
Acadia Gateway Center News – March 2006

A Brief History

In 1999, a partnership of federal, state, and local agencies and private organizations developed a three-phase transportation strategy for Acadia National Park, Mount Desert Island, and Trenton. Phase 1 established the Island Explorer bus system, which has carried 1.9 million passengers since its inception. Phase 2 expanded the Island Explorer bus fleet and established transit improvements in the park and local communities. Phase 3 of the transportation strategy calls for the development of an intermodal transportation and welcome center (i.e., Acadia Gateway Center) to serve visitors to Acadia National Park and Downeast Maine, and commuters to Mount Desert Island.

What is the Acadia Gateway Center?

The purpose of the Acadia Gateway Center is to reduce traffic congestion on the Route 3 corridor and in Acadia National Park by attracting visitors and commuters to use the Island Explorer bus system. The Acadia Gateway Center would also enhance the experience of visitors to the park and allow for the efficient operation of the Island Explorer. The Acadia Gateway Center would provide:

- connections to the Island Explorer and other bus services with parking for visitors and commuters
- visitor information about Acadia National Park and other destinations in Downeast Maine
- administrative, light maintenance, fueling, and storage facilities for the Island Explorer

In addition, the Acadia Gateway Center might accommodate complementary businesses, seasonal worker housing, public parkland, and other uses.

Who is on the planning team?

The principal agencies and organizations on the planning team are:

- Town of Trenton
- Federal Transit Administration
- Federal Highway Administration
- National Park Service
- Maine Department of Transportation
- Hancock County Planning Commission
- Downeast Transportation, Inc.
- Friends of Acadia
- DMJM Harris (consultant)

What facilities are proposed?

Facilities to support the intermodal transportation center tentatively include:

- sheltered boarding area for Island Explorer, intercity buses, and motor coaches
- short and long-term parking for visitors and commuters (350 to 550 spaces)
- food and beverage service / vending area

Facilities to support the welcome center tentatively include:

- park information and entry pass sales desk
- regional tourism information desk
- interpretive and informational displays
- theater for visitor orientation program
- book sales area
- administrative and other support space

Facilities to support the operation of the Island Explorer tentatively include:

- bus parking (30 to 40 spaces)
- employee and visitor parking (60 spaces)
- bus maintenance garage and fueling station

Why Trenton?

The Crippens Brook property (369 acres) in Trenton was selected as the most suitable location for the intermodal transportation and welcome center based on the results of the *National Park Service Intermodal Transportation Hub Charette* (2002) and the *Bangor - Trenton Transportation Alternatives Study* (2004). Between the two studies, six sites in Bar Harbor and eight sites in Trenton were considered.

Criteria:

- ability to reduce traffic congestion
- convenient, safe access to Route 3
- sense of arrival to Acadia National Park
- park-like setting
- adequate size
- availability and cost of property
- opportunities to minimize environmental impacts

The Crippens Brook property is strategically located to intercept traffic on Route 3 before the bottleneck at the head of Mount Desert Island. Acadia's mountains are visible from the property,

which would help give visitors a sense of arrival to the park. A minimum of ten acres is necessary for the proposed uses, but the large size of the Crippens Brook property is desirable to allow for visual separation of the facilities and to provide a park-like setting. It would also provide greater opportunities for complementary uses, such as housing for seasonal employees, exhibit space for local organizations and nature trails.

How will impacts to the environment and community be addressed?

As the first step in the project, the Maine Department of Transportation (MEDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FTA) are evaluating the suitability and feasibility of the Crippens Brook property as the possible location for the Acadia Gateway Center. DMJM Harris is developing alternative site designs to determine if and how the Acadia Gateway Center facilities could be accommodated on the property.

Federally funded projects must be reviewed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The MEDOT is conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) of potential impacts. The EA uses public input throughout the process.

The purpose of the EA is to develop and analyze a range of appropriate alternatives for the Acadia Gateway Center. The EA considers the potential impacts of alternative designs on the human and physical environment. The analysis considers direct impacts on the site, indirect impacts resulting from related changes in nearby places and activities, and cumulative impacts over time.

If the EA determines that the project has potential for significant impacts, the project must be modified to avoid the impacts or to include mitigation actions. Further analysis may be required through the preparation of an “environmental impact statement” if the significant impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated. The FTA could also decide not to move forward with the project if impacts are significant enough.

What is the schedule?

The timeline for the project in 2006 is as follows:

- January Begin resource inventory and analysis
- February Conduct public meeting to introduce project and identify issues
- March Develop alternatives for conceptual site design; Assess impacts; Conduct public meeting
- April/May Revise alternatives; Select Preferred Alternative; Prepare Environmental Assessment
- June Release the Environmental Assessment for 30-day public review; Conduct public meeting
- July Respond to public comments on the Environmental Assessment
- August FTA issues a decision on the Environmental Assessment



If the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issues a “Finding of No Significant Impact” on the EA and it is adopted by the National Park Service and FTA, Friends of Acadia could exercise its option to purchase the Crippens Brook property with the expectation that the sale would be completed by December.

If the project proceeds to the land purchase stage, additional site planning, engineering, and design work will be needed to fully develop the Preferred Alternative. This information would be used to secure approvals and permits from the Town of Trenton, State of Maine, National Park Service Development Advisory Board, and other regulatory agencies. Construction of the initial facilities could begin as early as 2008 with an anticipated opening in 2009.

Who will own the land and operate the Acadia Gateway Center?

Friends of Acadia purchased an option to buy the Crippens Brook property in Trenton through the end of 2006. They must make a decision whether to purchase the property by October. If the

Environmental Assessment determines there will be no significant impacts created by the Acadia Gateway Center, Friends of Acadia would proceed with purchasing the Crippens Brook property and might sell or donate a portion to the Maine Department of Transportation or Downeast Transportation, Inc. DMJM Harris will develop an organizational structure for managing the property in a business plan for the Acadia Gateway Center. The business plan will also recommend agreements and leases needed to support a mix of private and public uses.

How much will the Acadia Gateway Center cost and who will fund it?

Project costs have not been determined yet since decisions concerning the types and scale of services have not been made. DMJM Harris will prepare estimates for developing and operating the Center and identify opportunities to earn revenue and funding sources. Funding for the development and operation of the Acadia Gateway Center would come from a variety of public and private sources. Initial funding is available from the FTA, with \$3 million for planning and design and \$4 million for construction.

What are Trenton resident's concerns?

Trenton residents have spoken-out at several public meetings held during the last three years. Most concerns fall under the following topics:

Taxes: The 369-acre Crippens Brook property currently has a tree growth easement on 295 acres. With the easement in place, the land was valued at \$133,800 in 2005, and the owners paid \$1,679 in taxes. If land is removed from the tree growth easement, back taxes and penalties must be paid to the Town of Trenton. If the entire property comes under the ownership of a tax-exempt organization, the town has the potential lost of \$1,679 per year in taxes. In some instances tax exempt organizations contribute funds to towns in lieu of taxes. Nearby properties may increase in value and contribute additional revenues to the town.

Demand for public services: Undeveloped property requires few local services. Fire, police protection, and town administration are provided to the owners, but demand is low. The addition of buildings, parking areas and public amenities would require additional public services, including a greater likelihood of using emergency response services,

code enforcement, planning and select board attention. At this time no year-round residential development is being considered, avoiding demand for education and other human services.

Planning and zoning: The Trenton comprehensive plan and land use ordinances limit the forms of development that can occur on this land to a variety of light industry, commercial, residential uses. The Acadia Gateway Center is unlikely to be accepted under current zoning. To move ahead on this project, it would be necessary to meet local zoning requirements or receive a zoning change. The planning board must have a more detailed proposal before entering into a discussion about whether or how to accommodate the facility.

Traffic: The Crippens Brook property is located in a relatively undeveloped section of Route 3. Southbound traffic would have easy access to Route 3. Northbound traffic would require left turns into and out of the facility. No projections are available at this time, but a traffic study will be conducted as part of the EA to better understand the impacts of the Acadia Gateway Center.

What is the relationship to other initiatives?

Residents have asked how this project is related to recent discussion of light rail, bus services, local roads, a village center, scenic byway designation, and more. At this time, the Acadia Gateway Center is not linked to any of these concepts. The Maine DOT has decided not to pursue light rail or bus rapid transit at this time and the decision whether to construct a local road or village center is not coupled with this project.

How can the public provide input?

The EA for the Acadia Gateway Center is expected to be released in June for a 30-day public review. Public meetings concerning the EA will be held June. Comments and questions may be directed at any time to the contact below:

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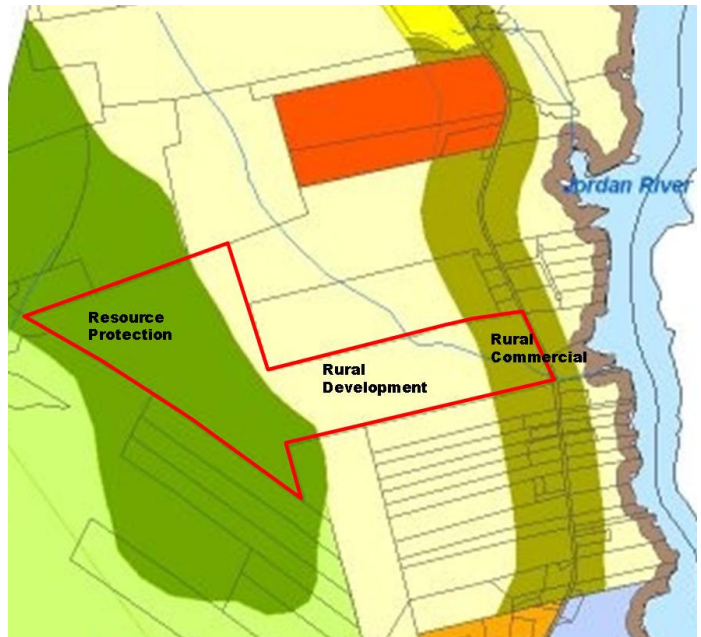
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IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON CRIPPENS CREEK PROPOSAL INSIDE



Crippens Creek Sight in Trenton



Close-up of Crippens Creek site and existing zoning.

Log on to www.AcadiaGatewayCenter.com for more information, photos and project updates!