

Pine Point bridge is on 'challenge' list

Organization says structure is in top five of state's transportation concerns

By Michael Kelley
Staff Writer

A national not-for-profit organization has listed Pine Point Crossing Bridge on Pine Point Road one of its top five transportation concerns in the state.

TRIP, based in Washington D.C., recently released a list of 50 of the states "top transportation challenges." Replacement of the Pine Point Crossing Bridge, which runs along Pine Point Road over the Pan-Am rail line, was listed as the fourth most pressing priority.

The group recommends replacing the bridge, something that would cost approximately \$3.3 million.

Frank Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research, said replacing it, rather than rehabilitating it, would be the most "cost-effective approach."

While the group recommended replacement, Moretti said the bridge is still safe for travel.



A federal transportation advocacy group has listed the Pine Point Crossing Bridge as one of its top transportation concerns in the state and recommends the bridge gets replaced. The Maine Department of Transportation has the project in its three-year work plan. (Michael Kelley photo)

"This bridge has significant deficiencies, but it is still safe for operation," Moretti said.

Mike Shaw, director of the town's department of public works, said he and

other officials in town are concerned about the bridge.

"The structural integrity of the bridge is a huge deal because it's a major artery into the Pine Point area," Shaw said,

adding if the bridge were to fail, the only other way to get traffic from Route 1 to Pine Point would be to channel it through

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Old Orchard Beach and then along East Grand Avenue.

He said Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director Mike Thurlow and Town Engineer Jim Wendell are also concerned about the bridge.

"We have had ongoing conversations with the (Department of Transportation) about that," Shaw said.

TRIP, according to its website, was founded in 1971 to research, evaluate and distribute "economic and technical data on surface transportation issues."

"Our goal is to promote the need for a well maintained and safe transportation system," Moretti said. "A transportation system is the backbone of any economy and is critical for keeping people safe. Its reliability is important because people depend on these systems."

The TRIP report states the Pine Point Crossing Bridge "carries an important highway, supporting tourism

economy. Loss of the bridge will have negative economic impact, especially to businesses along this section of Route 9. There are no practicable alternative routes without adding substantial time and cost."

Transportation issues were scored based on traffic volume, the significance of the issue, the importance of the route to the region and to the economy and the cost to fix the issue.

"Investing in Maine's transportation system and eliminating these challenges by improving the condition and efficiency of the state's roads, highways and bridges will be an effective step in growing the state's economy, enhancing quality of life and making Maine an attractive place to live, work and visit," Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP, said in a statement announcing the list.

The Maine Department of Transportation helped TRIP come up with the list.

"The TRIP priorities are not necessarily

DOT priorities, but we did help them develop the list," said Ted Talbot, spokesperson for the Maine Department of Transportation.

Talbot said the department has its own list of infrastructure and transportation challenges to address.

A \$1.18 billion three-year work plan, which was released in February 2013, includes the replacement of the Pine Point Crossing Bridge.

Shaw said when the bridge is replaced he would like to see the new bridge widened to create a better separation between pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Other Scarborough projects listed in the DOT's 2014-2015 work plan include resurfacing of I-295 from the Maine Turnpike toll booth to the Portland-Falmouth town line; resurfacing of Haigis Parkway; resurfacing of Payne Road from Ginn Road to Mussey Road; and improvements at the intersection of Route 114 and Running Hill Road.

The projects, he said are not prioritized,

but rather done when permitting and planning is complete and funding is available.

Funding for such projects got a boost Tuesday, Nov. 5, when Maine voters overwhelmingly passed a \$100 million bond issue that will pay for the "reconstruction and rehabilitation of highways and bridges and facilities or equipment related to ports, harbors, marine transportation, freight and passenger railroads, aviation and transit." The bond will be matched by \$154 million in federal and other funds.

Had the bond failed, Talbot said, the department would have had to eliminate \$100 million in projects over the next three years, including \$76 million for highways and bridges and \$24 million for airport, railroad and marine projects.

Scarborough voters passed the transportation bond 2,946 to 1,009.

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