

**Maine Department of Transportation  
Aroostook County Transportation Study  
Public Advisory Committee (PAC)**

**Meeting Minutes – PAC Meeting No. 27**

*Tuesday, August 1, 2006*

*Caribou Inn and Convention Center*

*3:00 – 5:00 pm*

<p><b><u>Public Advisory Committee (PAC):</u></b></p> <p>Paul Bouchard John Edgecomb Sam Collins Dale Flewelling Linda Ann Cyr Raymond Mersereau George Howe Christina Therrien Norman Johnson</p> <p><b><u>Not in attendance:</u></b></p> <p>Richard Mattila Douglas Hazlett David Parent Steven Buck Jim Brown Fred Corey Carl Flora Gene Green Anthony Tomah Candy Roy Richard Daigle Michael Corey Donald Flannery</p>	<p><b><u>Study Team:</u></b></p> <p>Jon Feinstein, VHB Ray Faucher, MaineDOT Mark Hasselmann, FHWA Susanna Liller, Barton &amp; Gingold Tobey Williamson, Barton &amp; Gingold</p>
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**Susanna Liller** introduced herself and welcomed everyone to the Public Advisory Council (PAC) meeting, saying that it may be the last one for this project. She said that Ray Faucher wanted to make sure that the PAC had a chance to ask questions about the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) before the public hearings later in the month. She said that as with previous PAC meetings we would have a presentation, then the members of the PAC would have a chance to ask questions, and finally the members of the public would be able to ask questions.

Susanna reminded everyone that the Public Hearings would be held on Monday August 14<sup>th</sup> in Frenchville, Tuesday August 15<sup>th</sup> in Caribou, and Wednesday August 16<sup>th</sup> in Houlton. She also mentioned that on Thursday, August 17<sup>th</sup> there would a Public Hearing for a totally unrelated project in Madawaska, where the General Services Administration is studying a new Border Station.

Susanna said that comments on the Aroostook County Transportation Study (ACTS) SDEIS would be accepted through August 31, 2006. Comments can be provided orally at any of the hearings and submitted in written form at the hearings or by mail. She then turned the floor over to Ray Faucher.

**Ray Faucher** welcomed everyone and said that the MaineDOT had reached an important milestone in the ACTS project. He said that additional information gathering had been done following the completion of the Draft EIS in 2002. Federal Highways was consulted and required a Supplemental DEIS because of the new information. The new document has been distributed to the PAC, the public mailing list, to the libraries of affected communities and is also available online. He said that they have done a lot of work. If all goes well and the comments are considered minimal and not deemed to be substantive, they would be allowed to proceed to the final EIS early in 2007. Ray then turned the floor over to Jon Feinstein for a brief overview of the SDEIS document.

**Susanna** interrupted briefly to introduce the members of the team, Ray Faucher, project manager from Maine DOT; Jon Feinstein, Project Manager for the Consultant Team from VHB and Tobey Williamson from Barton Gingold. She also introduced Christina Therrien, the new City Manager for Madawaska who is new to the PAC.

**Jon Feinstein** welcomed everyone and encouraged people to ask questions during his presentation so that they could have a dialogue about the SDEIS document.

He said that everyone knew what the purpose of the project has been and that this has not changed. He said that the study started in 1999 and that there have been two or three major project pauses when State agencies required more information. Recently the historical issues resulted in a pause. There was also a time a few years ago when a year was invested in new aerial mapping and plans. So, one of the good things about the study is that the plans in the document are very accurate in terms of the photography. He said that the GIS mapping that was done is a planning resource for the County that they should take advantage of with the help of NMDC.

Jon reviewed the progress made on the study since the DEIS was released, going over the C1, C2, Hm and Km corridors, explaining that the draft has been revised based on additional information—leading to the new document, the SDEIS. More detailed surveys needed to be completed and there is now additional data on file with the State Historic Preservation Office. The study team physically drove all the corridor alignments and catalogued all of the historic properties. Maine DOT and the State Historic Preservation Office reviewed all the new information and the

team received emails this week about additional homes being eligible for the historic register.

Impact to homes is an important issue in the decision making related to new highway alignments. Because of this, the K1 corridor has been dismissed and the C1, C2 and H1 corridors were modified in the SDEIS. Also a new C3 corridor was added.

Because new information was uncovered, a SDEIS had to be prepared, which will be presented at the three public hearings this month. People will be able to provide comments on new information in the SDEIS and what was carried over in the DEIS. The study team will respond to the comments and then move forward to prepare a Final EIS and a Record of Decision.

The document identifies the proposed action and describes the screening process that lead to that proposed action. It also catalogues and describes existing conditions, evaluates direct, secondary and cumulative impacts –economic impacts, transportation impacts, land use, cultural resources, impacts to wetland and natural areas. The SDEIS also identifies mitigation measures, and responds to substantive comments on the DEIS.

Jon showed a map of and described the corridors and explained what had been done through the study process. He said the question now is where does MaineDOT and FHWA go from here? He described the important distinction that this is a tiered document. He explained that this is due to the fact that it is a very large study area, which has a very large construction cost.

The first tier defers a decision on a total corridor but identifies proposed actions for the near term. The reasoning is that because the constructing a total corridor is so large it would be difficult to identify a preferred corridor that could be implemented with current funding. Since things are always changing in terms of the environment and funding availability, it makes sense to defer a decision until there is a transportation need or available funding for advancement of a project.

Jon explained that the project has always been talked about as a series of pieces that would be phased together to provide a corridor north to south. He then went on to describe what at the end of the day are the proposed actions from the SDEIS. He said that there are three major build scenarios, plus corridor management planning.

- Segment 2, Route 161 Upgrade
- Segment 4, Caribou Connector
- Segment 7, Presque Isle Bypass
  
- Corridor Management Plans for Route 1
  - Presque Isle to Caribou
  - Caribou to Van Buren

Even though the construction would not be occurring immediately, Jon said that when looking at the schematic, one can see the North South corridor starting to take shape. It is a first step, though not what was envisioned at the beginning of the process.

He next showed diagrams of the three segments and described their benefits and impacts.

- Segment 2 – Route 161 Upgrade
- Segment 4 – Caribou Connector
- Segment 7 – Presque Isle Bypass

### **Segment 2 - Rte 161 Upgrade**

Jon said that this partially satisfies the Purpose and Need by improving safety and mobility. It would maintain a 2-lane cross-section, add or widen shoulders, and add climbing lanes in 7 locations. Total length is 25.9 miles with an estimated cost of \$60 million—a snapshot in time that may change, and would require 388 acres of land acquisition.

<u>Impacts</u>	
Residences	2
Active Farmland (acres)	61
Wetlands (acres)	6
Section 4(f) Uses	2
Section 106 Adverse Effects	2
Wading Bird Habitat Affected (acres)	1.3
Deer Wintering Areas Affected (acres)	7.5

Jon explained that the two properties with historical importance that would be affected are homes that are setback far from the road. Because they are protected under law, it means that the properties are still impacted procedurally and mitigation is possible.

### **Caribou Connector**

Jon showed the three alternatives that are included in the document and explained that the team is working with the city to determine the best location. He said that this is an important piece of the study in terms of the more efficient movement of traffic north.

Again it partially satisfies the Purpose and Need. It connects Route 1 with Route 161, improves safety and mobility. It would reduce truck traffic through Downtown Caribou, which causes conflicts especially at lunch time. It would be 5.5 miles long and initially would be a 2-lane facility. He said that it is currently estimated to cost \$14.4 million for two lanes or \$56.6 million for four lanes and would require 288 acres of land acquisition. Alignment Option 2 is preferred because it has the least adverse impacts, minimizing impacts to farmland and avoiding adverse impacts to public recreational trails

Impacts

<b>Alignment Option</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Residences	1	14	12
Active Farmland (acres)	81	59	49
Forest (acres)	30	123	110
Wetlands (acres)	24	51	65
New Stream Crossings	2	2	2
Section 4(f) Uses	0	0	1
Section 106 Adverse Effects	0	0	0

**Sam Collins** asked if the residences and commercial properties were lumped together?

Jon Feinstein answered yes and said that the slide needs to be changed to show this breakdown.

Jon then turned to the Presque Isle Bypass, saying that as everyone knew all goods need to move through the center of town. Because of this the Presque Isle Bypass has always been a high priority. He explained that the options in the shaded area encompass all the alternatives that were tried to thread the needle over time, coordinating with the city over the last several years. Initially it would be a 2-lane facility with cross-streets grade-separated. Full interchanges would be built at Route 1 north and south of the community, at Route 163/167 and at Conant Road at a full 4-lane build out. A bridge would be constructed over the Aroostook River. The total length of the bypass would be 10 miles, requiring 455 acres of land acquisition, and costing an estimated \$48 million for 2-lanes and \$121 million for 4-lanes.

Jon said that it partially satisfies the Purpose and Need. It would reduce truck traffic through downtown Presque Isle, improve connections to industries east of Presque Isle, improve safety and mobility, and reduce travel times.

Impacts

<b>Alignment Option</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
Residences	26	22	23	95	27	22
Active Farmland (acres)	209	196	283	178	163	296
Wetlands (acres)	64	55	53	20	126	24
Forest (acres)	144	152	90	64	198	119
Section 4(f) Uses	3	1	5	4	5	3
Section 106 Adverse Effects	3	0	4	4	5	3

Alignment 2 was the most favorable in terms of impacts. Jon said that it is a balancing act. In the end they felt that option 2 was the best because of the balance of farmland and wetland impacts. Impacts to farmland would be minimized by putting the roadway at the edge of fields, trying not to fragment fields, and looking for least productive fields. In the end it is a better alignment, that also balances historic resource impacts.

Mitigation for Segment 7 still needs further work on archaeology. Any projects near rivers, the state requires detailed study for signs of Native Americans. Farmland disruption must be minimized and mitigated and any filled Wetlands require mitigation.

**George Howe** asked if any sort of study was done on where replacement farms would be?

Jon Feinstein answered, no, that this would be done later. He said that it is very difficult to figure out at this point. First the ownership and renting patterns have to be determined and they have tried to trace that back as best as possible. But they are not in a place where they could offer a compensation package. Once the corridor is agreed to people will work with MaineDOT on relocation when necessary.

Jon then turned to the discussion of the Corridor Management Planning, saying that very detailed planning level corridor management plans have been done as part of the document. People will see that these plans preserve the integrity of specific corridors. Route 1 from Presque Isle to Caribou and from Caribou to Van Buren.

The intent here along with access controls and plans that the County and the State have is to preserve the existing corridors for the future. So that strip development, historic values, visual effects, etc. are preserved for the future integrity of the County. The CMP's will provide transportation benefit and a lot of other benefit going north-south. Jon said that the framework for this was laid in the DEIS, has been developed in the SDEIS and that funding for going forward needs to be secured in the future. He said that the CMP's are not part of the proposed actions right now, but that they should be done for the future, especially because a lot of right of way can be acquired this way and it is less expensive than a new roadway. This approach maintains the current capacity of the highway and preserves options for the future by ensuring minimal disruption during any later expansion.

The planning includes looking at intersection improvements, safety upgrades, access Management, truck climbing lanes, signage plans, highway corridor overlay districts, changes in allowed uses, density or setbacks, and right of way or development rights acquisitions.

Jon said that as Ray had mentioned previously the team would be back in few weeks for hearings in Frenchville, Caribou, and Houlton where people can provide oral comments. People can also provide written comments by mail until August 31. After that, all comments will be categorized and responses will be developed for those determined to be substantive. The comments and responses will be included in the final document. The Federal Highway Administration would then provide the Record of Decision, unless there were new substantive comments that require additional study to resolve. If this were to happen Federal Highway and MaineDOT would have a conversation about how to move forward.

Assuming that a Record of Decision is submitted, the next step would be to identify the preferred alternatives and identify project commitments.

Jon then turned the floor over to Susanna who asked for comments from the PAC.

**Dale Flewelling** asked about when Jon talks about preferred options was he talking about Westfield to Madawaska or about the entire project?

Jon replied that he was referring to sections 2, 4, and 7. That's it. That's the action.

**Paul Bouchard** said that the team should have an idea by now of what the ultimate alignment would be top to bottom. He said he knows that it will be done in segments but it is frustrating not to have more detail because this road map is crucial in terms of planning ahead even if it is 20 years down the road.

Ray Faucher said that the team had looked at this quite a bit. He said that some of the discussions focused on Westfield down to the Interstate. What if they were to build a 4-lane Interstate type facility along Route 1? This would add a minimum of 2 lanes, which would result in disruption to homes and cultural resources. Ray explained that in the hierarchy of impact analysis – cultural and historical resources have the highest protection, even more than wetlands. So, the other option was to construct 2 lanes through the woods, which would have zero cultural impacts and has a lot more wetlands impacts. Without the funding now it is not possible to make a decision.

Once funding is available, any segments can be moved forwards independently because they all have independent utility and logical termini. Based on what we know today, the H corridor is best from I-95 to Presque Isle. If funding becomes available, we would then have to ask if anything has changed. If not, then we would use this as a base document for developing alignments. The same thing is true from Caribou to Madawaska. This SDEIS does not rule out full option from North to South.

Paul said that he understood, but that it seems like a Catch 22. Without the plan how can they go after funding? Without the funding, they cannot do the planning.

Ray said that they are looking at large segments and have had discussions with Federal Highway. In order to move these things forward you have to be able to implement them in a reasonable amount of time. This requires funding.

**Sam Collins** said that he wanted to pickup on what Paul had said. He said that there was some frustration from people in the Valley and Aroostook County because of the vehicles of communication used by MaineDOT. He said that the publication that was mailed out to thousands of people hoping that they would participate in the hearings, which is the supplemental draft. A lot people read the first page and see the Presque Isle Bypass, the Caribou Connector, Route 161 upgrades, the corridor management and then a few paragraphs down and see that this represents

almost half the transportation efficiency gains of the overall north-south highway at about ¼ the cost of the overall corridor. Exclamation point. Inside the newsletter gives some better explanation. But people's immediate reaction is that they're not building the highway up to the Valley. We have also seen the same type of thing at the Eggs and Issues event in Presque Isle. The communication element is sometimes lost to those that are affected. People coming to hearing are looking at a focus of Route 161 improvement and to them we are abandoning the idea of a new corridor. Many people are saying that improving the 161 corridor is better suited for MainDOT's 6 year plan. Communication is essential to be successful. We should spend money judiciously on Presque Isle Bypass and Caribou, since we have only enough money for one or one and a half.

Ray said that the volatility of oil prices is going to affect how much the available money will buy.

Sam said that people get a little frustrated about how things are communicated.

Ray said that he thought the newsletter would be a good tool and he wanted to get it out last fall. There was some resistance in the MaineDOT office and he feels lucky to have gotten it out. He said he heard what Sam was saying and that he has the same problem in-house in terms of relaying some the messages in the newsletter that he wanted to but was not allowed to.

Ray then provided some additional information on the comment period that closes on August 31<sup>st</sup>. As part of the Federal process, they are required to have a 45 day comment period from when this document is listed in the Federal Register. US EPA listed it on July 14<sup>th</sup>. That provides us the minimum time and one of the other requirements is that we need a two week period between the listing and the hearing. So there are some procedures that we need to follow when we put these documents out for review.

Susanna asked if there were more questions.

**Raymond Mersereau** asked if notices about property acquisition for the Presque Isle Bypass had been sent yet.

Ray Faucher replied that the team had been provided names for all property owners anywhere near the project in Presque Isle and in Caribou and that between 350-400 letters have been sent. The letters say that the recipient's property is in proximity to one of these alignments and depending on how things are finalized you may or may not be impacted. MaineDOT wanted to play it safe. So, anyone remotely close to the alignment got one.

**Norman Johnson** said that he received a letter too and it did not say anything about taking my house.

Ray Faucher joked that we're taking your house too. (Laughter)

Norm said that he hoped they did take it, but not the back lot.

Susanna asked if there were additional questions or comments from the PAC.

**Dale Flewelling** said that even though he doesn't know where the project would go in Southern Aroostook he is comfortable with the draft. He said he has been the only constant member of the PAC from south of Mars Hill since 1999 and he has been well informed.

Ray Faucher said that the team appreciates that.

Dale said that generally speaking Southern Aroostook is supportive, though he can't go on record saying that. It is very important to consider our Canadian counterparts, but Canada has really stepped it up at the border in Houlton to access their highway. It is reasonable for Canadian traffic to access our interstate there. Though, he is not in favor of creating a through route for Canadian traffic, since they are doing fine as it is. He is more concerned about traffic within Aroostook County and this seems like the most logical approach. There is benefit for everyone this way versus starting in the north or starting in the south. The figures the Jon gave us apparently show that we'll be spending \$60 million on 161 and only \$62 million from Caribou to Westfield. He asked Ray if he missed something.

Ray said he did not think that Dale got it wrong. The numbers for 161 is the total for all improvements – climbing lanes and widened shoulders. For that 25 mile stretch it would cost in the vicinity of \$25-26 million. If you look at Caribou, the full buildout would cost \$50 million, but again this is for 5 miles versus 25 miles. He said that this would be for the full build out of 161 and they have no intention of making it 4 lanes. Seven climbing lanes would be added to improve mobility.

Dale said that nevertheless this is a major reconstruction of 161.

Ray said that this all depends on available funding. He said that his understanding of priorities is that the first place they would be looking to do anything would be Presque Isle, second would be Caribou and 161 would be last. He continued that the based on oil prices these days they may be stretching the available money to finish Presque Isle and Caribou. The department will want some feedback from local citizens and communities when they get to a decision on 161 to see if moving forward is the best thing. Just because it is approved here it does not mean it would go forward then. Maybe we would go north or maybe we would go south. Perhaps Presque Isle or Caribou facilities would be expanded to four lanes.

Dale asked if this meant that there was no projected timeframe for upgrading 161.

Ray answered no. It can be done in the foreseeable future but it is difficult to say when. If the Record of Decision is completed sometime next spring, then the project development team would need 24 months plus or minus a few months to deliver a project for construction. So, 2009 is the timeframe for the Presque Isle Bypass. Then depending on how much is spent and how much is left, survey and

detailed alignments would need to be done for Caribou, which would also take time. Before talking with landowners we would need a decent design plan. Then we could go talk with property owners, show them the plan, and identify the impacts for them. Until that work is done it would not be appropriate to approach property owners.

Susanna said asked if there were more questions for the PAC. Since there were none, she opened the floor for questions from the public, beginning with elected officials.

**Ross Paradis**, the District 2 State Representative, spoke first. He said that he concurred with Dale that upgrades to Route 161 should be done as part of 6-year plan. The money allocated by Congress should be used for the other projects in the SDEIS. If 2 lanes are envisioned for this section he asked why we have the Daigle to Madawaska connector. He said that what people want is a 4 lane road. So, it is premature to think about this.

**James Cerrato** said that he owns property north of the VFW and he has never been notified of any action by this committee and he would like to be on that mailing list.

Ray asked that James see him afterwards to give him his contact information and he would ensure he was put on the list.

Susanna asked if there were other questions. She then said that she knew that Linda had letter from John Dionne, who could not be here, and had asked for it to be read.

**Linda Cyr** said that Ray has received this.

Ray agreed that he had received several letters.

Linda said that out of respect John asked that she read this letter (Attached to minutes).

Ray Faucher clarified that this email had been sent to Governor Baldacci, Commissioner Cole as well as to him.

**Steve Souter** from Presque Isle asked about the new bridge and whether federal permits under the Natural Resources Protection Act would be required before construction could begin.

Ray said that they would need to have secured all the right of way and all permits from the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Environmental Protection before construction could begin. This would also require an approved mitigation plan.

Susanna asked if there were other questions or comments.

Linda Cyr asked if Joel Kittredge was still involved in the bridge work and whether he was there.

Ray said that Joel was now his counterpart in project development so the project would be handed off to him after the Record of Decision.

**Wayne Sweetser** from Presque Isle said that the Presque Isle Bypass is absolutely not what the city of Presque Isle wanted. He said that two years ago he was at a meeting at the Cunningham School and Ray Faucher was there along with 50 people in the room and another 50 in the hallway. He said that Albert Cyr asked for a show of hands of who was in favor of the highway. He continued that no one raised their hand, so Mr. Cyr said "case closed" and walked out. But the project still keeps on snowballing and snowballing.

**Brenda Nasberg Jepson** from the Swedish Colony said that she is still very concerned because there are a lot of euphemisms about three lane overlaps. But if you look on the map they are in fact 4 lanes when put the two of them together. She said she agreed with the previous gentleman that their voices have not been heard. Nothing changes. She said that she was extremely concerned when she read in the Aroostook Republican in December that Senator Collins was quoted as saying that it would be a four lane highway. She asked if anyone had informed the Senator that it would not be and said that she does not know who to believe. Her in-laws got a letter from the MaineDOT that said whether or not the highway is built they would still need to make all the improvements to 161 because of safety. She said that she had Mr. Faucher on tape saying that this highway is not being built because of safety or traffic congestion, but instead for economic development. She asked if they were supposed to believe the recent newsletter or what they were told a couple of years ago. She said there was a lot of inconsistency. The people who live in Maine Swedish Colony still do not know who is going to benefit. It is not going to help their tourism. She said that it is a delicate, fragile, cultural, ethnic community. It is the only immigrant settlement built in the entire United States by an act of state legislature and it will be disrupted if the MaineDOT comes through with improvements. They are trying to make it more palatable by showing three lanes overlaps on the map when it is actually four lanes. These three lane overlaps occur in over 50% of the 19 miles through the Historic Maine Swedish Colony and that is too much for a community that depends on tourism for its future. So we're here saying the same things we have been saying. She does not know why the team asks for comments when nothing changes at all. Particularly when Susan Collins says at the Rotary Club in December that it will be a four lane limited access highway from Houlton to the Valley. Please be consistent with the information. The people that are raising the money for the highway should know as much as the people designing it.

Susanna asked if there were additional questions or comments from the public. Seeing none she went back to the PAC to see if they had anything to add or ask.

Jon Feinstein pointed out that before the hearings they would have an open house. People can ask questions informally and look at the plans and information. That way, specific questions can be answered before the hearing when the official record is opened.

Ray said that court reporters will be at all the hearings as they have in the past. Transcripts for all hearings will be developed.

Susanna said that the open house would run from 6PM to 7PM each night.

**Norman Johnson** said that he had to voice feelings he has had for a long time but has not vented before. He said that if people feel frustrated in the public that their comments have not been heard, he for one feels, and suspects that others on the PAC feel frustrated as well. Many times, most of the time, he went away from these meetings feeling this way. He said that early on when he heard that they would have a Public Advisory Committee made up of 30 members, he thought this was great. And looking at the process, it seemed good— perhaps lengthy and cumbersome but good. Because of the Sensible Transportation Act and the Federal Highway Act, input from the public would influence the system. He said that after all these meetings he now thinks that nothing could be further from truth. He said that the PAC never voted on anything. We sent some things back for more study, but in terms of the shape or location of the project or what it is all about, no. Originally, as initiated by LEAD, the idea was for economic development for Aroostook County as a whole. The financial work done twelve years ago was looking at the total county. He said that they did not have \$3 a gallon gas then, maybe it was \$1. But the numbers were large and they are bigger now. At the time he thought that the PAC would be great because members of the community would be represented from north to south and it can bring everyone together. But it does not seem to have happened that way. It seems that the various agencies involved make all the decisions. He said that this is the way politicians have set up the process, but unfortunately it does not do anything for the public or for him as a member of the PAC.

**John Edgecomb** said that he agreed with Norm. He said that he was not pointing fingers, instead he was saying the somehow the system has allowed the process to become frustrating. The consensus forum worked as well as it could have. The PAC is a great idea because it gets the public involved. He said that it is at least a partial answer to state and federal agency concern about need for public involvement. He said that he shared some of the concerns that Norm raised and added that the seven years it took made it a bit more frustrating too. He said is final question was that now that we are at the stage of an SDEIS Final Hearing, will there be a PAC meeting when the final document is released? Because one thing that comes out of the meetings is a summary of what is going on. Otherwise it is hard to find information in the document and a lot of reading. He said not that he wants another meeting, but it would be a good idea for information sharing.

Ray said that normally there would be no other meeting at the end of a study. But this one is unique because there still is a group of options in Presque Isle and

options in Caribou and they will be looking to identify a preferred option in the final. So, it may be appropriate to have another meeting even though there are no requirements when a final document goes out. But in this case it may be appropriate to get people together to explain the final decisions. The State and Federal agencies will have comments that we will have to respond to in developing our preferred options.

Norman Johnson asked who “we” is.

Ray answered that it is MaineDOT and Federal Highway. He said that one final PAC meeting may be appropriate when the Final EIS is distributed to say these are the options that have been identified. If it is in the FEIS then Federal Highway has agreed it meets all their requirements.

Norm said that maybe it has been made clear, but he wanted to know if Federal Highway always has a no-build option.

Ray said that all actions are compared against the no-build alternative.

**Linda Cyr** said that she hears frustration, but she has been on this committee since way back. They have always answered the questions. She said that she had to remind herself that the PAC doesn’t make decisions. They are the experts. We are advisory—to let them know what the people think. They appreciate our input and always respond. It isn’t always what we want. She said thank you and that the team has done a real good job.

**Paul Bouchard** said he agreed and that we needed to be reminded that they are an advisory group and that this is the limit of their obligation. He said that for every point made there is more than likely an opposing point of view. He said that he has always made comments knowing that the opposing point of view must be recognized by the team because we cannot all have our way. He said that at the end of the day he hoped that the consensus was that they have improved transportation in and around the County.

Ray said that it has been a long process. Over the past 7 years they have looked at more corridors than originally intended. Many of the corridors suggested came from the PAC. Besides meeting with this group, they have also met with representatives from the Forestry and Agriculture industries to get input on decisions. He said that unfortunately it is not always easy to identify transportation options that everyone can agree with. What the team has tried to do is come up with options that meet community needs, can be supported by permitting agencies, and are bought into by local communities.

**Dale Flewelling** said that he agrees with others that this process has been a roller-coaster. There is still a lot on the table for Southern Aroostook. He said that he does not like the option that goes through the woods, but that he has no decision making ability. Collectively he thinks people should get behind and support the project because it is beneficial to the entire county. He said that it is

important to keep the scope of the project in perspective – there is only one larger highway project in the country – in Texas. It is time to get behind this and move it forward.

Ray said that the study area is 2 ½ times the state of Rhode Island.

**Steve Souter** asked what people can do at the public hearing—could he read a 5 minute statement?

Ray said that he could read it or submit it as a written comment.

Susanna added that the only thing that might change that is the number of people that want to speak. If there are a lot of people, she may ask that he summarize his oral comments and submit the entire comment as a written comment so that everyone has a chance to speak.

Norman Johnson asked if all comments will be responded to.

Ray said that all substantive comments will be responded to in the Final EIS.

Susanna added that substantive comments are not just opinions. To be considered substantive it must be a specific critique of the document.

**Pamela Sweetser** from Presque Isle asked for further clarification. She said that they have made attempts to communicate with Mr. Faucher and VHB and received form letters but are not listed in the comments section of the document. But the term seems to mean that we can talk about the document, but not about our community.

Jon said that if you provide a comment for example—you really missed this habitat for this one woodpecker that has lived on my property and the species does not exist elsewhere in the state—that would be substantive. If you say I have this tree that I really like because my grandfather planted it, that would not be substantive. It would not have any regulatory standing, unless it was a protected tree for some reason. Not substantive is a personal feeling or something that has no relationship to the project as a whole. Once there was a project where someone wanted the team to study a blimp instead of a roadway connector. Substantive comments have factual, technical merit. Not personal, but technical.

**Norm Johnson** asked whether a financial comment would be considered substantive.

Jon replied that the economic analysis that has been done is macro not micro level of benefits or impacts. Parcel by parcel impacts have not been done. For instance impacts to Houlton as a whole as a result of bypassing it was evaluated, but we have not evaluated the impacts to a bakery in Houlton of building the bypass.

Susanna clarified that the only time the process requires comments be responded to is at the Public Hearings. Responses are included in the document that goes to Federal Highway, so it is important to get comments in.

Ray added that they received a lot of what seemed to be form letter comments on the Draft. Some letters had a lot of signatures attached. The assumption was that the first person that signed was the person who wrote it. So, if a letter is signed by 20-25 people, only the first one who signed received a response. But the requirements state that we must send the final document to everyone who submitted substantive comments.

**Steve Souter** asked since Caribou has three possible options and Presque Isle has six possible options whether we were now down to one in each town.

Ray said that they have identified preferred options for both Presque Isle and Caribou – in both cases it is option #2. But there is still work to be done to ensure the support of the state and federal agencies.

Steve Souter asked whether they still needed to do archaeological studies to build the bridge.

Ray said the yes they still needed to do some additional archaeological work on the entire 10 mile section in Presque Isle. He said that the Maine State Historical Preservation Agency had people here in May, June and July looking for additional sites that we should be aware of, but mostly in Maine items found are important for what they are not for where they are. In most cases they are dug up removed and recovered.

**James Cerratto** asked when landowners in Segment 4 Option 2 will be notified that this option has been recommended.

Ray answered that they would include this in the Final EIS document which they are hopeful will be available before the end of this year, if all goes well. Property owners will be notified when the project is going to final design. Once this happens then the project development team would have a meeting to show property owners some idea of where it is going to be. Ultimately what they have now is a rough alignment. Additional information needs to be gathered. The goal is to try to minimize impacts to businesses and homeowners—knowing that we cannot avoid everyone.

Mr. Cerratto asked when the surveyors would come.

Ray answered that he did not know. They would begin with Presque Isle, but final plans would not be done without some kind of hearing and they would not do anything to anyone's property without notification and a conversation.

**Gail Sweetser** asked for clarification of some terms. Mr. Feinstein had listed on the presentation farmland, wetland, active farms and historic resources as criteria for choosing options. Then later Mr. Faucher said cultural resources trump wetlands. So it was not clear to her how they distinguish between what is a cultural resource and what is a historic resource.

Ray said that cultural resources generally include all above ground and below ground resources. Below ground resources being archaeological, above ground being buildings. But the items that would not be moved are those that have been identified either on the National Register or additional information that says they are eligible for the national register.

Gail said that she has been through the application process for getting something listed on the National Register. She asked if they were using the terms cultural resources and historical resources interchangeably.

Ray answered yes.

Susanna asked if there were any other comments. Seeing none she said that she hoped to see people in two weeks at the hearings. She said that she knew she was speaking for the study team when she thanked the PAC for all the time and energy they had contributed to the process. She also acknowledged that it is a frustrating process. Thank you.