerous agencies and Maine DOT have undertaken; as I am sure they are all doing their best to complete the work they have been assigned to do. I do ask you to be cognizant that this project, like most others, is being controlled by folks who do not live in this area, do not own property in this area, do not travel through this area regularly, and have no sentimental, economic, or cultural connection to this area. I seem to recall reading in one version or another of the study that the Federal Government generally doesn't want to push through highway projects without the buy-in and support of local citizens. I am not sure Maine DOT project managers feel the same way. I do think the majority of citizens and city/town councils have spoken overwhelmingly in opposition to this proposed connector 2B2 – I recall few if any instances of any citizen supporting this initiative at the meetings Maine DOT facilitated to gauge local support, and I am aware that at least Eddington and Brewer councils passed resolves to oppose this project.

In closing, again I want to thank you for your time and consideration. I hope that if the majority of testimony is also in favor of removing 2B2 from consideration that this bill will make it out of committee and be presented to the full legislature for a vote.

Sincerely,

William Butterfield