

# Libbytown Traffic and Circulation Study

## Public Advisory Committee Meeting

June, 10<sup>th</sup> 2013, 4-5:30 pm  
Clarion Hotel

### **In attendance:**

**Committee Members:** Zachary Barowitz, Christian MilNeil, Bike/Ped Committee; Channing Capuchino, St. John Valley Neighborhood representative; Jackie Thompson, neighborhood; Harlan Baker, neighborhood; Skip Woods, Hood; Christopher Pare, Maine Medical Center, Maria MacDougal, neighborhood.

**Staff:** Carl Eppich, PACTS; Jeremiah Bartlett, Kathi Earley, Bill Needelman, Alex Jeagerman, Caitlin Cameron, and Bruce Hyman, City of Portland; Lucy Gibson, DuBois & King; John Mahoney, Ransom Consultants; Tom Farmer, T.J. DeWan & Associates; Carol Morris and Scott Hastings, Morris Communications.

*Meeting started 4:10 pm*

Carol Morris opened the meeting and introductions were made all around.

Lucy Gibson reviewed the agenda for the meeting and presented the study team's recommendation. The recommendations were based on input from the PAC and from the first public meeting, as well as input from meetings the team had with MaineDOT and Portland police, fire, and emergency responder representatives, along with other study data.

The recommendations were to remove ramps A, B, C, and D but to keep ramp F. Park Ave and Congress Street were recommended to become two-way streets with bike lanes. Congress Street would have on-street parking but Park Ave would not. (See Figure 1 on the next page)

The rationale behind the removal of the ramps was primarily that all four have high crash locations either where they meet the highway or where they meet surface streets. In some cases high crash locations exist on both ends. Traffic from all of them can be accommodated existing routes. Ramp F was kept because removing it would divert significant traffic to the Forest Ave interchange, which is already heavily used and has its own high crash locations. Further there was strong public support for keeping it.

Park was recommended to become two way because this would provide a route into the city that did not have an at-grade rail crossing. Also two-way streets are better for transit and allow for bike lanes in both directions. Finally the idea also had good public support.

Congress St. was recommended to become two way because the closing of the ramps diverts traffic to St. John St. and a one-way Congress would create added congestion. A two-way road

would also improve the situation for transit and bikes. Public opinion on this option was mixed with a similar numbers of people in favor of a one way and two way Congress St., but the data favors a two-way option.

**Figure 1: Study Team Recommendations**



Above is a map of all the study team's recommendations.

A committee member noted that she is the representative of the St. John Valley neighborhood organization, which includes the properties that front on the section of Congress St. that is currently one way. She noted that this organization has shown strong opposition to making this stretch of Congress two way.

Another committee member asked why the neighborhood organization was opposed to this.

The response was that the neighborhood wants less traffic on this section of Congress St. Their opinion was that if it becomes a two-way road, they would lose what they gain by closing the ramps and still have a high traffic, neighborhood-dividing road. Right now they feel that in the evening when traffic is primarily headed out of town, they get a break in traffic.

Lucy responded that they had tried very hard to make a one-way Congress option work, without success. She noted that with proper design elements, a two-way Congress St. could still be a neighborhood street and that she hoped people would keep an open mind. She said that traffic would be slower and it would be easier to cross, noting that she would be showing more detail on that later in the meeting.

Jeremiah Bartlett added that a two-way Congress St. fits in better with the city's larger stated goal of increased permeability. The city is working on converting a number of one-way streets throughout the city to two-way streets. The city council has been very much in favor of this. This city is also committed to bike and pedestrian friendliness and if traffic issues are a problem with a two-way Congress, they will work hard to find mitigation techniques.

A participant also mentioned that they were concerned about traffic backing up from the rail crossing into town.

There was some discussion about this and Lucy said they she would look into this in more detail with the traffic model.

Lucy presented a map of predicted traffic volume changes (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Predicted Traffic Volume Changes**



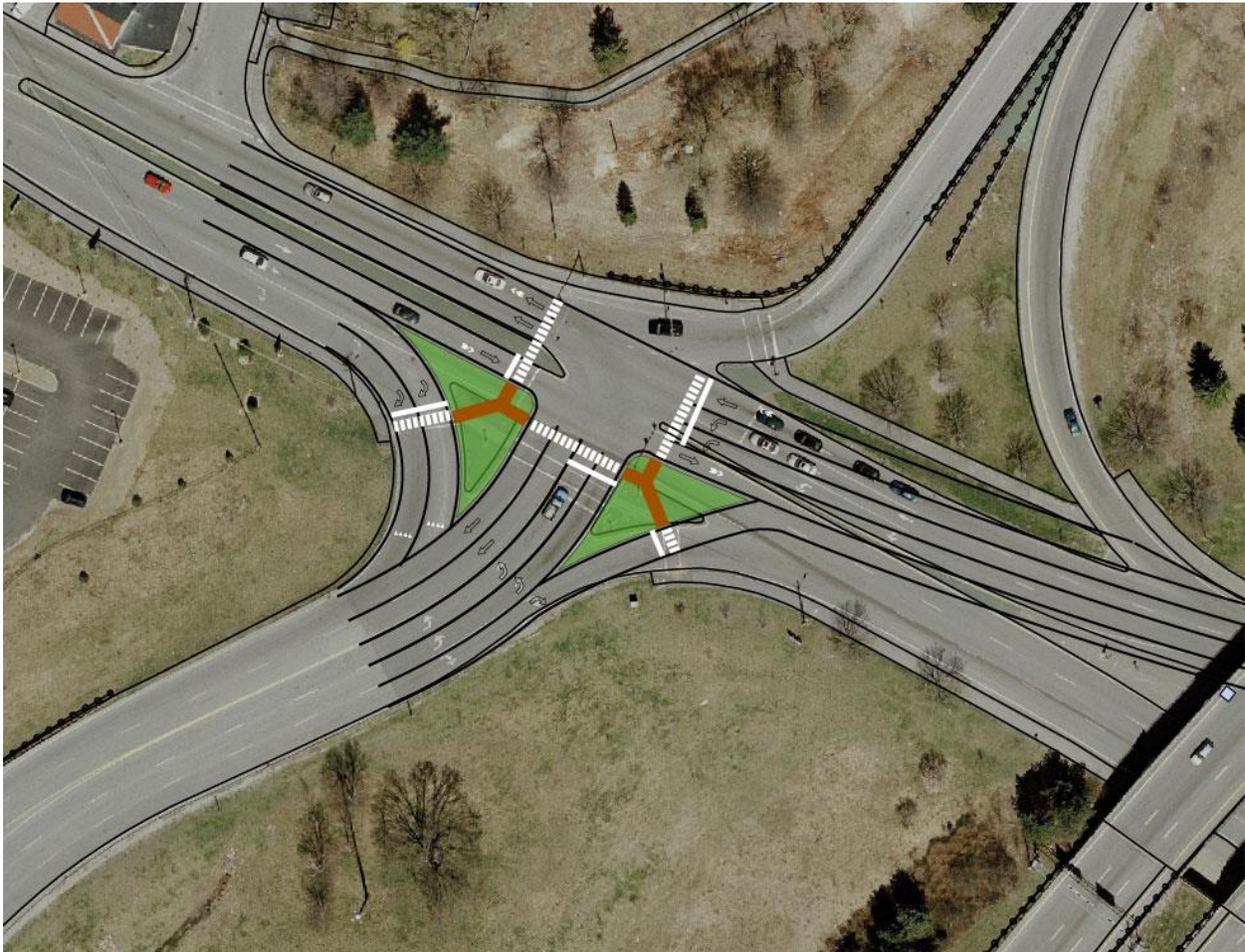
Lucy pointed out a decrease in traffic on I-295 that was due to short, in-town trips using surface streets instead of the highway, which is generally a desirable thing. This assumption is supported by an increase in traffic on Park Ave from St. John St. to Preble St. There is actually a reduction in overall traffic on Park and Congress from that intersection to St. John St., with an overall reduction of 20%. The model shows 40% of traffic using Congress St. and 60% using Park Ave.

A committee member felt that this was misleading and that overall a two-way Congress would have more traffic because of the traffic running all day rather than primarily in the morning. They also felt that traffic from downtown going to Outer Congress would use Congress St. rather than Park Ave.

This prompted some discussion over whether traffic would use Park Ave. or not.

Lucy then began presenting the close ups of each major intersection, showing recommendations for how they could be configured.

**Figure 3: Intersection of Congress St. and the Fore River Parkway**



There was some discussion about the ramps and orienting people to which ones are pictured here.

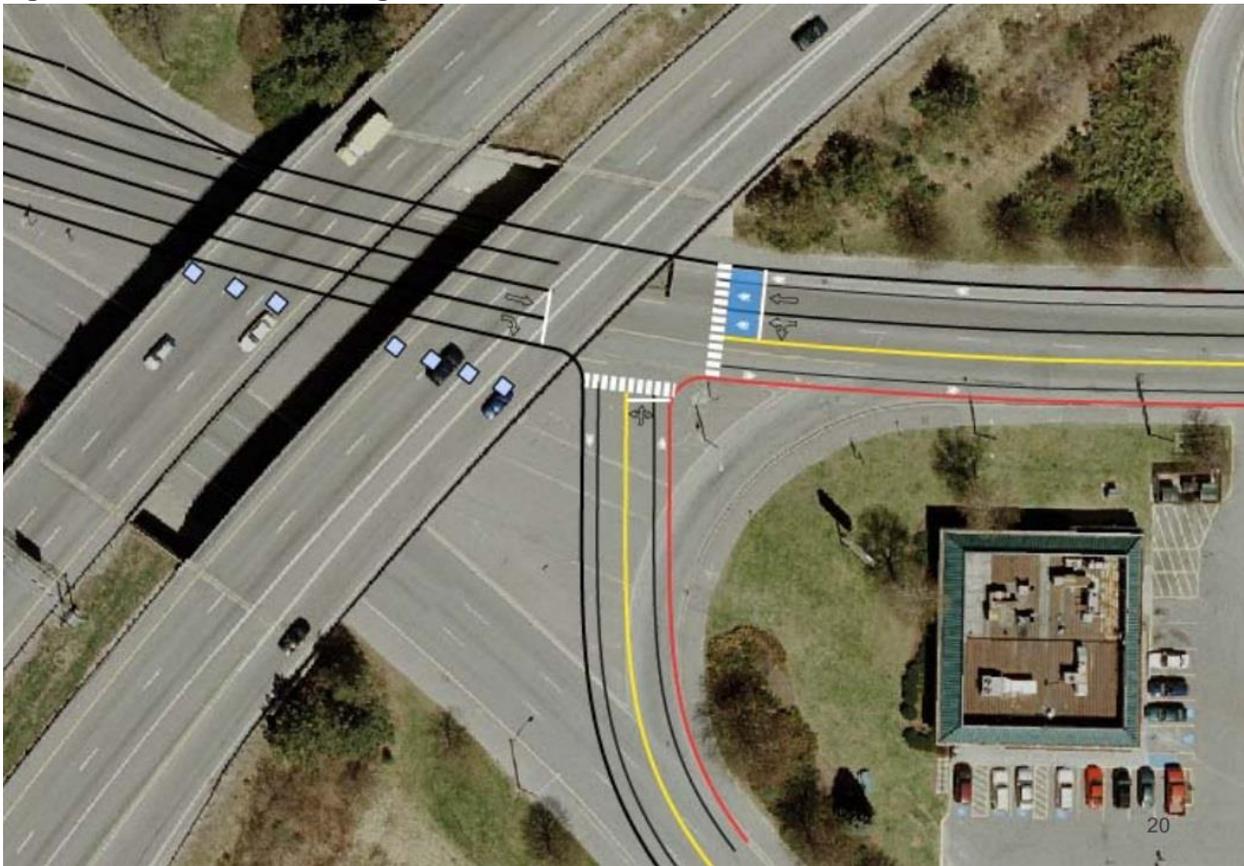
The representative from Hood voiced the opinion that closing these two ramps was a good thing.

Carl Eppich asked if the right turn off Congress St onto the Fore River Parkway would be signalized.

Lucy said that it would have to be to allow the two left turn lanes from Congress to operate smoothly.

There was a discussion about sidewalks on the Fore River Parkway. The city is already planning on building on the Eastern side. People felt that having one on the western side would be desirable and make sense to connect to the trails on that side of the road. Lucy noted it would be expensive due to a major retaining wall along part of that section. It was noted that Sewall St. provides pedestrian access to the transportation center.

**Figure 4: Intersection of Congress St. and Park Ave**



Lucy pointed out that this configuration is very tight to the north of the piers, but that the road as shown should fit. Design refinement will be needed.

There was some discussion about the layout of the road and Lucy clarified that the large triangular space south of the new lanes would all be opened up for new uses.

**Figure 5: Intersection of Park Ave and Marston St.**



Lucy pointed out that Marston St. is one way in this recommendation and would allow both left and right turns out onto Park Ave. No traffic signal is shown, but if traffic volumes warrant it the city could pursue one. The curb to the left of Marston St. would be mountable to make sure that Hood trucks can make it from Marston St. into Hood's lot.

The Hood representative mentioned that people already take left turns onto Marston going the wrong way, even with the current alignment of the road. If the road were T'd up, he believes that problem – a serious one - would increase.

There was some discussion about how a separate bike connection study had identified Marston St. (if made two way) as a bike connection through the area. It was determined that this study should address either making Marston two way or identifying a different bike route.

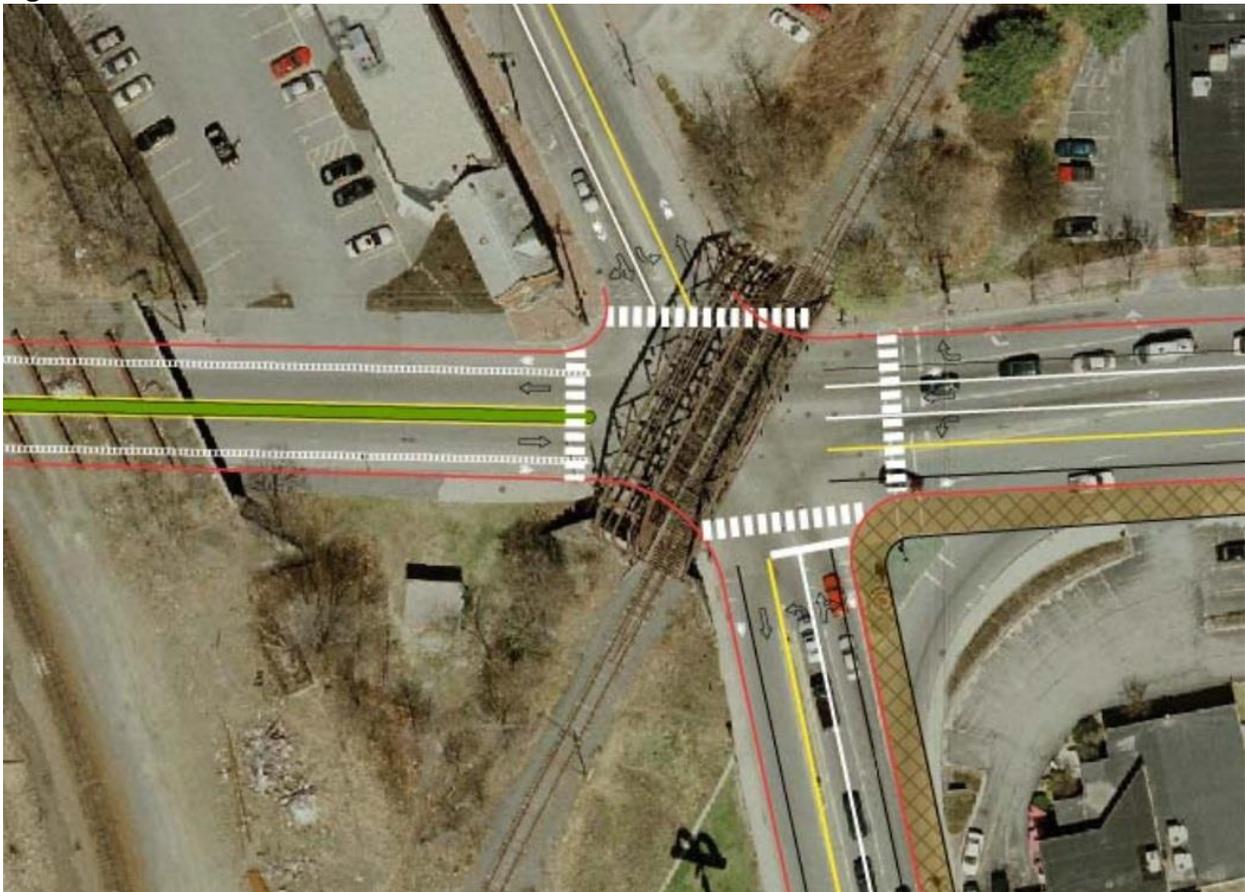
It was pointed out that with the creation of on-street parking on Congress St., the need for parking on Marston St. would be lessened and so perhaps it could be made two way. Lucy agreed to look into this and will be tabulating the parking gained on Congress St and lost on Marston St.

One committee member felt that it would not be worth the money to change Marston St. to two way.

The Hood representative countered that making Park Ave. two way and leaving Marston St. one way a dangerous situation is created re-emphasized that it should be made two way to anticipate this.

Lucy agreed and said they would look into it and based on the result, add it to the recommendations. She also noted that a two-way Marston St would make it more likely that a traffic signal at Park Ave. and Marston St. would be necessary.

**Figure 6: Intersection of Park Ave. and St. John St.**



Lucy noted that a project is already underway to remove the protected right turn lane at this intersection as it is a high crash location.

Caitlin Cameron asked if there was space in the intersection as shown for the Bus number 5 bus to stop there like it currently does going outbound.

Lucy responded that they had not yet specifically modeled it, but there is a lot of available pavement there so it shouldn't be a problem. She also mentioned that they would be talking with METRO about how the two-way streets would affect bus routing.

**Figure 7: Intersection of Congress St. and Marston St.**



A committee member pointed out that people crossing the street would have to worry about traffic coming from both directions.

Lucy replied that while that was true, they were also significantly reducing the distance the pedestrian would have to cross so that makes it safer.

A committee member noted that this section of Congress St. curves significantly and people accelerate from the ramps. Having a traffic signal here, even a pedestrian signal, would help remind them that things are happening here.

Another committee member noted that cars do not stop for the existing pedestrian flasher.

Alex Jaegerman pointed out that the plan as presented was to remove the ramps and that that alone should help to slow traffic.

Bill Needleman agreed and felt that the removing the direct highway access from the road would do a lot toward making it feel more like a local street.

There was some discussion at this point of exactly what part of the road has the worst speed problem and the reasons that people speed in the area.

Alex pointed out that Congress would be T'd up at its intersection with Park Ave. This would make people have to think about staying on Congress St. and make them slow down to do so.

A committee member noted that they would like to see a signal that stopped traffic on Congress St. at Marston St., even if it was just a pedestrian one.

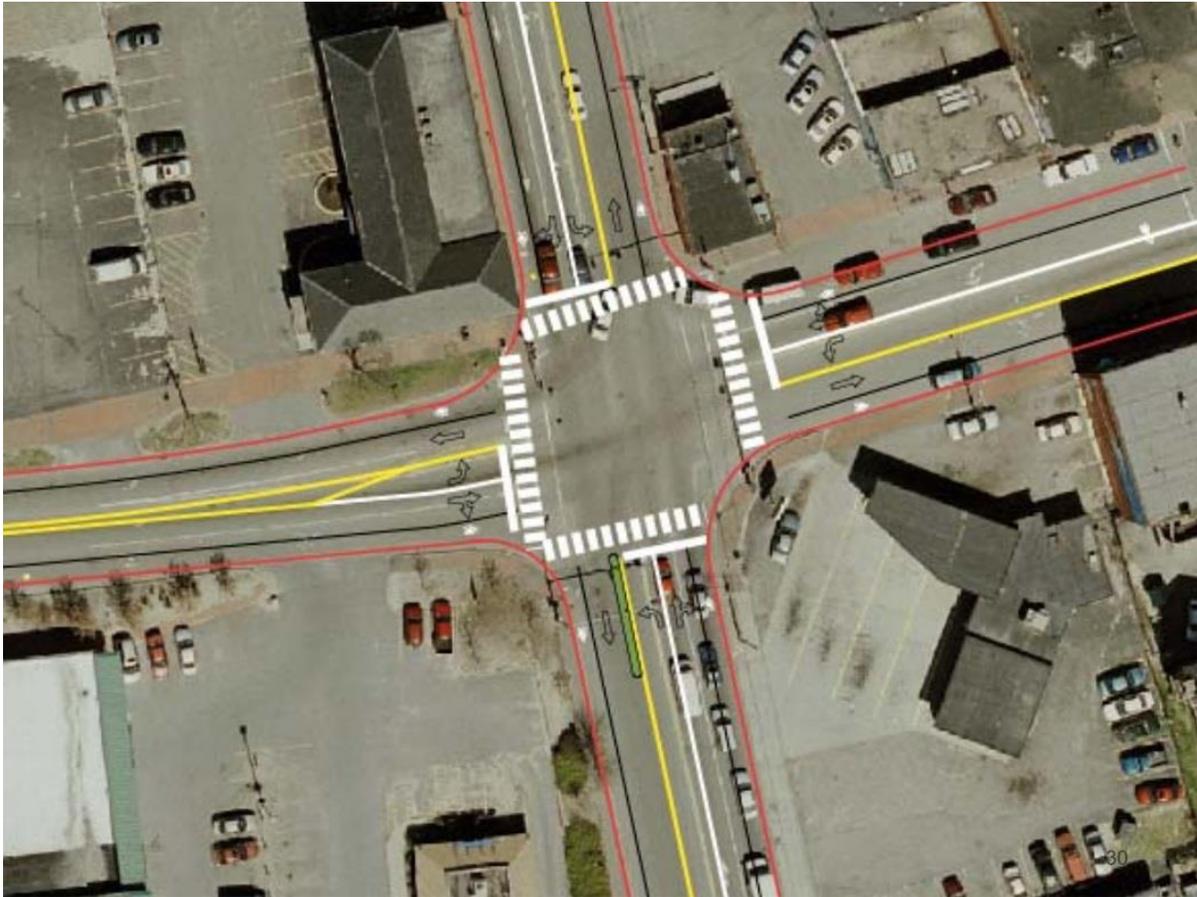
Lucy responded that a traffic signal is possible, especially if Marston is two-way. It was noted, however, that MaineDOT does not allow pedestrian-activated red lights.

A committee member asked if the on-street parking would extend to be in front of the triangle of city-owned open space near Denny's.

Lucy responded that there could definitely be parking there if the city wanted there to be.

At this point there was some discussion about how some people would like to see a playground there, and questions about how this could happen. It was suggested that private funding would be necessary, but sponsors might help out.

**Figure 8: Intersection of Congress St. and St. John St.**



Lucy pointed out that the on-street parking on Congress St. would stop between the railroad tracks and St. John St. Also the existing median in Congress St. on the West side of the intersection would be removed.

It was pointed out that there is a separate streetscape improvement project planned for St. John St., with construction starting this year

At this point Lucy presented the team's recommended implementation strategy. The first step would be making Park Ave. a two-way street. It could be done without a new signal at its intersection with Congress St. and does not rely on the removal of the ramps. The next step would be working with MaineDOT to define the process and ultimately close the four highway ramps. MaineDOT seems to be open to this conversation with particular interest in improving the safety of the interchange.

A representative of the emergency services personal in the city noted that while they are supportive of the whole plan, at the point where ramps start being closed they would need to do serious outreach to all the ambulance drivers in region. Many of them use ramp A currently and would need to be made aware of new routes. He envisioned that most would go up the newly two-way Park Ave, thus avoiding the at-grade rail crossing.

Lucy continued, saying that the third step would be making Congress a two-way street. This can only be done after the removal of the ramps. Following this, streetscape improvements can be considered, followed by looking into new uses for the land freed up by the removal of ramps. Also at this point, the city can look into whether they would rather have roundabouts at the Congress St/Park Ave and Congress/Fore River Parkway intersections.

A committee member asked that lighting under the various bridges and overpasses be a priority.

Alex agreed that it definitely is a priority.

Lucy reviewed the next steps. A public meeting is taking place the same night, and a meeting with the city's Transportation, Sustainability, and Energy committee the next week. She said that a final report would be released in two to three months.

*The meeting closed at 5:35 pm.*