



TOWN OF FREEPORT, MAINE

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OB #1 PART 1

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Freeport Town Council
FROM: Peter Joseph, Town Manager
DATE: 10/15/20
RE: Update on MDOT Bridge Projects for Exits 20 and 22 overpasses

Background / update on design process

Several Town volunteers, committee members, elected officials, and staff have been actively participating in the Exit 17/20/22 bridge design committee with the Maine Department of Transportation over the past year. At the most recent committee meeting on Tuesday 10/06/20, the Department presented conceptual designs for both the Exit 20 / Desert Rd. interchange overpass replacement and the Exit 22 / Mallet Dr. interchange overpass replacement to the Town. The Department also presented cost sharing estimates for various options of potential bicycle/pedestrian facilities that could be added to these bridges, as well as timeframes during which decisions on these additional facilities would need to be made. These two questions are explored in more depth below. The presentation from MDOT including the cross sections and conceptual interchange design improvements is attached separately for your review.

Cost sharing estimates for various bike/pedestrian facility upgrades to overpasses

MDOT has identified cost sharing estimates for the following potential bicycle/pedestrian improvements, if said improvements were to be included in the final bridge design for construction. **As a disclaimer, all of the costs shown throughout the rest of this memo are preliminary estimates provided by MDOT, and they are subject to change during the design process.** Cost sharing percentages have not been agreed to by either the Town or MDOT, and are presented as likely cost shares for the sake of conversation only at this point:

- 1) Exit 20 / Desert Road interchange options
 1. Replacement of existing bridge with upgraded traffic patterns and traffic signalization, as well as a facility upgrade to include (1) 5 foot wide sidewalk – **no additional cost to the Town**
 2. Facility upgrade to include (1) 12 foot wide multi-use path – **estimated \$555,000 cost to the Town**

2) Exit 22 / Mallett Drive interchange options

1. Replacement of existing bridge, with upgraded traffic patterns and signalization – **no additional cost to the Town.**
2. Facility upgrade to include (1) 5 foot wide sidewalk – **estimated \$195,000 cost to the Town**
3. Facility upgrade to include (1) 12 foot wide multi-use path – **estimated \$655,000 cost to the Town**

Due to the fact that the planned service life of the bridges in question is 75+ years, it is important to make decisions looking forward to what may be needed in the future as Freeport continues to grow from a residential perspective. Staff recommends that at a minimum, the Town should include sidewalks on both of the bridges in question, which would add cost only at the Mallett Drive project. Given the expected service life of the bridges, there is a good argument to be made for including multi-use paths at one or both locations, and a large amount of public support for these options. However the relatively high added cost (aprox. \$1.2M for both locations) warrants further deliberation from the Town Council on this decision.

Timeline constraints for decision making regarding additional bike / pedestrian facilities

While the cost sharing decisions presented above are relatively straightforward, unfortunately the timing of these decisions is anything but. Due to constraints on the project timeline (the project must be awarded by September of 2021 in order to qualify for the committed federal grant funding), MDOT on 10/06/20 requested that the Town provide feedback on its preferred option as well as a funding commitment as soon as possible, so that the design work for the preferred alternative can move forward and meet the September '21 deadline for bidding.

This requested decision making timeline is unfortunate because it would rule out the consideration of this project proposal through the Town's customary capital budgeting process which takes place in March through June of each year, and which would allow the highest amount of resident input and Council deliberation on what could be a greater than \$1.2M local funding question.

There are two alternative methods that the Council can consider to fund the project which may better fit into MDOT's required design timeline:

- 1) The Council could make a supplemental appropriation pursuant so Freeport Charter Article 6.08(a). The decision making process for supplemental appropriations typically happens very quickly and only involves 1 public hearing, severely limiting the opportunity for both Council deliberation and public input. This method would also require the expenditures to come either out of fund balance or reserve funds, which is less than ideal. This option not recommended by staff at this point, but it may need to be evaluated if MDOT's timeline constraints cannot be met in any other way.

- 2) The Town Council could propose the issuance of bonds in the desired amount through a special election. Finance Director Jessica Maloy is researching the timeline for the issuance of bonds through a referendum (required by Freeport Charter Article) and will present this information in a separate memo to the Council.

While not as ideal as appropriating funds through the Town's prescribed capital budgeting process, a special election/referendum should allow satisfactory opportunity for all voices in Freeport to be heard on the question. There remains the question of whether the timeline for a special election will fall within MDOT's required decision making timeline for design purposes, which will require further discussions with the Department to ascertain.

Conceptually, both of these bridge projects make good candidates for bond financing, as they are large capital assets with an expected service life that would greatly outlast the payback period of any bond issue. The Town's overall debt level remains extremely low, further supporting the case for bond financing these two projects.