



# Three-Year Work Plan

*2021 Edition*

January 2021

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## C. Unmet Need

As outlined in the Commissioner’s cover letter to this Work Plan, transportation needs in Maine continue to far outpace available resources for several reasons. These reasons include Maine’s large land area and expansive transportation system, relatively low and widely dispersed population, limited contractor competition in some areas, and geography and weather that – while beautiful – are challenging when it comes to transportation infrastructure.

The precise amount of our unmet need is a moving target, especially in the midst of a pandemic and during the time of change in which we find ourselves, but it is clear the funding shortfall is daunting. In March of 2020, the members of the nonpartisan Blue Ribbon Commission to Study and Recommend Funding Solutions for the State’s Transportation Systems (a group made up of legislators, transportation professionals, and other stakeholders) found that Maine’s unmet transportation need was about \$232 million per year. That figure was calculated *after* assuming that state bonding of \$100 million or more will continue annually. This shortfall was broken down as follows:

<b><i>Annual Shortfall</i></b> <i>(millions of \$)</i>				
<b>Work Group</b>	<b>Annual Need</b>	<b>Anticipated Annual Funding</b>	<b>\$ Shortfall</b>	<b>% Shortfall</b>
Bridge Projects	\$188	\$120	-\$67	-36%
Paving Projects (including LCP)	\$141	\$120	-\$21	-15%
Safety and Spot Imp. (including Partnerships)	\$61	\$35	-\$26	-43%
Traffic/Mobility/Capacity/ITS Improvements	\$41	\$13	-\$28	-68%
Highway Reconstruction/Rehab	\$118	\$63	-\$55	-47%
Multimodal Improvements	\$91	\$56	-\$35	-38%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$640</b>	<b>\$407</b>	<b>-\$232</b>	<b>-36%</b>

There are numerous factors that could impact the magnitude of this shortfall:

1. **MaineDOT Policies.** In a continuation of its *MacGyver* approach, MaineDOT is again evaluating its highway corridor priorities, specifications, and standards to attempt to reduce costs. These efforts are expected to result in an expansion of the Light Capital Paving (LCP) program; simplified paving specifications and treatments to increase paving competition; and standardized corridor improvement strategies using safety data,

customer expectations, and realistic funding constraints. Although important, these efforts alone cannot solve the fundamental funding challenge.

2. State HF Revenues. As noted above, state Highway Fund (HF) revenue is down due to the pandemic (currently down \$30 million or 4.4% from the previous biennium). Will Maine drivers return after the pandemic? What will be the lasting impact of telework? Will new friends from away start an in-migration that could increase travel? The answers to these and other questions are unclear, but they will determine how long and how much HF revenues will stay down.
3. Federal Funding. At the federal level, the winds of change are gusting. More federal funding through additional economic stimulus or a large federal infrastructure package may have renewed viability. *If* any such funding materializes – and that is a significant question given past experiences on transportation funding discussions – its effect on Maine’s unmet transportation funding need will depend upon amounts and whether it is one-time or ongoing in nature.

The factors outlined above show that the amount of unmet need is especially dynamic right now. Some factors could make Maine’s transportation funding situation better; others could make it worse. Furthermore, less than a year has passed since the Blue Ribbon Commission issued its final report, although it admittedly seems like it has been much longer than that. Still, the Commission’s unmet need estimate remains a good one. Finally, as noted above, the pandemic dictates that state policy priorities focus on restoring the health of Maine citizens and the health of our economy. For all these reasons, MaineDOT has not updated the finding of the Blue Ribbon Commission relating to unmet transportation funding need. There will be plenty of time to perform such an update as developments unfold. In the meantime, MaineDOT can confidently state that the amount of the annual unmet transportation funding need is generally consistent with the Blue Ribbon Commission report.

For the next couple of years, as we defeat the virus and address its impacts, MaineDOT will continue to do the best it can with the resources provided, which means maintaining essential services while competently managing a slow decline of our transportation system.

Maine deserves better. Transportation is fundamental to our safety, economic prosperity, and quality of life. It is fundamental to everything we do and who we are. After we resolve the chronic transportation revenue challenge, we need to maintain the system we have, but we also need to improve the system. We need to make targeted capacity improvements, improve villages and downtowns, and reduce the impact of transportation on the climate. Investing in transportation will help move Maine forward.

“For all these reasons, MaineDOT has not updated the finding of the Blue Ribbon Commission relating to unmet transportation need.” (page xxi)

Is this a new tactic of the DOT? They won't tell you how bad things really are so they won't have to answer to wasting another \$90.3 million on a worthless project like the connector as other projects go unfunded? The unmet transportation need annual shortfall data as mentioned in this document, with a March 2020 date, was actually presented to the Blue Ribbon Commission by the DOT in October of 2019 - MONTHS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC!!

Two questions: Does the DOT really not know how bad the shortfall is -OR- do they know how bad it is and won't tell us?

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ID/Year	Municipality	Scope	Name	Description	Total Project Cost
018915.00 2021 HCP 1, 2, 6	Brewer, Eddington, Holden	Highway Construction/Rehabilitation Rural Highways New Construction	Interstate 395/Route 9 Connector	Beginning 0.25 of a mile west of Interstate 395 and Route 1A, roughly paralleling the Brewer-Holden town line, extending 6.00 miles to Route 9 west of Chemo Pond Road (in the vicinity of Lois Lane). FHWA INFRA Grant recipient.	\$90,300,000