STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
16 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0016

Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR

Bruce A. Van Note
COMMISSIONER

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Testimony of Meghan Russo
Maine Department of Transportation
Before the 132nd Legislature, Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

In Opposition to LD 478

An Act to Reduce Maximum Speeds on Roads Close to Residences

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, I am Meghan Russo, Director of Government Affairs at MaineDOT. MaineDOT is in opposition to LD 478.

LD 478 proposes to set the maximum rates of speed for a public way where at least one residence is within 15-feet of the public way. This maximum speed is proposed as 25 MPH for a snowplow and a vehicle with at least 5 axles, and 35 MPH for all other types of vehicles.

MaineDOT is responsible for setting speed limits on all public roads in Maine, including both state-owned and local roads. Speed limits provide a consistent and reasonable speed for traffic. They are crucial to keeping our roads safe for all users. MaineDOT studies have shown that simply reducing the posted speed limit does not slow drivers down.

Over the past year MaineDOT engineers have reviewed and updated the way in which we set speed limits. This updated system aims to implement a Safe System Approach when setting speeds, a strategy adopted and endorsed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This new system is based on research detailing how roadway context influences driver behavior. Roadway context refers to the surroundings of a roadway, is the roadway rural with sufficient sight distance, is it rural but within a town setting, is it within a village setting, suburban, or urban. These five classifications are now part of the established Roadway Context Classification System that MaineDOT considers when setting speeds. I have included a copy of the report for your reference that resulted from last year's speed study that was conducted by the department.

As I have testified before this committee previously, simply lowering a speed limit will not slow drivers down without changing the context of a roadway. In a downtown or village area, speed management measures need to be implemented in conjunction with lowering the speed limit.

Traffic calming infrastructure changes, such as sidewalk bump-outs, speed tables, and raised crosswalks will result in noticeable reduction in the speeds people drive. The same holds true for rural areas. Simply lowering the speed without contextual changes will not result in motorists slowing down. Motorists tend to drive a roadway at the speed in which they feel comfortable. Artificially lowering the speed limit on a stretch of road will create speed differentials which leads to a dangerous situation when a few are abiding by that artificial speed limit and others are traveling at the speed in which they comfortable for a stretch of road.

MaineDOT has additional concerns with this legislation. As written LD 478 creates different speeds for different types of vehicles which will prove problematic for enforcement agencies. In addition, the bill does not specify the length of the newly set speeds related to the property that is located within 15 feet of the public right of way. Should the committee consider passing this legislation it should be noted that the fiscal note would be roughly $650,000. This amount only covers sign costs and installation on state roadways. Municipalities would be responsible for the costs associated with speed limit changes on their roadways.

If a property owner feels that the speed in front of their property is inappropriate we urge them to reach out to their municipality and ask that they request a speed study by MaineDOT. MaineDOT requires that speed studies are requested by municipalities because towns or counties are typically responsible for speed enforcement along state and local roadways. Once this request is received we would be happy to conduct a speed study and safety audit to determine if a lower speed along a stretch of road is warranted. In addition, MaineDOT offers municipalities speed enforcement tools, free of charge, to assist with slowing motorists down.

It is for the above safety concerns that MaineDOT is opposed to LD 478, and we urge the committee to vote ought not to pass. Thank you.

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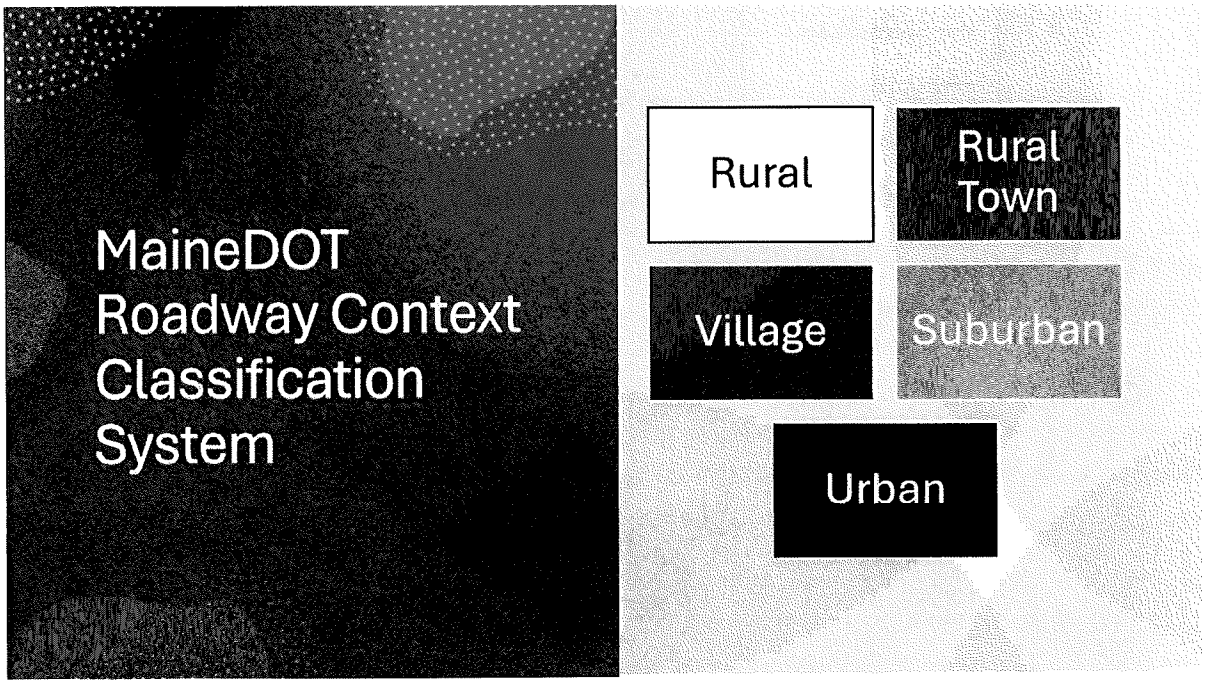
MaineDOT Speed Limit Setting Process

"Safer Speeds" has been recognized as a key objective of the Safe System Approach, an international highway safety strategy adopted by Maine and the United States. MaineDOT sets speed limits on all public roads in Maine, including both State and local jurisdiction roads pursuant to 29-A § 2073 §-1 and 2075, §-3. To set consistent and repeatable speed limits that consider local context and road user safety, MaineDOT has created an updated methodology to set speed limits.

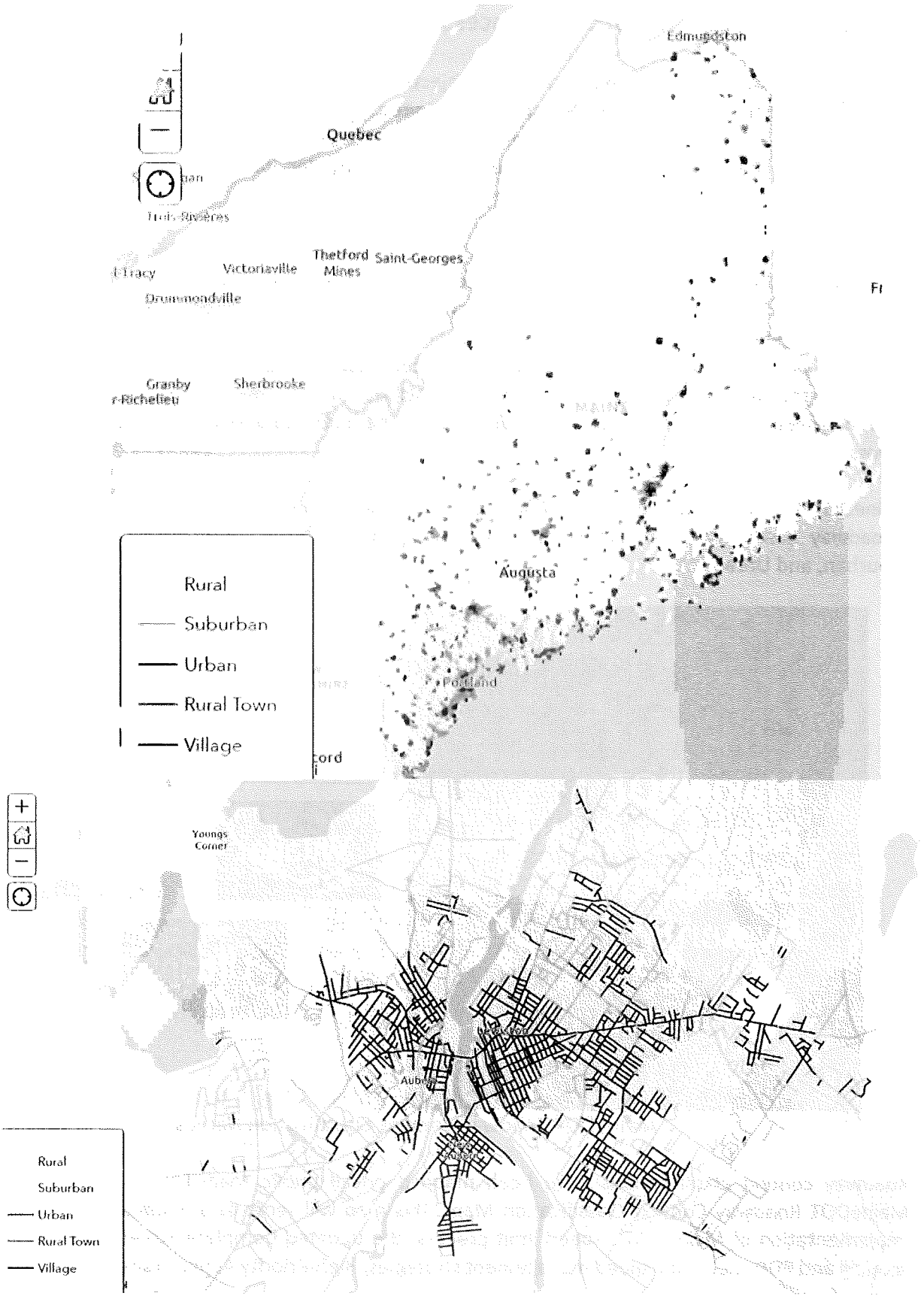
This new methodology is based on recent research detailing how roadway context influences driver behavior. The Department is changing practices to gain voluntary speed compliance from drivers by posting speed limits which consistently align with road user expectations. Research indicates that changing a speed limit sign alone does not significantly impact vehicle speeds. When appropriate, MaineDOT will strategically use speed management techniques in combination with speed limit postings to achieve the Safer Speeds objective on the state highway system. The roadway and roadside elements used for speed management will more clearly convey the intended and appropriate operating speed to drivers.

MaineDOT has established a Roadway Context Classification System that identifies the current context of a roadway based on many factors. The five context classifications are: Rural, Rural Town, Village, Suburban, and Urban.



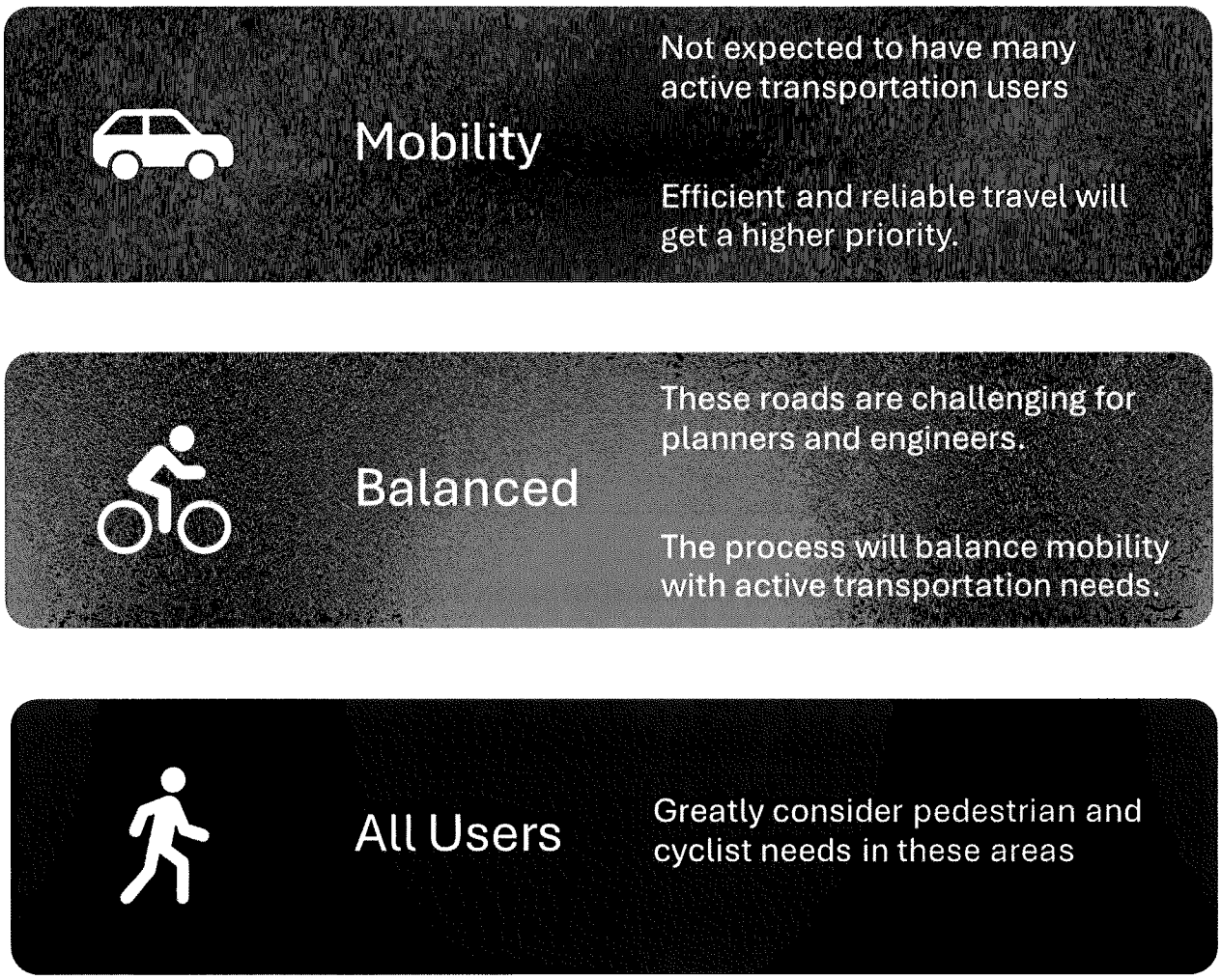
MaineDOT Roadway Context Classification Names

Roadway context classifications have been mapped on all public roads in the state with the new MaineDOT Roadway Context Classification Map. This map will serve as a guidance tool to assist with implementation of MaineDOT's speed limit process, the updated Complete Streets Policy, new project scoping and PDR checklists, speed management strategies, High-Priority Active Transportation routes, and more.



MaineDOT Roadway Context Classification Map

The new speed limit methodology is variable, with three processes that consider different factors to appropriately weigh the needs of road users.



MaineDOT Three Speed Limit Processes Explained

The speed setting process is selected based on the roadway context classification and the functional classification of the road. In general, the variable processes will be used in the following ways:

- Roads in the Urban and Village contexts and low priority roads in the Rural Town and Suburban contexts will use the "All Users" process. This option is geared toward lower speeds for improved access and safety of pedestrians and bicyclists. It is important to note that 85th percentile speed is not considered in the "All Users" process.
- Roads in the Rural context with lower development density will use the "Mobility" process which prioritizes safe and efficient travel between communities.
- High priority roads through Suburban and Rural Town contexts serve many purposes and the "Balanced" process will more evenly weigh these needs.
- Freeways and expressways are not shown in either of these decision tables because MaineDOT decided to keep the existing speed limit setting practice for those road functions. Pedestrians and Bicyclists are

not allowed on freeway or expressway facilities, so there is no need to consider importance of other modes on those roadways.

The following decision table is used by the MaineDOT Speed Limit Setting Tool to automatically assign the appropriate speed limit setting process based on roadway context and federal functional classification of the road:

Speed Limit Setting Processes

Type/Context	Rural	Rural Town	Village	Suburban	Urban
Principal Arterial	Mobility	Balanced	All Users	Balanced	All Users
Minor Arterial	Mobility	Balanced	All Users	Balanced	All Users
Major Collector	Mobility	Balanced	All Users	Balanced	All Users
Minor Collector	Mobility	All Users	All Users	All Users	All Users
Local	Mobility	All Users	All Users	All Users	All Users

The following decision table is used by the MaineDOT Speed Limit Setting Tool to automatically assign the maximum possible speed limit (the upper limit of a speed limit range) based on roadway context and federal functional classification of the road:

Speed Limit Maximums by Expanded Functional Classification (MPH)

Type/Context	Rural	Rural Town	Village	Suburban	Urban
Principal Arterial	55	40	30	45	30
Minor Arterial	55	40	30	45	30
Major Collector	55	35	30	40	30
Minor Collector	50	35	30	35	30
Local	45	30	25	30	25

In addition to roadway context classification and function of the road, the following factors are considered in MaineDOT's new speed limit setting procedure:

MaineDOT's speed limit setting methodology	The new posted speed limit may be impacted by the
• Observed speed data • Crash history • Segment length • Traffic volumes • Number of lanes • Median presence • Density of driveways/access points • Level of pedestrian activity • Presence of pedestrian destinations	• Lane, shoulder, and pavement width • Clear zone width • Frequency of sharp vertical curves • Terrain type • Horizontal alignment type • Frequency of sharp horizontal curves • Number of traffic signals • Presence of all-way stops or roundabouts • Pedestrian and bicycle facility presence, width, and separation • Level of bicycle activity • Crosswalk presence • On-street parking presence, type, and activity

MaineDOT has created a speed limit setting tool based on similar tools created by transportation researchers and traffic engineering experts. This tool automatically selects the correct speed setting process for users and properly consider many variables. This tool does not recommend posting the speed limit significantly lower than observed speeds unless appropriate speed management techniques are also used.

MaineDOT's new speed limit setting procedure will maintain system reliability while improving safety, economic opportunity, and quality of life. Implementing this process and the updated Complete Streets Policy for project scoping at the same time will maximize progress toward these goals given available resources.