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Response to Comments

6.1 Introduction

A Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the Aroostook County Transportation Study (ACTS) was released for public review in June 2006. Public comment was received during Public Hearings on the SDEIS which were held in Frenchville, Caribou, and Houlton in August 2006.

In addition, written comments on the SDEIS were received from federal, state, and local governmental agencies and elected officials, community organizations and businesses, and citizens during the comment period that ended on August 31, 2006. A total of 40 comment letters on the SDEIS were received. The comment letters and transcripts from the public hearings are included in Appendix B of this FEIS.

This chapter of the FEIS summarizes the substantive comments on the SDEIS specific to Segment 4 and the overall project, and provides responses to these comments in accordance with the requirements of NEPA. A separate Tier 2 FEIS will be filed for Segment 7, the Presque Isle Bypass, in the near future and MaineDOT will respond to comments related to Segment 7 at that time. MaineDOT is deferring decision making on the overall project corridor until such time as conditions warrant construction and there is reasonable funding available for them. Comments relating to segments other than Segments 4 and 7 will be responded to at a later time.

The following sections provide summaries of the comments received on the SDEIS. The comments are separated into 6 general categories: purpose and need; alternatives; aquatic resources; socio-economic resources; utilities; and other issues.

6.2 Purpose and Need

Many comments were related to the purpose and need for both the overall ACTS project (Tier 1) and the Segment 4 Proposed Action (Tier 2).

A few commenters were concerned about the overall ACTS corridor. Some commenters stated that Northern Maine was promised a 4-lane highway and a 4-lane

highway is the only acceptable option. Others suggested building I-95 straight from Smyrna to Madawaska and join I-95 with the Trans-Canada Highway. One commenter suggested that at a rate of 5 miles per year, in 30 years there would be an acceptable road system. One commenter stated that the highway plan must cover Aroostook County as a whole and offer justice to all. Commenters also emphasized the importance of promoting quality infrastructure for safety and economic growth.

A few commenters commented on the need for Proposed Action in Segment 4. One commenter suggested that an upgrade to the existing roads will suffice while another stated that the current traffic system is more than adequate for the amount of traffic on the existing roadways. Some comments suggested MaineDOT consider rail options instead of a new highway.

***Responses:** The purpose and need for the Proposed Action is described in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, on page 1-6. The purpose of the ACTS is to evaluate transportation alternatives that would improve the region's economy by improving transportation mobility. MaineDOT is deferring decision making on the overall project corridor until such time as conditions warrant construction and there is reasonable funding for them. MaineDOT is advancing only Segment 4 at this time.*

The No-Action Alternative for Segment 4, as described in Chapter 3, page 3-4, of this FEIS would not satisfy the purpose and need for the Proposed Action. Similarly, a rail option would not meet the project purpose. Given the widely dispersed origins and destinations of truck and passenger car traffic, developing freight and passenger rail systems for the ACTS Study Area would not be practicable.

6.3 Alternatives

Many comments were related to the selection of a Preferred Alignment for the Segment 4 Proposed Action.

A few commenters suggested that the Preferred Alignment should bypass Caribou, beginning south of downtown Caribou and travel to the west. One commenter stated that using property west of the Caribou Convention Center for transportation upgrades should be considered as it would have the least economic impact. One commenter requested that Alignment Option 1 be chosen to minimize impacts to aquatic resources

One comment letter recommended that TSM and TDM measures be considered in combination with the Preferred Alternative.

***Responses:** The alternatives analysis conducted for the Proposed Action is described in Chapter 3 of this FEIS. After a thorough and extensive alternatives analysis, which considered federally regulated environmental resources and transportation benefits to the*

region, Alignment Option 4B has been selected as the Preferred Alternative. The City of Caribou has also identified Alignment Option 4B as their Preferred Alternative. MaineDOT will continue to consider TSM and TDM measures in combination with the Preferred Alternative to benefit the transportation system in Caribou.

6.4 Aquatic Resources

Aquatic resources were the subject of many comments on the SDEIS. Many comments requested more information related to aquatic resources. Information requested included the baseline water quality conditions in surface and ground water including existing salting practices, the locations of significant vernal pools in the area, and the locations of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Land and Water Quality 303(d) listed impaired water bodies in the area. One comment noted that the reference to the United Watershed Assessment needs to be edited.

One commenter requested MaineDOT include a discussion of planned instream sampling of pollutants before and after construction. Another comment suggested MaineDOT coordinate with Maine DEP Sand and Salt Pile Coordinator on potential siting for salt and sand storage piles. One comment was related to stormwater management and suggested that the BMPs implemented should be consistent with Maine Stormwater and Maine Drinking Water Program's Source Water Assessment/Management Law.

A few comments were related to wetland mitigation. One comment requested that MaineDOT address invasive species and methods to control them. Another thought the decision on wetland mitigation area size is premature, and MaineDOT should focus on loss of wetland function and then consider suitable mitigation areas.

Responses: *Aquatic resources and wetlands in the Segment 4 Study Area are described in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, page 4-39 of this FEIS. Information regarding the water quality of surface and groundwater resources in the Study Area including Maine Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Land and Water Quality 303(d) listed impaired waterbodies has been included. The 2008 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report was used to gather this information instead of the United Watershed Assessment. No significant vernal pools have been documented in the vicinity of Alignment Option 4B.*

Alignment Option 4B would cross Longfellow Brook, a perennial stream in Caribou. Longfellow Brook is in downtown Caribou and is currently crossed by roads and rails, including Route 1. MaineDOT is not planning on conducting instream sampling for pollutants but will implement stormwater BMPs consistent with the MaineDOT's Best Management Practices for Erosion and Sedimentation Control Manual. (MaineDOT will coordinate with MaineDEP regarding sand and salt piles and will cover all sand and salt

piles to avoid erosion, sedimentation, and stormwater contamination.) The MaineDOT salt storage area within the right-of-way for Alignment Option 4B will be relocated and covered.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.2.3, page 5-34 of this FEIS, 15 potential wetland mitigation areas have been identified. MaineDOT will select wetland mitigation areas which will provide the similar functions and values as the wetlands impacted by Alignment Option 4B. Wetland mitigation areas will be constructed using appropriate wetland mitigation techniques and will incorporate appropriate monitoring and control measures for invasive species.

6.5 Socio-Economic Issues

Approximately 10 comment letters referred to socio-economic issues related to the Proposed Action. Many commenters are concerned about the impact the Route 1-161 Connector will have on the economy in Caribou. Specifically, one commenter stated that the connector will harm the economy, destroy businesses, and carry people away from downtown Caribou.

Specifically, one commenter requested MaineDOT provide a broader discussion of the influence the Proposed Action will have on the economy in the region. One commenter requested MaineDOT make an effort to predict the effects on existing businesses by researching the economic effects from similar transportation projects. Another commenter requested a description of ongoing and planned activities to maintain and expand Aroostook's economy. One commenter thought the potential of development at the intersections to of the Route 1-161 Connector and existing roads should be assessed.

A few comments were related to the property takings required for the Proposed Action. Commenters requested that in-depth communication occur with property owners who will be affected by the Proposed Action. One commenter thought eliminating 14 businesses at the Route 1/Route 89 Intersection represented inconsiderate planning. Another thought eliminating the Lyndon Street access point to Route 1 would result in economic hardship.

Responses: *The transportation system in Aroostook County is currently inadequate. The purpose of the Route 1-161 Connector and the overall ACTS Corridor is to improve transportation mobility in the region. Improved mobility will improve economic opportunity in the region. Access to businesses in Caribou will remain open and the Proposed Action would benefit downtown Caribou by removing through traffic (with no intention of stopping in Caribou) and truck traffic from the downtown. Page 5-18 of Chapter 5 discusses the potential for new developments along the Route 1-161 Connector. Impacts to the Social and Economic Environments can be found in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.3, page 5-14 of this FEIS.*

To provide a description of ongoing and planned activities to maintain and expand the economy of Aroostook County is beyond the scope of this project. The Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC) in coordination with the Aroostook Partnership for Progress (APP) and Leaders Encouraging Aroostook Development (LEAD) provide a wide range of services geared towards maintaining and expanding the economy in Aroostook County.

Since the SDEIS, the alignment options for the Route 1-161 Connector have been modified. The Preferred Alignment, Alignment Option 4B, will not eliminate the Lyndon Street access point to Route 1. Modifications to Alignment Option 4B reduced impacts to non-residential structures from 14 to 3, consisting of 1 industrial structure, 1 government structure, and 1 commercial structure (near the Route 1/Route 89 intersection). Under state and federal law, owners of property are entitled to fair and just compensation for the value of their property, as well as financial assistance with relocation. MaineDOT will communicate with property owners who will be affected by the Proposed Action. Section 5.3 of Chapter 5, Page 5-8, of this FEIS describes the business impacts of the Proposed Action.

6.6 Utilities

The Maine Public Service (MPS) and members of the public raised a number of issues regarding utilities in the comments on the SDEIS. The comments ranged from issues related to utility relocation to the interruption of utility service.

MPS requested they be involved in future economic analysis and that they were unaware of any agreement to have utilities relocated. Another comment stated that Segment 4 would pass through an existing MPS transmission line. MPS also stated that impacts to distribution lines and transmission lines will require early coordination and communication between MPS and MaineDOT. MPS stated that if the segments are constructed as 4-lane highways, it will require a major utility effort.

Commenters also requested additional information related to utilities. Information requested included information on who would bear the cost of construction blasts on wells/foundations and driveway relocations; whether construction work would continue in the winter; and how long the electric and phone service would be interrupted.

Responses: *MaineDOT will coordinate with MPS regarding impacts to utilities including distribution lines, transmission lines, and private right-of-way. The Route 1-161 Connector will be constructed as a 2-lane highway on a 4-lane right-of-way footprint and a major utility relocation effort is not anticipated at this time. Alignment Option 4B has been selected as the Preferred Alignment. The Preferred Alignment has been designed in coordination with MPS to avoid the substation on Otter Street in Caribou (see Figure 2-7b).*

MaineDOT will bear the cost of driveway relocations as well as any right-of-way impacts. No blasting is anticipated for the Segment 4 Proposed Action. Therefore, no impacts on wells and foundations are anticipated. MaineDOT will decide at a later date if construction work will continue during the winter months. MaineDOT will not be responsible for relocating electrical and phone service, however, utilities are expected to remain in service during construction.

6.7 Other Issues

A few comments were related to air quality data, highway maintenance, cultural resources, and public participation.

One commenter requested that the technical support documents for the CO air quality analysis be made available to the public. Another commenter stated that MaineDOT is unable to complete current maintenance projects on existing roads and asked how a new roadway would impact future budgets. One comment suggested that Caribou should study alternatives for the Proposed Action through their own bypass committee and relay the results to MaineDOT. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission noted that consultation is ongoing for architectural and archaeological resources in the ACTS Study Area.

Responses: *Members of the public interested in viewing the technical support documents for the air quality analysis may contact MaineDOT (www.vhb.com/aroostook/default.asp). MaineDOT will continue to fund projects listed on their six-year plan. Public input has been an important element of this project. Chapter 7, Section 7.3, page 7-3 of this FEIS provides a description of public involvement including the Public Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting dates and consultation with the city council. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.6, page 4-31 of this FEIS describes the ongoing coordination regarding cultural resources in the Segment 4 Study Area.*