

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Transportation Objectives
Draft Revised: May 19, 2005

Workforce Development Goal: Provide a lifelong, seamless educational and training network, emphasizing technical training and apprenticeships, along with increased attendance by Eastern Maine students at post secondary education.

Discussion

The rural character of Eastern Maine presents logistical challenges to pursuing life-long education. Workers who have been displaced as employers close or move to new locations rarely live within a short commute of adult education facilities. Loss of employment and income combine with long travel distances and high travel costs to discourage participation in job training and post-secondary education. Recent advances in distance learning through internet-based education and interactive telecommunications have reduced but not eliminated the distance barrier.

Objectives

Transportation

- Support the use and rehabilitation of train stations, ferry terminals, commuter park and ride lots and assist in developing efficient commuter intermodal options.
- Develop strategies to work with service center communities and major employers (100 or more employees) to support commuter bus and van options.

Land Use

- Improve public transportation to serve the limited income workforce, including expanded shuttle bus service, volunteer driver and taxi services to reach dispersed rural residences.
- Encourage future residential and commercial development in service centers, close to employment, educational, social and transportation infrastructure.

Economic Development

- Encourage year-round job creation to mitigate the impact of the highly seasonal economy and seasonal congestion on roadways.
- Promote school-town collaboration in providing community transit services.

Strengthen Traditional Industries Goal: Rejuvenate traditional industries by recognizing their importance and focusing attention on their needs for technology transfer, value added, a better business climate, and enhanced infrastructure to preserve existing jobs, and create new opportunities, while promoting complimentary economic development strategies.

Discussion

Transportation is a significant cost factor for traditional industries. Direct transportation costs include:

- Travel time moving raw materials to processing centers and finished goods to markets.
- Damage to goods and transportation equipment due to inadequately maintained transportation infrastructure.
- Route restrictions due to seasonal and year round weight limits on roads.
- Higher prices due to limited competition for transportation services.

In addition to those costs incurred by traditional industries are costs incurred by local and state governments to maintain roads that are not built to carry heavy freight as well as the indirect costs to all who use these damaged roads.

Objectives

Transportation

- Increase vehicle weight limits on I-95 to reduce heavy truck impacts to nearby state roads.
- Support traditional industries with high quality transportation and communications infrastructure.
- Improve efficiency of rail service to promote expanded use for freight.

Land Use

- Encourage safe design and location of driveways and entrances to highways in order to retain mobility along the arterial corridors.
- Encourage retention of agricultural and forest lands and other resource-based economic land-uses.
- Encourage residential and commercial investment in service centers.

Economic Development

- Continue to support coastal communities needing marine infrastructure for working waterfronts and tourism through Small Harbor Improvement Program (SHIP) and similar funding opportunities.
- Increase rail and truck access to the marine facilities.

Business Development Goal: Eastern Maine will be a region of diverse and healthy firms and industries, providing for the needs of existing businesses, as well as creating an economic climate that supports the growth, attraction, and retention of high growth, entrepreneurial firms that create and commercialize new products and services.

Discussion

Investors assess numerous costs and benefits when selecting business locations. Eastern Maine is generally very rural, with varied availability of inputs and markets. For instance Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island draws more than three million visitors each year and creates many opportunities for restaurant, lodging and entertainment establishments. Vast tracts of land in Washington County are uniquely suited to production of wild blueberries. However, in the absence of clear resource or market advantages, transportation can play an important and sometimes decisive role in investor location analysis. Coordination of land use and transportation planning through policies like access management can help to mitigate the negative consequences of poorly-planned development along highways.

Objectives

Transportation

- Improve safety and efficiency of existing rural highways
- Reduce congestion delays, particularly in business districts and arterial connectors. Alternative strategies include road widening, passing lanes, better access management and construction of bypasses.
- Improve efficiency of rail service to promote expanded use for freight.
- Improve corridor highway ride quality so as to reduce damage to products in transit.

Land Use

- Support municipal efforts to manage subdivision development.
- Increase access management to preserve transportation mobility.
- Improve communications access. Eliminate dead-zones for cellular phones.

Economic Development

- Work with municipalities and businesses to develop new mechanisms to cover transportation infrastructure costs of development.
- Support the emerging tourism industry by providing adequate visitor information or facilities on corridors with high levels of tourism visitation.
- Improve highway and other international connections so as to support traditional industries and international trade.

Community Development Goal: Eastern Maine should seek to attain balanced growth throughout the region, while protecting local values and landscapes, and making the area a more welcoming place for new ideas and culture.

Discussion

Eastern Maine straddles two distinct economies. Knox, Waldo and Hancock Counties have maintained steady population growth and diversified economies. Piscataquis, Penobscot and Washington Counties are in a more challenging process of restructuring. The number of traditional “extractive” jobs such as fishing, farming and forestry has declined. Some towns that were highly dependent upon single employers have experienced extended periods of population loss, economic shortfalls and additional losses of local serving business. Particularly hard-hit have been service centers that are losing population to outlying communities yet still must absorb costs of providing regional services. Transportation systems can serve to spread development into depressed regions, but can also be a conduit for longer trips to distant shopping malls and exurban residences.

Objectives

Transportation

- Support and invest in bicycle and pedestrian trail facilities (on road and off) to link schools with residential and recreational areas and to help facilitate non-vehicular tourism options, with emphasis on coastal village areas.
- Enhance tourism through transportation corridor development. Strategies include scenic byways, thematic working landscape, ecotours and heritage tours.
- Improve the quality of collector roads accessing corridors.

Land Use

- Encourage residential and commercial investment in service centers.
- Protect scenic vistas and other historic resources, particularly on Scenic Byways.
- Support public access to significant shore land on the ocean, lakes and rivers.
- Assist corridor towns to develop consistent comprehensive plans and land use ordinances to discourage inappropriate roadside development.

Economic Development

- Improve access to employment opportunities in service centers through road improvements and commuting facilities.
- Support the emerging tourism industry by providing adequate visitor facilities in the corridor.
- Encourage the establishment of employment clusters so as to reduce commuting times and traffic congestion.