

## Seacoast Online: Connections study moves forward with strategies

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KENNEBUNK — The Central York County Connections Study has been completed and members of the groups conducting the study proposed 12 different strategies to help connect towns in the center of York County with Route One and I-95 during a public meeting March 29 at Kennebunk Town Hall.

The study began in September of 2010 to determine whether improved access to the greater Sanford area would have a meaningful economic impact on the surrounding communities.

The study group is made up of three different committees, the study team, steering group, and advisory group. The study team includes members from the Maine Department of Transportation and Maine Turnpike Authority, while the steering group has representatives of the 10 communities within the study area, and the advisory group includes members from environmental, historic, and bicycle groups.

"We wanted to get as many opposing points of view as possible," said Carol Morris, a member of the study team.

The 12 different strategies proposed during the March 29 meeting can be divided into three different corridors, members said. The study looked at improving existing roads or creating new ones through Biddeford, Kennebunk, or North Berwick. Nine of the 12 are considered "regional strategies" that stretch across town lines while the remaining three are "local strategies."

The Biddeford corridor has four different regional strategies and two local strategies. Of the regional strategies two of them (B1 and B3) involve improvements to Route 111. The other two (B5 and B6) involve constructing a four-lane controlled access highways.

The Kennebunk corridor has two regional strategies and one local. Of the regional strategies one (K1) is improvements to Route 109 while the other (K-3) is a new three-exit controlled access highway from the Kennebunk turnpike exit to Sanford.

The North Berwick corridor rounds out the final three strategies; two (NB-1 and NB-2) of which involve improvements to Route 4, and the third (NB-3) being a new four-exit controlled access highway from Ogunquit to Sanford.

These 12 strategies were then evaluated in nine different areas including cost, economic benefit, traffic safety, rural and urban character, and environmental impact, to see which strategy would be the best option to move forward with.

"A couple of general patterns that stand out, any of the new corridors have pretty considerable costs associated with them. So they did not score well in that regard. Upgrades to the existing corridors

tended to score a little bit better but in this early phase, we are looking at old upgrades, so those also involve considerable costs," said Steve Rolle, a member of the study group.

Ultimately the advisory and steering groups recommended the B-1, B-3, and K-3 as strategies for consideration moving forward. The study team expressed cautious optimism about B-1 and B-3 but thought the cost of K-3, \$199 million, was far too high.

"Federal funding is not what it used to be. Earmarks are gone; we don't seem them ever coming back. A lot of these (strategies) don't do much to the regional economy. We would be hard pressed to come up with \$80 million, but we feel B-1 and B-3 could be attractive and could be fundable," said Gerry Audibert, of the Study Team and a MDOT official.

Strategy B-1 had a cost of \$83 million and a benefit to cost ratio of 1.4. Strategy B-3 had a cost of \$135 million and a benefit to cost ratio of 1.3. These two were the only strategies with a benefit to cost ratio above one and will be the only regional strategies considered moving forward. The local strategies will receive further investigation in Phase III of the study.

The final public hearing for this study will be held in July when resolutions of recommendations for regional strategies and local strategies will be discussed.