



**CITY OF PORTLAND**  
**Planning & Urban Development**  
**Christine Grimando, AICP, Director**

**TO:** Chair Ray and Members of the Sustainability and Transportation Committee

**FROM:** Christine Grimando, AICP, Director, Planning and Urban Development

**DATE:** September 10, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Libbytown Safety and Accessibility Project

**CC:** Chris Branch, P.E., Public Works Director  
Jeremiah Bartlett, P.E., Transportation Systems Engineer  
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Troy Moon, Sustainability Coordinator

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**Introduction**

In March 2021, the City of Portland submitted a funding application to the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) for the Libbytown Safety and Accessibility Project. The project involves the conversion of the one-way portions of both Congress Street and Park Avenue to two-way streets, construction of a new, urban roundabout where the two streets meet, and new complementary street/streetscape elements such as high-quality bikeways, pedestrian crossings, and streetscape and transit facilities. In the PACTS application, the City requested \$260,000 for design and approximately \$4.2 million for construction, and assumed that additional funds would come from the Rail Quiet Zone program for the mainline rail crossing at Congress Street and from MaineDOT for the paving of Congress Street and Park Avenue. PACTS funding requires a 25% local match for both the design and construction phases.

Among the nine project applications submitted to PACTS in March, the Libbytown application scored the highest. In late August, the PACTS Policy Board voted to fund the project, on the condition that the construction funding commitment would be limited to \$3,000,000 (with the potential to revisit the cap following completion of the project design). The S& T Committee's endorsement is necessary in order to receive PACTS funding and begin the project.

**Background**

The Libbytown Safety and Accessibility Project is a direct outgrowth of the *Libbytown Traffic Circulation and Streetscape Study*, a multi-year effort on the part of the City of Portland to address safety and accessibility issues along Congress Street and Park Avenue between Fore River Parkway and St. John Street in Libbytown/St. John Valley. The study examined the street network from a

multi-modal perspective, looking at safety and accessibility for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists and how the existing street and I-295 ramp configurations and the condition of sidewalks and pedestrian crossings affect safety and accessibility.

Originally issued in 2013, the draft study report recommended several actions, including:

- Conversion of both one-way sections of Congress Street and Park Avenue to two-way
- Elimination (after testing) of four of the five I-295 on and off-ramps (preserving the NB I-295 on-ramp on westbound Park Avenue)
- Conversion of St. John Street from a four-lane roadway to a three-lane roadway, adding bicycle lanes
- Significant upgrades to the condition of sidewalks, the quality of the streetscape, ADA-accessibility along Park Avenue and Congress Street, and pedestrian crossings along and across Congress Street and Park Avenue
- The addition of bi-directional bicycle lanes on both Park Avenue and Congress Street within the study area.

The 2013 process was overseen by an advisory committee comprised of neighborhood, business, and institutional representatives. MaineDOT participated in the process. Following the issuance of the draft report, the MaineDOT vigorously opposed the portion of the recommendations that called for the removal of the interstate ramps on Park Avenue and Congress Street. Action regarding the primary recommendation for conversion from one-way to two-way streets stalled.

In 2017, the MaineDOT agreed to resume the study, updating the traffic alternatives analysis with funding from PACTS and the City, provided that the I-295 ramps remained in the street network. The resulting revised analysis updated the traffic counts and accounted for approved development in the area, including the full build-out of Thompson's Point and the construction of Maine Medical Center's parking structure on St. John Street. The analysis assumed peak summer traffic levels projected for 2027. MaineDOT Bureau of Planning staff actively participated in the review.

Similar to the original analysis, the 2017 work focused on and assessed the traffic and multi-modal impacts and benefits of three alternatives:

- *No Build(C1/P1)* – No changes to the street network (i.e., both Park Avenue and Congress Street remain one-way where they currently are)
- *Park Avenue Two-way/Congress Street One-way (C1/P2)* – Park Avenue is converted to two-way from St. John Street to the intersection with Congress Street
- *Park Avenue Two-way/Congress Street Two-way (C2/P2)* – Both Park Avenue and Congress Street are converted to two-way utilizing a compact urban roundabout in the vicinity of the I-295 overpass on Park Avenue to make the transitions.

The results of the updated traffic analysis were assessed based on multi-modal connectivity, safety, public safety, and resiliency goals. The analysis showed that C2P2, the two-way conversion of Park Avenue and Congress Street, was the most favorable in terms of:

- Vehicle level of service and queue lengths
- Promoting moderate vehicle speeds and safety
- Providing safer and more frequent pedestrian crossings
- Compatibility with plans to connect the Bayside Trail and Fore River Parkway bicycle facilities

- Intersection efficiency
- Addressing community accessibility, public safety, and resiliency.

Since the completion of the 2017 work, some recommendations from the study have been implemented, including sidewalk and curb ramp rehabilitation, installation of pedestrian crossings across Park Avenue and Congress Street with RRFBs, extension of the Fore River Parkway Trail to Congress Street, reintroduction of on-street parking in locations, conversion of St. John Street from a four-lane street to three lanes with bicycle lanes, removal of the traffic signal at Congress and Valley Streets, and reconfiguration of Congress Street from the Fore River Parkway to St. John Street to include bicycle lanes. However, the two-way conversion of Congress Street and Park Avenue has not been pursued until now.

### **Recent Outreach**

Staff from Public Works and Planning recently held meetings with Maine Medical Center and nearby neighborhood associations to provide information on the Safety and Accessibility Project. Input from both were generally positive. MMC's input primarily revolved around preserving emergency vehicle/ambulance response time and enhancing accessibility. Neighborhood input touched on the pros/cons of a roundabout, the status and configuration of the I-295 ramps on Congress Street and Park Avenue, network resiliency, opportunities to integrate bicycle and pedestrian improvements, and gateway opportunities.

### **Action Sought**

Staff is seeking Committee endorsement of the Libbytown Safety and Accessibility Project to enable the City to receive design and construction funding through the PACTS Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

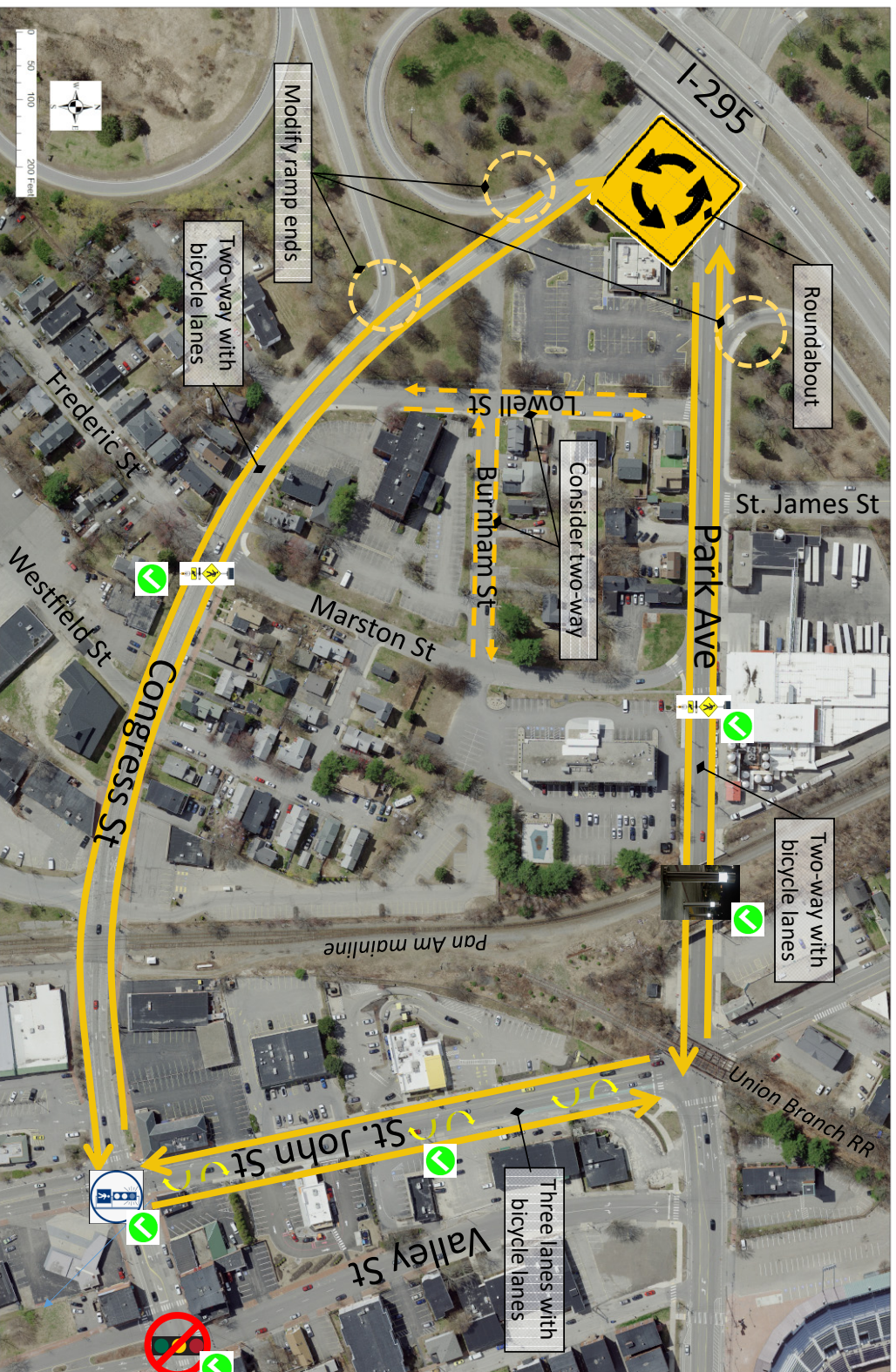
### **Next Steps**

Following the Committee's endorsement, the project can be added to the PACTS TIP. Once added, the initial phase of design, called the Preliminary Design Report (PDR), can begin in 2022. This initial phase will accomplish 50% design, identify potential right-of-way impacts, and update the preliminary construction cost estimates. Public participation will be conducted during the PDR phase. Successful completion of a PDR and its approval by the MaineDOT is a required milestone before final design and the release of construction funding. CIP requests will be made this fall for the 25% local match for the PDR and final design/construction phases.

### **Attachment**

1. *Libbytown Traffic Circulation and Streetscape Study (2013/2018)*, Recommendations

# Libbytown Traffic Circulation & Streetscape Study Recommendations (2013/2018)



Source: Portland Planning & Urban Development, 2021.

- Area-wide:
- Upgrade sidewalks/crossings
  - ADA accessibility
  - Enhance transit stops
  - Streetscape/street trees
  - Lighting
  - Bike lanes
  - Add on-street parking

✓ = completed