

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

Meeting Minutes – PAC Meeting No. 22

Tuesday, March 16th, 2004

Caribou Inn and Convention Center

3:00 – 5:00 pm

Public Advisory Committee (PAC):

Paul Bouchard
Sam Collins
Fred Corey
David Cyr
Linda Anne Cyr
Peggy Daigle
Richard Daigle
Arthur Faucher
Dale Flewelling
Carl Flora
Gene Green
George Howe
Norm Johnson
Richard Mattila
Ray Mercereau

Study Team:

Ruth Bonsignore, VHB
Jon Feinstein, VHB
Ray Faucher, MaineDOT
Tony Grande, VHB
Mark Hasselmann, FHWA
Jay Kamm, NMDC
Susanna Liller, Barton & Gingold
Kenneth Murchison, NMDC
Elaine Stiles, VHB
Gerald Varney, FHWA
Elaine Walsh, Barton & Gingold
Bob Ballew, MaineDOT
Mike Morgan, MaineDOT

Not in attendance:

Jim Brown
Michael Corey
John Edgecomb
David Parent
Candy Roy
Anthony Tomah

Susanna welcomed everyone to the 22nd PAC meeting and introduced the Study Team.

Susanna asked for two minutes for Dale Flewelling. Dale read a statement explaining Houlton's support for Aroostook County and its transportation needs in response to recent newspaper articles. Dale asked that the statement be included with the distribution of the meeting minutes.

MAIN POINTS OF PRESENTATION BY RUTH BONSIGNORE, JON FEINSTEIN AND TONY GRANDE, VHB

Agenda – Review Corridor North of Presque Isle

Caribou Bypass
Route 1/Route 161 Corridor
Route 161
Route 161/Madawaska
Route 1 Caribou

Design Approach – Upgrades of Existing Highways

- Alignment 1. Widen both sides, split the impacts to both sides of corridor
- Alignment 2. Alignment 2 looks at widening east and west, in some cases uses existing roadway
- Alignment 3. Like 2 but with Limited Bypasses

Design Approach – New Highways

Objectives of these alignments:

- Fit corridor to the topography
- Make logical connections to existing transportation system
- Minimize impacts to human and natural resources

Design Approach – Context

With every mile, a different context

Balance design objectives:

- Enhance north south highway
- Human resources
- Natural Resources

Test criteria given the context of the alignments

Need to educate each other on the options and come up with the least environmentally damaging solution.

PRESENTATION OF CARIBOU UPGRADE / BYPASS / ROUTE 161 CONNECTOR

Ruth and Tony conducted a review of the Caribou segment alternatives, pointing out items of note.

Route 1: Caribou Motor Inn to South of Fort Street

- Approximately 2.6 miles long
- Widening is focused to the west avoiding impacts to the river
- No impacts to existing buildings are anticipated
- May require a new bridge over the existing railroad

Route 1: Fort Street to Route 161 Connector

- Approximately 3.4 miles long
- Existing Highway ranges from 52-98 feet wide through this section
- High Crash location at Route1 / Route 89 / Bennett Drive intersection
- Constrained from Fort Street to High Street
 - o Cemetery
 - o Structures close to the highway
- Several alignments investigated through this section:
 - o Split widening
 - o Combination east / west widening
 - o Potential reduced speed through this area
 - o Bypass section east of Cary Medical Center
- Various intersection configurations evaluated
 - o At-Grade
 - o Full Interchange

Route 1: Route 161 Connector

Approximately 2.0 miles long

Existing issues/constraints:

- Wetlands along the north side of the corridor
- The Gathering
- Caribou Country Club
- Farmsteads along west side of Route 1
- Sharp curve along Route 161

Several alignments investigated for this connection

- Connection beginning at Ouellette Road to Ogren Road
- Connection beginning at Cary Medical to Ogren Road

Various intersection configurations evaluated

- At-Grade
- Full Interchange

QUESTIONS FROM THE PAC ON CARIBOU UPGRADE / BYPASS / 161 CONNECTOR:

Paul Bouchard - Have you gone far enough into the process to determine the preferred alignment?

Ruth Bonsignore - Speaking to this segment, it will be a tradeoff analysis.

Paul Bouchard - Looking from outside and not having had the opportunity to hear from Caribou, the shortest route appears to be the most desirable route, not sure which has the most impact.

Norm Johnson - Of the three alignments, what are the differences between them?

Ruth Bonsignore – The differences are very small/minimal.

George Howe – How many acres of farmland will be impacted with these alignments?

Ruth Bonsignore – Direct route option has the most farmland impacts, there are land use impacts with the other alignments, the third alignment has industrial growth zone impacts, potential wetland issues, flood plain issues. We would have to replace existing snowmobile trails and trailhead, as there are lots of wetlands. Magenta route was not well received when we met with Caribou.

PRESENTATION OF ROUTE 161 UPGRADE

Ruth and Tony conducted a review of the Route 161 Upgrade, pointing out items of note.

Route 161: Caribou to Daigle

Approximately 28 miles long

Approximately 22 locations of vertical or horizontal deficiencies

Travel lane width deficiencies - 11 feet existing (approx. 36 percent of corridor)

Shoulder width deficiencies – varies 2 to 6 feet existing (approx. 53 percent of corridor)

Proposed upgrade improvements (Travel lane widths – 12 feet; Shoulder widths – 8 feet)

Truck Climbing Lanes evaluated

Tony Grande – Existing roadway in several areas is deficient in one form or another; shoulder widths vary while some are paved and some are gravel. We are looking at making sure that all lanes are 12 feet wide, which would add one foot on each side of the existing 11 foot wide lanes, and the existing shoulders would be paved and widened to 8 feet. Generally, the edge of the new paved shoulders would be about 7 feet closer to existing property. The typical cross

section reflects the matching color scheme shown on the plans. Yellow indicates the widened travel lanes, from 11 feet to 12 feet, while grey represents the widened shoulders to 8 feet. Truck climbing lanes have also been evaluated along the Route 161 corridor, and are identified on the plans with red bands along either side of the roadway where warranted. Truck climbing lanes are generally warranted in areas of long steep grades. Where truck climbing lanes are proposed, an additional 6 feet of widening would be required on that side of the road, which would result in one additional travel lane, 12 feet wide, with a reduced shoulder width of 4 feet.

Ruth Bonsignore – Tony is now showing all areas where truck-climbing cross sections are warranted along the corridor. Next generation of these maps may have some modification based on impact analysis.

Ray Faucher – The Route 1 segment north of Presque Isle has a truck climbing lane and is an example of the proposed improvements along Route 161. In the vicinity of the Woodland-New Sweden town line, climbing lanes are shown in both directions. Where climbing lanes are shown in both directions, the roadway width would have 4-12 foot lanes and 2 narrow 4 foot shoulders. At the Jepson Road Intersection, we are not proposing to change the side road configuration. If issues are identified locally, we would consider some minor upgrades to existing roadways in the corridor.

Ruth Bonsignore – We plan to look at the configuration of Station Road for upgrades to that stretch of Route 161.

Norm Johnson – There are vertical deficiencies before Beardsley Brook.

Ray Faucher – Once funding is determined for a proposed project, possible deficiencies such as Beardsley Brook would be evaluated in the final design phase to include the appropriate improvements.

Tony Grande – There is currently an existing truck climbing lane on Route 161 (in T17R4) in the vicinity of Cross Lake, south of the lake access roads and the Route 162 intersection, where there is a combination of tight horizontal and vertical curvature. Lane widths north of this location are generally 11 feet wide with gravel shoulders. Another issue along this corridor is utility poles, which may need to be relocated along this entire segment as a result of the widening.

PRESENTATION OF ROUTE 161 / MADAWASKA CONNECTOR

Ruth and Tony then conducted a review of the Route 161 / Madawaska Connector, pointing out items of note.

Route 161 / Madawaska Connector

Approximately 14.5 miles long

Extends from Route 161 in Daigle (north of Ouellette Road) to Route 1 in vicinity of Fournier Road in Madawaska

Issues / Constraints

- Steep, rolling terrain
- Wetlands
- Farmsteads
- Airport

Several Alignments evaluated

Tony Grande – The Alignment begins approximately one mile north of the Ouellette Road / Route 161 intersection and veers off to the north passing through St. Agatha and Frenchville and then ties into Fournier Road and Route 1 in Madawaska. The proposed alignment has two

variations, one in the northerly section and one to the south. Both alignment options would widen existing roadways as opposed to building new alignments. The southerly option utilizes Ouellette Road which has very few structures along it while the northerly option utilizes Dionne Road. Three at-grade connections are proposed along the Connector. Proposed connections will be made at Flat Mountain Road and Route 162 in St. Agatha, and with Rossignol Road in Frenchville, near the airport. This alignment represents a four-lane corridor, with a grass center median. There are very steep grades throughout the area, very mountainous terrain, 7% grades in several locations. There are also a fair amount of wetlands in the area. Because we are close to the airport in Frenchville we will need to evaluate the flight path for the airport to make sure we have proper clearance with the proposed roadway - we believe that we are okay in that area.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PAC ON RTE 161 UPGRADE AND MADAWASKA CONNECTOR:

Paul Bouchard –What is the proposed alignment of Ouellette Road?

David Cyr – The new connector road would tie into Route 161 near David Pelletier’s office?

Norm Johnson – There is no money in the budget for upgrading as I understand it. The current six year plan has upgrading to the same standard on Route 161.

Ray Faucher –The current proposed improvements to the corridor would be to provide for a uniform consistent highway from I-95 to the Saint John Valley.

Paul Bouchard - How many miles is the Madawaska connector?

Ruth Bonsignore – The Madawaska Connector is a 14.5 mile segment.

Ruth Bonsignore – The Frenchville section received negative feedback for the widening of Route 1 between Frenchville and Madawaska. We identified other sites and looked at alignments in the vicinity of one of those potential sites. The Madawaska Connector was 8 miles in the DEIS, now 14.5 miles.

Peggy Daigle – Has the airport location been coordinated with the Airport Master Plan and flight patterns?

Tony Grande – We still need to verify flight patterns.

Paul Bouchard – Flight patterns exist in Master Plan, you can refer to that.

Paul Bouchard - How far is the proposed roadway from the airport?

Tony Grande – 2,000 ft

Paul Bouchard – Don’t see a conflict considering that distance.

Arthur Faucher - Can you print these maps and make them available?

Ruth Bonsignore - Yes, we can. However, we have not had meetings with some communities. We want to first do outreach with Madawaska and folks up north to avoid having too many versions in circulation.

Sam Collins – What are the anticipated speeds?

Tony Grande – 65-70 mph, though we may consider down posting possibly to 50 mph.

PRESENTATION OF ROUTE 1 – PRESQUE ISLE TO CARIBOU

Ruth and Tony then conducted a review of the Route 1 section between Presque Isle and Caribou, pointing out items of note.

Route 1: Brewer Road (US 210) to Route 164 / Dow Siding Road

Approximately 6.2 miles long

Two vertical curve deficiencies

Issues / Constraints

- Residences
- Cemetery
- Utility poles located along west side of Route 1
- Farm access
- Business zone in northern section

Several Alignments evaluated

Tony Grande – This section begins at the intersection of Route 1 and Route 210 / Brewer Road, tying into the proposed Presque Isle Bypass. Double arrows indicate a four lane median divided roadway. We've been guided by all the constraints that Ruth mentioned including natural, human, and environmental resources. We're trying to minimize impacts as much as possible. Truck turnarounds will be provided at selected locations as proposed median breaks would not accommodate a large truck turning around. Additional pavement widening may be needed to accommodate the turnaround locations. There is a large dip in the road in the vicinity of PI/Caribou town line, referred to locally as "Death Valley". Raising the grade through that area would be needed to fix that problem. Two off-line options are shown, one that would shift the alignment further to the west in this area to raise the grade and minimize impacts to existing buildings along Route 1 and maintain this section of Route 1 as a frontage road. One additional option is shown that would continue the alignment straight, just north of the dip area, with a new alignment to the east that would parallel the Caribou Commercial Zone and connect with a potential new interchange or at-grade crossing with Dow Siding Road further to the east of the Caribou Inn.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PAC ON ROUTE 1 – PRESQUE ISLE TO CARIBOU:

Fred Corey – What would the access management considerations be? Would we create any landlocked properties that would not have access to the road?

Ruth Bonsignore – New highway corridors will be limited access corridors. For example, along the Madawaska Connector there will be connections at Flat Mountain Road and Route 162, but no connections in between. There will be regularly spaced median breaks for land uses.

Fred Corey - Driveway cuts, and slow-downs defeat the purpose of these projects. How will you address this?

Ruth Bonsignore – In the near term it will be "right in right out", though it could be additional development with access rights, and controls for sensitive areas. Inconsistency with four-lane concept with the commercial zone, additional land use strategies layered on preferred alignment meet mobility as opposed to other needs.

Fred Corey – Do you foresee potential changes to land use?

Ruth Bonsignore There will be an impact to commercial zones. Our economic analysis will accommodate those, with a goal to anticipate changes that may happen along the corridor.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Jon Feinstein – There will be more coordination and community outreach in the coming months. We will continue with our regulatory coordination, meeting with the state and federal interagency group to update them on the project. In two weeks we will present the status of the project to EPA Region One.

Ray Faucher –FHWA suggested that it would help to have the agencies participate at public meetings to explain their roles and responsibilities in the review process. Since the last meeting, we have covered many miles from Presque Isle North. Our next challenge is to go south down to Houlton. It will be about 30-60 days of work. We will get back to you regarding the next PAC meeting probably in May or June.

Norman Johnson – Will you have a better idea about plans then?

Jon Feinstein – Yes.

Paul Bouchard – Are you planning to touch on the New Sweden meeting that was held yesterday?

Jon Feinstein – At the Cary Medical Center, the Aroostook County Commissioners and Town of New Sweden coordinated a meeting where we presented plans for Route 161, and described how the list of alternatives evolved to the few alternatives we have now. We explained that making that road a two-lane upgrade is adequate for the near future. We feel we reached a better understanding with the community. Elaine Stiles with VHB is researching historical resources in the communities and has identified all the known historical buildings along the proposed corridor.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Paul Cyr – Madawaska

Paul wanted it added to the record, that he attended the meeting concerning New Sweden, and he was not allowed to speak or participate in the meeting, just attend, which he did not think was right. He wanted the public to know this.

Paul also said that it was his understanding that it was a matter of regulation and law that in order to prepare the final EIS, more than one alternative must be studied. He requested that the DOT consider the “straight shot” alternative up the center of the county and not impact the residents of New Sweden. He stated that he felt the DOT was violating NEPA regulations by restricting their consideration of alternatives. He said the alternative they were considering with the upgrade of Rt. 161 points a loaded gun at all resources on Route 161.

Gerald Varney - FHWA – Gerald explained that the FHWA had met with Paul Cyr and have had previous discussions with him concerning his issues.

Dave Anderson - Stockholm

When you upgrade the yellow sections, - what are the exact physical impacts to what looks like an 80 foot wide modification?

Tony Grande – The yellow shown on the typical cross section represents two 12’ lanes. The road will have a clear zone to improve safety by having grass shoulders.

John Hedmond – I have property near Sweden.

How much wider will the two lane upgrade be from what we have now?

Tony Grande – There will be potentially 7 feet of widening on each side. The proposed Right of Way width will likely be approximately 100 feet.

Ray Faucher – The right of way width would vary. We'll also need object-free zones, in case vehicles go off the road. There needs to be flat shoulders wide enough for a clear path.

John Hedmond – What's the timetable for upgrading by the hospital?

Ray Faucher – Several decades. We'll begin in the Presque Isle area to do final design, but first we need to complete the FEIS document. Also we need funding. The focus is to upgrade Rt.161, then 161-Madawaska, but it's funding dependent. We need to get feedback from communities to minimize impact at that point in time.

Boyd Nelson- New Sweden

You're going to build a two-lane upgrade at the bottom of the hill and on a curve so you might as well have a drive right through my home.

Ray Faucher – We will look at the widenings in the communities, determine impacts to abutters, historic impacts or others. We will work with the communities to minimize impacts in the final design phases.

Paul Cyr –Madawaska

Daigle to Madawaska was never studied in the DEIS, I want to notify the public of that.

Mark Hasselman – That route is based upon the DEIS and information provided by PAC and public comments provided to us. It reduces the impacts so the alternative does not need to go back through the EIS process.

Paul Cyr –How do you know it is a reduction in impacts? We never discussed this. We had a general discussion when I met with you. We never had this discussion.

Linda Anne Cyr – Paul was your question answered?

Paul Cyr – No

Ray Faucher – We work closely with FHWA, the last thing we want to do is violate regulations in how we prepare the EIS. I do not believe the regulation has been violated.

Paul Cyr – I still do not have an answer.

Gerald Varney FHWA – Come and talk to us.

Jon Feinstein- In the DEIS we looked at a range of alternatives required in the draft to be studied in the north. We studied a variety of connections. After the draft was complete we received other comments from the PAC, the agencies and communities suggesting we coordinate with the border crossing station. All of this was made public and is how we came up with what you saw here tonight.

Linda Anne Cyr – Paul has worked for the federal government and he is smart. We should listen to what he is saying.

Jon Feinstein – All Federal agencies have different guidelines to comply with NEPA.

Arthur Faucher – Do you get everything that is sent to the commissioner? Have you received Madawaska's last correspondence?

Ray Faucher – Responses to letters are being developed to address the questions and concerns that they have, responses will be sent out shortly.

Paul Bouchard – The PAC came to an understanding on how to deliver an improved north south highway. Looking at the geography of the St. John Valley it is an awesome task to develop an improved highway that goes to all of the communities. How to do this and deliver services so that it does not create too many branches? We can't lose sight of our original mission. We have collaborated with the communities, their input was considered when the choice of corridor was put in front of us. I am confident that MaineDOT has been thorough to this point.