



Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0016

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Bruce A. Van Note
COMMISSIONER

February 22, 2022

Christine Almand
Town Manager
Town of Skowhegan
225 Water Street
Skowhegan, ME 04976

Dear Ms. Almand:

Thank you for your letter of January 27, 2022 letter to the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) Commissioner regarding input into MaineDOT's planning process, the Village Partnership Initiative (VPI), and the decision-making process if MaineDOT moves forward with a second bridge environmental study. The Commissioner has asked that I respond directly to you.

Before I address the points in your letter, I want to thank you and the Town of Skowhegan for your involvement in the feasibility study for the past several years. Skowhegan was not just a financial partner, but a true collaborator that helped lead the effort, particularly with public involvement. This is the type of foundation that MaineDOT hopes to build upon as we establish and implement the VPI statewide and continue different municipal partnership programs.

MaineDOT will work with the Town of Skowhegan and take municipal and public input into consideration during all our project programming and planning. Under your and the Select Board's leadership, Skowhegan is thriving. As indicated in your letter, there is significant development underway, both locally initiated and state-sponsored, that will affect transportation in Skowhegan. I agree that the next step in a collaborative process is to meet with MaineDOT staff to review developments underway, local and state planning to date and programs such as the VPI. I understand that MaineDOT Bureau of Planning Staff have already provided information regarding different Community-Based Initiatives (CBI) including the VPI and have contacted your office to arrange a meeting. A continued partnership under a CBI could help us improve transportation in Skowhegan. It could also help policy makers further understand how transportation could function in Skowhegan both with and without a second bridge before we decide whether to proceed with an environmental study.

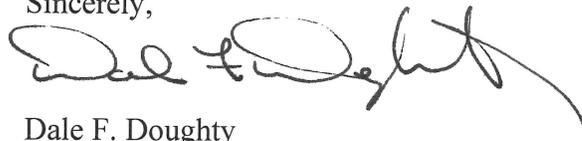
With regard to concerns and questions related to decision-making for a second bridge, MaineDOT is responsible for the safety and mobility of the state transportation system for all users. Highways in Skowhegan, Route 2 and Route 201 in particular, are vital to regional, statewide, national and

international transportation and commerce. As MaineDOT considers our mission, *“to support economic opportunity and quality of life by responsibly providing our customers the safest and most reliable transportation system possible, given available resources”*, we need ensure a safe and reliable transportation system for the future of all Mainers. Although MaineDOT has no immediate plans to move forward with a second bridge without Skowhegan support, MaineDOT shares the same concerns regarding system resiliency and redundancy that lead Skowhegan to request the study in the first place. When we began the feasibility study, we agreed to work together to gather information regarding the benefits, costs, impacts, and community input regarding locations for a new river crossing in Skowhegan that would likely be eligible for federal transportation funding. The feasibility study completed in late 2021 accomplished these goals. Unfortunately, the study concluded that a new bridge on a new location could have some locally profound impacts. MaineDOT understands and if we move forward to further study and build a new bridge, we will do everything reasonable to minimize impacts. However, if there was a simple solution for a second river crossing, it may have already been constructed decades ago.

At the start of the feasibility study, MaineDOT indicated that we would be asking the Select Board for support for beginning a more costly environmental study to implement the findings of the study. If we begin a study under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the study will revisit the traffic analysis under the 2021 feasibility study and if warranted, consider additional locations based on growth, potential environmental impacts and/or changes since the last study. However, a NEPA study will take years and likely cost several hundred thousand dollars. Nevertheless, there is a high probability it will identify one of the locations put forth in the feasibility study as the preferred alternative to move forward into design and construction. At this time, MaineDOT does not want to commit to begin a NEPA study without clear understanding by the Skowhegan Select Board that subject to available resources, we would intend to implement findings to improve the local, regional, and statewide transportation system.

Thank you once again for Skowhegan’s ongoing commitment to work with MaineDOT. Please let me know if you have any additional questions. Both Matt Drost and Martin Rooney remain committed to working with Skowhegan on emerging opportunities such as a potential VPI or additional study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dale F. Doughty", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dale F. Doughty
Acting Director for the Bureau of Planning