

# **Commentary**

## **Views on Widening the Maine Turnpike**

### **Widening the Maine Turnpike: The time is now**

**Maine Policy Review (1997). Volume 6, Number 2**

**by Dana F. Connors**

Come November, the voters of Maine finally will be able to put the turnpike-widening issue to rest. We have before us an opportunity to promote the economic vitality of our state and ensure safer driving conditions for our families and commercial products—all without touching the pocketbooks of Maine taxpayers. It's a good deal.

Since we last addressed this question in 1991, there has been a lot of bickering on both sides, a lot of politicizing, and we have lost sight of the basic facts. In 1991, opponents of the proposal called on the state to commission an independent study on the effects of a wider turnpike. The research firm of Vanasse Hangen, Brustlin, Inc. released its findings last December, and they are conclusive: The economic benefits of expanding the two-lane portion of the Maine Turnpike are unquestionable, and the commitment to maintain a safe mode of travel is undeniably important.

The turnpike is Maine's chief artery. Maine families depend on the turnpike to travel across the state, and Maine's industries rely on the turnpike to ship their goods to market. However, this roadway, which we all depend on directly or indirectly, is congested more than 550 hours a year, and that is growing. In excess of 6 million more vehicles a year travel along the turnpike than did in 1991. Our present turnpike infrastructure simply cannot handle that increase. The independent study concluded that by the year 2005, commercial traffic would be delayed 50,000 hours.

By delaying the turnpike widening, Maine will lose an estimated 7,000 jobs. Our economy will not be able to wait another six years. We need to begin this project now. The studies are over, and the facts far outweigh the politics. We cannot just sweep the truth under the rug, as our opposition would like us to do.

That's why I and a group of equally concerned women and men have formed Maine Citizens for Jobs and Safety (MCJS), a grass-roots coalition of citizens from around the state dedicated to getting the truth out on this issue. The fact is that the two-lane stretch of the Maine Turnpike from York to Portland is dangerous, and is crippling to a healthy economy.

Ask Brenda Libby of Old Orchard Beach, a MCJS member who joined the organization because she was becoming literally frightened to drive her children and their friends back and forth to different activities in and around York County. Or ask Al Greenlaw, a trucker from Stonington who knows firsthand how the congestion hurts the economy of the whole state.

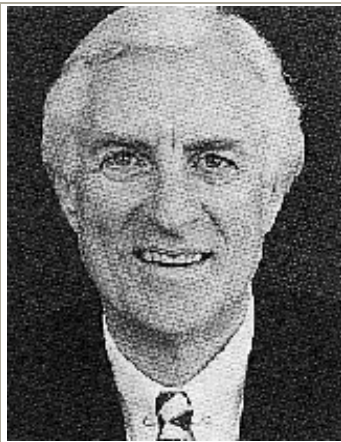
Ask Mark Dyer, an emergency medical technician for the Scarborough Fire and Rescue Department, if the families who travel the two-lane stretch of the Maine Turnpike are

endangered. He will tell you more about the 72 percent increase in accidents on the two-lane section of the turnpike than you will ever want to know, and how the outdated roadway prevents him and other rescue workers from responding to a call rapidly.

For the good of our state and the safety of its inhabitants, we must expand the two-lane portion of the Maine Turnpike now. We have another referendum on the ballot that would ensure that the local roads and bridges are upgraded, with provisions that we also invest our monies in alternative means of transportation.

The state cannot afford to wait on this issue. There have been enough studies and political bickering. The evidence is in. Maine's economy is being constricted by the turnpike's inability to allow an uninhibited, safe passage throughout the state, and we are jeopardizing the lives and safety of our families and visitors by forcing them to endure hundreds of hours of congested drive time.

This November we will be able to remedy most of the turnpike's shortcomings without digging into taxpayers' wallets. The southern end of the turnpike is in desperate need of an overhaul. Please vote "yes" on the turnpike widening.



*Dana C. Connors is president of the Maine Chamber & Business Alliance and serves as chairman of Maine Citizens for Jobs and Safety.*

**Full cite:** Connors, Dana F. 1997. *Views on widening the Maine Turnpike Widening the Maine Turnpike: The time is now*. Vol. 6(2): 61-62.