



## City of Auburn, Maine

Transportation Systems Director  
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TO: Members of the City of Auburn Planning Board  
FROM: Jonathan P. LaBonte, Transportation Systems Director  
DATE: September 10, 2024  
RE: Transportation Initiatives Briefing Memo

There has been much researched and written about the direct influence of transportation infrastructure and land-use and development patterns. Transportation is used here to cover all modes, including vehicular, bicycle or other rolling modes, pedestrian, transit, freight, and aviation. This document is intended to provide context and reference materials in advance of a workshop discussion on transportation initiatives in the city. Should further information be needed, or additional questions arise after review, please contact the Planning Department and I can support follow up.

For Planning Board members new to this topic, I would encourage reviewing a white paper by the Victoria Transport Policy Institute entitled *Land Use Impacts on Transport* published earlier this year. You can find it at this link; <https://www.vtpi.org/landtravel.pdf>. Another resource that I have found helpful to frame land use and transportation implications is the organization Strong Towns (<https://www.strongtowns.org/>), a policy and local planning lens that is embraced by the group Build Maine (<https://www.build-maine.com/>).

For New England, Auburn covers a fairly large land area, and its infrastructure covers the full spectrum of transportation types and corresponding land use impacts. The city has three railroads and a freight intermodal facility, a regional reliever general aviation airport, fixed route transit, commuter bus, controlled access highways, an interstate, local streets, and shared use paths.

With the dominant mode being vehicles, Auburn witnesses regular conflict between regional traffic movements (commuters, shoppers, through traffic) and local, neighborhood land uses. Despite being of similar land size to South Portland and Scarborough combined, Auburn has only six miles of fully controlled access highway and one associated interchange. Scarborough and South Portland share 11 miles of fully controlled access highway with 17 total interchanges. In addition, the Maine Turnpike is planning a new \$200 million four-mile highway with additional interchanges through those two towns and Westbrook. The lack of efficient regional mobility in Auburn impacts traffic shifts onto streets intended to serve local, neighborhood movements.

To advance transportation initiatives, city staff work with a host of organizations at the federal, state, regional, and local levels. These include agencies within USDOT (FAA, FHWA, etc), MaineDOT, Androscoggin Transportation Resource Center (AVCOG), multiple city departments (planning, public works, engineering) and city board and neighborhoods. The items that follow are high level summaries of initiatives underway that are either city-wide/regional or geographic specific.



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### City-wide/Regional

#### **Safe Streets and Roads for All**

The City of Auburn partnered with ATRC and the City of Lewiston for a new Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) grant to identify pathways to improve safety throughout our community. This program is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and will position the city to pursue implementation funding upon study completion and final adoption. The evaluation includes a detailed review of 10 years of crash data, identification of a “high injury network” where crashes are leading to serious injury or death, significant public engagement to gain on the ground input from residents (over 400 total survey responses this summer), and a policy/process review to see how city plan review, permitting, and capital improvement efforts impact safety on these corridors. The draft action plan should be available for review comment in the fall of 2024.

#### **Traffic Signal Management Plan**

The City of Auburn is working with ATRC and the City of Lewiston on a review of traffic signals in both communities. This evaluation includes benchmarking of the state of all equipment, establishing new protocols for on-going monitoring and maintenance, and setting criteria for future capital improvements at existing or new traffic signals. Alternative intersection control to signals, as in roundabouts or elimination of signals where not warranted, will be part of the final plan documents. Future planning efforts will review signal timing and coordination priorities.

### Location Specific

#### **Route 4/Turner Road (North of Causeway to Town Line)**

MaineDOT is completing an evaluation on their own for the future of this four lane section of highway, including the potential for a road diet (reduction to one lane in each direction with center turn lanes). The city has requested MaineDOT look holistically at the corridor to protect regional mobility and safety, with concerns about diversion of north south traffic to local streets and the implications of driver behavior when “passing” options re-emerge in-town Auburn (Center Street). The city has also requested MaineDOT identify an active transportation route/shared-use path location that would connect the future Southern Link Lake Auburn Trail north to the Androscoggin Riverlands State Park, as outlined in previous city initiatives. The city is awaiting a response from MaineDOT on drafting an MOU that outlines a partnership for the future of this corridor.

#### **Mall Area (Center Street, Mount Auburn Ave/Summer Street, Turner Street)**

The city has been developing a scope of work to re-evaluate transportation safety and multi-modal options within the mall area inclusive of the streets reference above and corresponding connecting streets. The original “Mall Area Master Plan” included more street-grid connections and safe active transportation options, but those were not implemented. With the addition of



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housing, and interest for additional housing in this area, further efforts to calm traffic and introduce safe movements for those not in vehicles are critical and would drive further taxable value growth.

### **Minot Avenue/Union Street/Court Street Village Partnership Initiative (VPI)**

The city has partnered with MaineDOT to share costs on an evaluation of Minot Avenue from Hatch Road through the Rotary and on to Union Street where it meets Center Street and Turner Street. Included in this effort is an evaluation of Court Street for the potential to improve efficient use of Minot Avenue for through trips. The VPI program of MaineDOT is tailored to provide communities a pathway to reimagine highway corridors to safely support multiple users and encourage reinvestment/development. The scope of work will include evaluating lane reduction/road diets on these corridors, how to safely provide for movement of pedestrians and cyclists (including students) and how to manage travel time along the corridor to encourage its use by through traffic to protect local neighborhoods.

### **Mechanics Row/Main Street/Great Falls Plaza**

The city has developed a preliminary scope of work to evaluate this multi-block section at the core of downtown Auburn. The focus of the evaluation will be to support additional urban in-fill development in locations such as Mechanics Row and Great Falls Plaza, while accommodating efficient movement of people (walking, biking, rolling). This is likely to involve laying out an improved street grid in Great Falls Plaza, addressing safety concerns on Court Street between Turner Street and the Longley Bridge, parking management (residential and visitor), and evaluating the benefits of two-way traffic on Main Street and Mechanics Row to further separate thru-traffic from traffic destined for downtown.

### **Little Androscoggin Gateway District (Washington Street)**

Aligned with the Comprehensive Plan, a multi-part evaluation for Washington Street from Exit 75 to the Rotary was initiated earlier this calendar year. The most significant component is a study funded by ATRC (FHWA funds) to evaluate the conversion of Washington Street South into a two-way controlled access highway and Washington Street North into a two-way local neighborhood street to support redevelopment along that corridor. Washington Street South is already controlled access in one direction and has sufficient right of way to accommodate two-way traffic (as was originally planned by MaineDOT in the 1950s). By removing the regional through traffic, Washington Street North could return to two-way local traffic with potential connections to New Auburn at Broad Street. This redevelopment area would straddle the Little Androscoggin River, creating opportunities for in-fill, neighborhood scale development that coincides with river restoration and recreation initiatives well underway (new trails, dam removal, fish passage, improved boat access, etc).

The transportation evaluation is being supplemented by a land use/zoning/landscape study that will look at potential building form, zoning, and environmental constraints in what the



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Comprehensive Plan coined as gateway formed based code district. There are city funds designated through the American Rescue Plan Act to support small area master plans for redevelopment and growth of the tax base, and those funds are supporting this enhanced scope of work for zoning and land use along the corridor and connecting to New Auburn.

### **Airport Master Plan Update**

The Auburn Lewiston Municipal Airport has not updated its FAA-Master Plan since 2006. This evaluation will look at existing and future facility needs to support the projected air traffic at the airport. In addition, areas will be identified for non-aeronautical development that could support the airport through land leases and additional employment areas. The interlocal agreement between Auburn and Lewiston to operate the airport charges it will managing the airport and facilitating industrial and commercial development on its 675 acres. The plan will also evaluate how existing zoning regulations in Auburn influence safety of flight and further discussions on zoning on and around the airport may emerge in the process.

### **Auburn Freight Intermodal Facility**

The city-owned facility on Lewiston Junction Road connects with the Lewiston and Auburn Railroad Company corridor to Washington Street. There are ongoing evaluations of facility needs to further grow rail-based industrial development and additional intermodal activity.