



Transforming Forest Avenue Study Leads to Major Accessibility Improvements in Portland, ME

Challenge

Forest Avenue is a critical transportation route for Portland, Maine and its surrounding communities, but the corridor has presented safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists. The avenue connects the urbanized peninsula to the suburban residential neighborhoods west of Interstate 295. Though the roadway was initially designed to be multimodal, focus on pedestrian, bicycle, and bus accessibility began to diminish during the 1950s and 1960s as focus shifted to vehicle speed, congestion, and road width. The [Transforming Forest Avenue](#) study identified a number of areas of concern along the corridor, including Interchange 6 and Woodford's Corner. The two Interchange 6 ramps at Forest Avenue saw 60-80 vehicular crashes over a three year period, which is seven to ten times the number of expected crashes. At Woodford's Corner, peak-hour traffic congestion consistently spilled into abutting neighborhoods, creating safety concerns and a nuisance for residents.

Solution

In 2011, the City of Portland collaborated with the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS), the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the region, to initiate an intensive five-month corridor study of Forest Avenue. The study, [Transforming Forest Avenue](#), was conducted as a result of the [2008 Portland Peninsula Transit Study](#), which identified Forest Avenue as the second most important transit corridor on Portland's peninsula. [Transforming Forest Avenue](#) focused on a 1.5-mile, transitional stretch of the corridor that leads to the downtown. The agencies solicited public input to inform the study through multiple Public Advisory Committee meetings and two additional public meetings, as well as a [study website](#). [Transforming Forest Avenue](#), developed by a consulting team for \$80,000, served as both a land use and transportation assessment. The Portland City Council adopted the policy recommendations proposed by the study on June 4, 2012.

[I-295 Interchange 6](#). One significant outcome of the [Transforming Forest Avenue](#) study was construction of vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle infrastructure safety improvements through Interchange 6 on Forest Avenue. MaineDOT initially began this project to enhance vehicular safety in the area, as the two ramps had the first and third highest numbers of vehicular crashes in the county. PACTS and the City of Portland worked with MaineDOT to expand the scope of the interchange safety project that MaineDOT had already planned, adding streetscape bikeway and pedestrian improvements, which included:

- Rectangular rapid flashing beacons at on and off ramps to increase drivers' awareness of pedestrians;
- Widened sidewalks on both sides of the street to 8 to 12 feet to create shared use paths;
- Bike lanes to better connect to a university campus, as well as to and through Baxter Boulevard, a popular bicycle and pedestrian path within Greater Portland; and
- Green bike lanes painted through the interchange area conflict zones.

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



These improvements were funded through Federal funding sources, designated through FHWA's High Priority Projects Program. Construction was completed in 2015. Next, the agencies plan to add 22 lighting fixtures along the pathway to further improve pedestrian safety and access. The lighting project will be financed 80 percent by local funds and 20 percent by Federal and State funds.

Woodford's Corner. Another high-priority recommendation of *Transforming Forest Avenue* was to address issues at Woodford's Corner. The design of this corner presents particular challenges; most of the corridor leading to Woodford's Corner has a right-of-way of 86 feet, but near the corner, five diverging streets of traffic converge into two closely-spaced intersections and the right-of-way is reduced to 66 feet.

Key elements of the \$2.8 million Woodford's Corner project include:

- The addition of a second northbound outbound travel lane to increase traffic capacity;
- Curb extensions or "bumpouts" at key pedestrian crossings to reduce pedestrian crossings;
- Reconstructed sidewalks and streetscape elements including decorative borders, trees, and lighting;
- New shared lane markings or "sharrows" throughout the intersection to better accommodate bicyclists;
- Signal upgrades at the railroad crossing at Woodford's Corner in order to improve coordination and communication between rail and street traffic; and
- Installation of a 10' x 10' illuminated public art piece.



This image shows a future concept of Woodford's Corner, including the sculpture a local artist will construct in the main plaza. (Image courtesy of Portland Public Art Committee)

Construction is slated to begin in spring 2017, with anticipated completion by spring 2018. The project is funded by approximately 80 percent Federal, 10 percent State, and 10 percent local funding.

Conclusion

The Interchange 6 and the Woodford's Corner projects address the locations with the most pressing safety challenges and congestion within the *Transforming Forest Avenue* study area. In subsequent years, a broad mix of funding sources will be used to make additional changes along the corridor to achieve the goals of the study. Additionally, PACTS is beginning the Portland/South Portland Multimodal Corridor Study, a two-city initiative to enhance transit planning throughout the region. The agency anticipates completing the study by December 2017.

By highlighting the areas most in need of improvement, the *Transforming Forest Avenue* corridor study identified a wide range of streetscape, transportation, and land use recommendations that will encourage transit supportive development and help transform Forest Avenue into a Complete Street for drivers, transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability
Partnership for Sustainable Communities: www.sustainablecommunities.gov/

