

**State and High Streets Two-way Conversion Study  
Public Advisory Committee and Community Advisors Meeting Report  
6 pm, Room 24, Portland City Hall  
January 7, 2015**

*In attendance:*

**PAC Members:** David Marshall, Kevin Donoghue, Carl Eppich, Ian Jacob, Anne Pringle, Ron Spinella, Rosanne Graef, Michael Connolly, Kristen Levesque, William Barry, Lauren Wayne, Emma Holder

**CA Members:** Chris O’Neil, Dan Goodman, Damon Yakovleff, Zack Barowitz, Chris Cantwell, Ben Shambaugh, Bill Bray

**City Staff:** Mike Bobinsky, Alex Jaegerman, Christine Grimando, Bruce Hyman

**Consulting Staff:** Tom Errico, T.Y. Lin; Carol Morris and Scott Hastings, Morris Communications

*Meeting started at 6 pm*

City Councilor Kevin Donoghue opened the meeting and asked attendees introduce themselves.

Carol Morris of Morris Communications took the floor and reviewed the agenda for the meeting. She then led the committees in a review of the previously agreed-upon Purpose and Needs Statement to help inform their evaluation of the data presented, or “what we are trying to achieve with this study.”

Tom Errico of T.Y. Lin took the floor to present the results of the traffic modeling. The modeling, taking into account population and development growth, estimated an approximately 8% increase in traffic between now and 2035. They modeled two scenarios; one representing a continuation of the existing one-way traffic and one where State and High would be converted to two-way streets. The results showed the two-way scenario handling a very similar overall amount of traffic, with some localized gains and losses on State and High Streets where traffic redistributed itself during the morning and evening peak traffic periods. One notable area, the stretch of State Street between York and Danforth Streets, did show a net gain in traffic due to increased access to the West End. The same stretch of High Street saw a net decrease corresponding with this increase.

A question was asked if they could look at restricting the left turn from northbound State Street traffic onto Danforth Street.

Tom replied that they could but that there was not a significant reason to do so. Traffic volumes on Danforth Street changed very little in the two-way scenario. He explained that the change was in how the traffic got to Danforth Street.

There was a question as to whether incoming bridge traffic would take a hard left down onto York Street to get to Commercial Street rather than taking the current right.

Tom said that the model showed traffic heavily favoring a right onto York Street, and then a right onto Park Avenue as a route to Commercial Street. He also noted that this scenario assumed the installation of a signal at High Street and Commercial Street.

A question was asked about what the model showed for the Fore River Parkway.

Tom responded that it did not show much diversion to the Fore River Parkway. The road capacity to handle increased traffic exists but traffic congestion in the State and High vicinity would not be increased to the point where the model showed that people would divert to use that roadway unprompted.

Tom then presented an example of the intersection by intersection analysis of the turning movement volumes. These numbers were used to inform the Level of Service (LOS) evaluations of each intersection. He then went on to present the LOS evaluations. The State/Marginal/Forest intersection was highlighted as a place that would decline in LOS in a two-way scenario. This decline would not be to an unacceptable level but it would be noticeable.

It was asked if the model looked at the issue of the northbound off-ramp at Exit 6 backing up onto the highway.

Tom responded that this was not looked at in any detail as it was largely outside the study area for detailed modeling.

It was asked if the State/Marginal/Forest intersection would require an additional traffic signal phase under a two-way scenario.

Tom replied that yes, one additional phase would be required.

It was asked if the analysis included the potential for Somerset Street to be reconnected to Forest Avenue.

Tom replied that it was not modeled but was considered and will be addressed in a less comprehensive way in the final report.

Tom then pointed out that the left turn from northbound State Street to westbound Congress Street was not allowed in their scenario. The geometry of the intersection, as well as the traffic volumes, did not allow for the left turn lane that would be required. He added that Congress Street does not have particularly high traffic volumes, so all State and High/Congress intersections functioned quite well in the model.

Tom then looked at the intersection of State Street and York Street, where the Casco Bay Bridge ends. He explained that for this intersection to work in a two-way scenario, a left-turn lane would have to be added to the existing two through/right lanes on the Bridge approach. There is room for this turn lane if the central barrier is removed at this end of the bridge. He noted that this would be an expensive prospect but not prohibitively so. Tom went on to explain that in the two-way scenario, southbound traffic on State Street approaching the Casco Bay Bridge would not be allowed to make a left turn onto York Street. This has some issues with traffic getting potentially locked into going over the bridge when that was not the intention, but he noted that signage and using the right turn onto York Street will mitigate this.

It was asked if the two-way scenario would reduce traffic volumes on the stretch of York Street between the bridge and High Street enough to re-configure the lanes there.

Tom responded that the models did not show a large decrease in traffic volumes there and that he felt the lanes would need to stay mostly as they are.

There was some discussion about the possibility of routing Fore River Parkway/Commercial Street traffic west onto York Street/Beach Street. The hard left turning motion off the bridge to this route is not allowed under the model, which routed Commercial Street-bound traffic east via York Street/Park Street.

It was noted that there was an improvement to LOS at the intersection of High Street and Forest Avenue due to State Street taking on some of the traffic volume.

A committee member felt that the "C" LOS rating for the State Street/Marginal Way/Forest Avenue intersection in the one-way scenario was too high. He felt that the LOS was already bad and would only get worse.

Tom summed up that while some areas would have a lower LOS under a two-way scenario, no area was predicted to see an unacceptable or alarming loss in capacity.

He then moved on to the issue of parking. The study team undertook a detailed look at existing parking and the possible gains and losses of parking spots in a two-way scenario. State Street would see a total loss of 19 spaces between Park Avenue and York Street. High Street would see a loss of 10 spaces between York Street and Congress Street and a loss of four spaces between Congress and Park Avenue. These losses were primarily due to the need for added turn lanes but some were lost due to the need to enlarge intersections to allow space for trucks to turn. A potential for gaining a significant amount of parking spaces was seen in the stretch of State Street between Forest Avenue and Park Avenue. However, this would come at the expense of bike lanes on this stretch of road.

A question was asked about what the study was assuming for lane widths.

Tom replied that in most places lanes were assumed to be 11 feet wide, with some areas having lanes 10 feet in width.

A committee member commented that bike lanes are not needed on the downhill stretches but that climbing lanes are very useful.

Tom replied that in a scenario that retains parking on both sides of the streets, there is no room for bike lanes, even climbing lanes on one side. He did note that the team was looking into the potential for the uphill travel lanes to be slightly wider to ease bicycle/vehicle conflicts. The team had discussed their proposal with the Bicycle Coalition of Maine and they agreed that this proposal was more bike-friendly than existing conditions - even without bike lanes.

It was asked if Tom felt that the two-way scenario was feasible in a configuration that did not take any existing parking spaces.

Tom replied that it could still work but that there would be a significant reduction in LOS at many intersections that would lead to an overall increase in congestion for the corridor. He agreed to have the study team put together a review of a two-way scenario in which less parking supply was lost so that the committee would have a comparison.

Tom then presented an overview of the intersections that would require geometry adjustments in order to accommodate two-way traffic. The study team evaluated intersections based on handling vehicles up to and including the length of a city bus. Thirteen corners would need to be adjusted, affecting eight of the 22 total intersections. A further 13 turning movements would likely result in vehicles larger than a bus having to use part of the adjacent lane when making the turn. Many of these intersections are unlikely to see notable truck traffic, but some, such as northbound State Street to eastbound Park Avenue right turn, may have a larger impact. Tom notes that safe turning movements was one of MaineDOT's major concerns.

A committee member expressed concern that the depicted eight-foot parking lanes were insufficient to handle winter snow and would force parked vehicles in the travel lanes, which would be less efficient than in a two-way scenario.

Tom replied that parts of the city only have seven-foot parking lanes. He acknowledged that snow removal would be important but felt the city was very able to handle it.

There was discussion about the ability of trucks to deliver equipment to the State Theater. Tom felt that it would not be any more difficult in the two-way scenario than it is currently.

Tom then gave a brief overview of the study team's collection of data on other cities' experiences with converting to two-way streets. Focusing on northern cities that also had to deal with snow removal, the team identified 30 communities that had undertaken similar conversions. They were able to contact and have conversations with seven of these communities. The results of these conversations were summarized in a document provided to

the PAC before the meeting. In the interest of time, Tom asked that the committee review that document and did not present the data. He did note that the examples from Lowell, Massachusetts were the most recent and that that city converted a large number of one-way streets and ultimately returned one of them to its two way configuration. All of the others cities were relatively pleased with the results of the conversion.

A committee member mentioned that he had seen firsthand the before and after of Charleston, South Carolina's conversion and corroborated the dramatic benefits that the area saw.

At this point, Carol introduced the discussion of pros and cons. She reviewed that the document summarizing the pros and cons of two-way conversion as seen by the study team . This document was based on the metric discussions from earlier in the process and broke down its analysis based on six categories:

- Safety
- Ease of travel (all modes)
- Quality of Life
- Economic Development
- Logistics (Snow removal, emergency services, etc.)
- Cost

A committee member asked about neighborhood with traffic cut-through issues – why was this not addressed?

Carol responded that this was addressed under the "traffic diversion" heading. Tom added that the model showed very little diversion to the smaller streets adjacent to the corridor. The primary difference in traffic volumes was a shifting between State and High Streets to balance the traffic volumes.

A committee member felt that reduced traffic speeds should be seen as a positive rather than the neutral identified in the document. Carol agreed, as did the rest of the committees.

Another committee member questioned that left turns would be safer for cyclists in a two-way scenario.

Tom replied that in a one-way scenario, a biker holding to the right side would have to cross two lanes at once to make a left-hand turn. In a two-way scenario the left turn pockets would allow them a place to sit while looking to cross the second lane of traffic.

A committee member felt that the statement that overall safety would increase due to lower traffic speeds was incorrect. They felt the introduction of conflicts due to new turning movements would negate this or lead to additional safety issues.

Tom replied that that point was derived from an examination of the reduction crash rates in other cities that undertook conversion of streets from one-way to two-way, which does reduce traffic speeds.

A committee member felt that the loss of parking should be stressed as a greater negative in the document. They felt the potential gain in parking near Deering Oaks was not useful, that the demand for parking was higher in the other parts of the corridor. Another committee member said that she was reluctant to allow further parking along the park portions of State Street.

A committee member asked if the team could look into the possibility of cross streets, such as Grant Street and Sherman Street, to absorb some of the lost parking.

Tom agreed to look into it.

There was a brief discussion of public transit service. It was noted that two-way traffic allowed for many more options for increased and improved transit service along the corridor. However this could come at the cost of further loss of parking.

A discussion took place about the choke point on High Street created by the Westin Hotel valet parking and State Theater deliveries. There was concern that loss of the second lane would reduce traffic's ability to get by these blockages.

Tom noted that even under the current scenario, the city was very concerned with reducing the impact of the Westin on traffic flow. Tom felt that under either scenario, this would have to be addressed and that it was solvable in either configuration.

A committee member questioned whether large truck deliveries should be listed in the positive column.

Tom explained that it was listed there because two-way streets give trucks more options on how to navigate to their destinations and more choice on how to approach deliveries. There was some discussion of this and it was felt by committee members that a closer look at how service vehicles would deal with unloading in a two-way scenario was warranted.

The study team was asked for a clear breakdown on how many parking spots would be affected in scenarios covering the inclusion of turn lanes, bike lanes, both together or separately.

A committee member felt that increased cost of snow removal should be added to the column under costs.

Mike Bobinsky, Director of the Portland Department of Public Services, responded that while the two-way roads would require somewhat more attention in snow removal, that this would fall well within the city's capabilities with minimal affect on overall operations.

It was requested that the study team re-send the PAC their documentation covering data collection results.

It was asked if there was another options to the one-way or two-way scenarios, for example, converting just one of the streets.

Tom replied part of why the two-way scenario works is the equitable balance of traffic between the streets. If only one street was converted, that street would not be able to hold the additional traffic volume that it would experience.

A committee member wondered if the cost could be offset by the value of the economic development benefits.

Tom replied that it was very hard to predict economic benefits in a concrete way.

A committee member felt that the study was focusing too much on trying to find and include everything that would be nice to have. They felt there should be a clearer identification of the things that the corridor needs to function better and the things that are not required but would be nice.

A committee member felt that pedestrian usability was under-represented in the metrics compared to vehicular usability.

Another committee member felt that there was not enough mention of the Fore River Parkway and the potential to use signage to encourage traffic to divert to it for crosstown trips.

The point was raised that many feel the speeds shown in the data underestimate off-peak travel speeds.

Tom responded that they had heard that from a number of sources and were trying to set up a day to do another collection of traffic speeds at all times.

A committee member asked if a metric could be included reflecting the possibility for time saved by improved transit service.

At this point the Committee Chair, Kevin Donoghue, asked each committee member present to explain where they currently stood on the issue of conversion and why, or “Which way are you leaning?”

The first committee member, representing the Chamber, said that he was skeptical from the start, not because he thought it was a bad idea but because he was not convinced it was necessary. At this point with the additional data that had been collected and presented, he was definitively against conversation.

The next committee member, representing St. Luke's, said that he was leaning toward two-way conversion but that he was very concerned about the loss of parking and the potential for lane encroachment on some turning movements. He felt that these issues could lead to unforeseen traffic congestion issues.

Another member, representing the State Theater, said she had been against the two-way conversion to start. She is now much more open to the idea, but is still concerned about the ability of trucks to do load-ins for the theater. She was also worried about how the new configuration would handle snow removal.

The committee member representing the Portland Museum of Art was in favor of two-way conversion because it gave the museum increased accessibility and visibility. However she was also very concerned about the loss of parking.

A committee member said that while they themselves did not drive, they were also concerned about parking. They noted that they had not originally been in favor of two-way conversion but were now much more open to the idea.

Another committee member said that they were in favor of two-way conversion because it would improve pedestrian connectivity to the West End and would allow for improved transit service.

A committee member said that they come into this process in the middle and were now in favor of a two-way conversion. They were still concerned about parking and the Westin/State Theater chokepoint on High Street.

The next committee member said that they were leaning toward two-way conversion. They were concerned about the roads' ability to handle cyclists and strongly wanted some accommodation for climbing cyclists. They also felt that some of the loss of parking could be absorbed by the side streets.

A committee member said that they were in favor of two-way conversion. They liked its improvement in accessibility and routing options. They also felt that the traffic volume numbers were a good sign of it being successful.

The next committee member had originally been very concerned about the impacts two-way conversion would have on traffic coming off the Casco Bay Bridge. The potential addition of a third lane there did a lot to alleviate their concerns. That said they were still concerned about Exit 6 and the Marginal Way intersection. Ultimately their biggest concern was safety and if the metrics showed an improvement in safety they felt pursuit of a two-way conversion was warranted.

The representative of the West End Neighborhood Association said that prior to the first meeting they had polled the association and found that it overwhelmingly felt the current situation needed improvement. With this in mind, they were strongly in favor of the conversion to two-way. Personally, as a resident who lives at the intersection of State Street and Danforth Street, he was also strongly in favor of conversion in order to improve pedestrian connectivity. He felt that as an urban location, the minor losses in parking were not a big issue. Parking in urban environments is sometimes inconvenient and that is the nature of such places.

The Friends of Deering Oaks Park representative said that they were in favor of conversion but were concerned about the proposal to increase parking near the park. There were issues with traffic vibrations possibly destabilizing the pond wall and they would like to see traffic moved farther from the pond. They felt that the improvement to pedestrian accessibility and the reduction in traffic noise and speed as a result of conversion were significant benefits.

It was pointed out here that there would be an inherent decrease in traffic noise in areas that went from two uphill travel lanes to one as uphill travel requires more engine work than downhill travel.

The representative of the Parkside Neighborhood Organization said that the organization was in favor of conversion because of the traffic calming and pedestrian environment improvements. Personally, she did not own a car and was not concerned with the loss of parking. She noted that walking was healthier.

The representative from Mercy Hospital said that he liked that conversion would make their hospital more accessible but were concerned about the loss of parking and the potential for increased travel time. He was interested to hear what MaineDOT had to say about the proposal. It was noted that Mercy would be moving operations from their State Street building to their Fore River Parkway facility but he said that plans for the State Street building were as of yet uncertain; they might be retaining ownership of the building.

The next committee member said that they were not convinced that two-way was the right choice. They felt the full picture was not being examined and that there may be potential downsides that had not been identified. They were concerned that the study was too focused on two-way conversion and that they may be missing better options.

The representative of the Portland Society of Architects said that she is leaning strongly toward the two-way conversion. They were primarily interested in the quality of life metrics and liked that this was a restoration to a historic street pattern. She noted that on a personal note, their daughter had recently been hit by a car at State Street and Spring Street, and so safety was her number one concern.

The representative of AAA agreed that safety for all modes was their primary concern and they felt the data was pointing toward a two-way scenario being safer. They did have some concern

that there would be more head-on collisions in the two-way configuration and wanted to review the crash data collected earlier in the study.

The representative of the Portland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee said that they supported restoration to a two-way configuration. They felt that the pedestrian experience was an important part of what makes Portland a good place to live and that a conversion to two-way would bolster that experience. There was some concern about the accommodations for climbing cyclists but he felt that issue could easily be addressed while moving forward.

Carol took the floor again and explained next steps. A public meeting will be held in late February or March and the final PAC meeting will be the following month to evaluate public input and make the final recommendation.

*Meeting ended at 7:55 pm.*