

# Maine DOT gets federal approval for I-395-Route 9 connector design

BY NOK-NOI RICKER  
BDN STAFF

BREWER — After 16 years of planning, the proposed and controversial Interstate 395/Route 9 connector has gained its first federal approval, project manager Nathan Howard of the Maine Department of Transportation’s Bureau of Planning said in a June 24 email.

The Federal Highway Administration issued a Record of Decision on the I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study on June 23 that selects the state’s preferred route as the one that will be built, Howard said.

“The [Record of Decision] identified Alternative 2B-2 as the environmentally preferred alternative and selected the proposed route as the build alternative,” he said of the estimated \$61 million project. “This decision clears the way for MaineDOT to begin the Design and Right-of-Way process for the proposed I-395/Route 9 connector.”

Residents and community leaders in Brewer, Eddington and Holden have expressed concerns about the project that they say is being forced down their throats. An estimated eight homes will be “displaced” and another 54 other properties in Brewer, Eddington and Holden will be affected in one way or another, according to the Maine Department of Transportation concept plans.

“Firstly, I am not surprised,” Eddington Planning Board member Gretchen Heldmann said in a Friday email about the federal decision. “The MDOT continues to steam-

roll ahead with insufficient data to justify the selection of this alternative, while simultaneously misleading the public and wasting taxpayer dollars.”

Brewer City Manager Steve Bost described the connector as “a project in search of a mission, funded by money better spent on other infrastructure priorities, strongly opposed by the affected municipalities and homeowners, and based upon data that is no longer relevant. ... It would be funny if it was fiction, but unfortunately it is not.”

Opponents have held forums in an attempt to stop the project. The Brewer City Council voted unanimously in opposition to the roadway. The Holden Town Council also voted against it. Eddington Selectmen voted last year to take no action on any resolve about the project, even though town officials sued the Maine Department of Transportation in 2013 for connector documents.

The planned route extends I-395 where it ends at Wilson Street in Brewer and roughly follows the Holden-Brewer line until entering Eddington and connecting with Route 9.

The two-lane road is designed to ease heavy truck traffic and improve safety on nearby routes 46 and 1A, while also creating a more direct link from Canada to the U.S. highway system.

The Record of Decision is the final step in the Environmental Impact Statement process. It identifies the preferred route, the basis for the decision, the alternatives considered, the “environmentally prefera-

ble alternative,” and provides information to avoid, minimize and compensate for environmental impacts, the Department of Transportation’s I-395-Route 9 connector website states.

A copy of the federal decision will soon will be posted to the project website, Howard said.

It is the sixth of seven steps needed to complete the project, which has a tentative 2025 completion date.

Now that the Record of Decision has been issued, “MaineDOT will be hosting a Public Informational Meeting within the next month to discuss the I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study and [Federal Highway Administration’s] recent decision and to describe the process moving forward as the study now transitions into a project,” Howard said.

The date and time for the meeting have not been set, he said.

The connector has been in planning stages since 2000, and members of a local regional transportation board said they felt forced to endorse the road project in March when state officials told them they would lose \$57 million in regional road project funding.

The Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System’s policy committee endorsement was also approved by Federal Highway Administration officials on April 8 and allocates \$250,000 to prepare preliminary engineering and right-of-way documents for the connector, Howard said.

“This will go down in history as a waste of time and money,” Heldmann said.

## UMaine student conducting Bangor communication survey

The way Bangor chooses to communicate with its residents is vital when it comes to keeping residents well-informed. But what is the best way for the city to reach out to its residents? One survey hopes to reveal the answer.

Jaymi Thibault, a fourth-year honors student majoring in Political Science at the University of Maine, is conducting a survey in collaboration with the city of Bangor. The goal of the survey is to determine which methods of communication Bangor residents prefer when it comes to hearing from the city, as well as what types of information residents want to know.

With this information, decision makers in Bangor will be able to hone their community outreach methods to ensure that residents are getting the information they need.

All residents of Bangor are encouraged to take the survey, which will likely take participants between 10-15 minutes to complete. All responses will be anonymous.

As a thank you for your participation, respondents will have the option of entering a drawing to win one of multiple \$25 gift cards to a local restaurant or business within Bangor at the end of the survey.

A later phase of the research will involve focus groups conducted with renters and elderly residents of Bangor. All participants who complete these one-hour focus groups will receive a \$10 gift card to spend at a local restaurant or business. Survey respondents are under no obligation to participate in these focus groups.

The survey can be taken online at BangorSurvey.com. For those who are interested in the upcoming focus groups or who would prefer a paper copy of the survey, please contact Jaymi Thibault at 207-402- 0135 or jaymi.thibault@maine.edu.

## Maine Health Access Foundation awards funds to PCHC Dental Center

BANGOR — The Maine Health Access Foundation has announced the award of \$148,568 to five nonprofit dental clinics that are part of Maine’s oral health safety net to strengthen their capacity to provide high quality, affordable dental care for low-income Mainers. PCHC Dental Center was the recipient of a \$25,000 award as part of this grant.

All of the clinics recently completed comprehensive individual practice improvement and business plans detailing actions that could improve the efficiency and long-term viability of their practices. This planning process was done with the help of the DentaQuest Institute’s Safety Net Solutions program. The grants will allow the five clinics to implement critical pieces of their viability plans.

Maine’s oral health safety net is made up of a number of independent clinics, volunteer oral health providers and federally qualified community health centers. This small

network provides critical services to children and adults who often have limited means to pay for dental services and rely on the safety net clinics to get the care they need.

“Preventive and restorative dental care are critical to good oral health. Everyone needs access to these services,” said MeHAF’s Vice President for Programs Barbara Leonard. “Kids need to be pain-free to learn at school, and for adults, good oral health can be an important factor in getting and keeping a job. The oral health safety net helps everyone to have better access to dental care, especially people in rural areas or with low incomes.”

PCHC Dental Center is the largest public or private dental practice north of Boston, and host to an Accredited Community General Practice Dental Residency. PCHC offers a full range of quality dental services for people of all ages. Using the latest in oral health technology combined with compassionate, knowledgeable staff, PCHC Dental Center focuses not only on preventative care, but offers specialty care for a variety of dental issues.

# Bangor’s Hollywood Casino Epic Buffet receives worldly makeover



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## Hollywood Casino in Bangor.

BANGOR, ME – The Epic Buffet – a dining staple in Bangor since Hollywood Casino opened their permanent facility eight years ago – is seeing some changes. The Epic Buffet World Table theme debuted Friday, July 1, and brings flavors and cuisines from around the world to Hollywood Casino Bangor.

“We’re really excited about this,” said Jose Flores, General Manager of Hollywood Casino Bangor. “We have found that locals and visitors alike enjoy sampling different flavors on our buffet. In this case, we’re giving diners the chance to sample flavors from around the world. We will have food options from Italy, Mexico, Asia, Home-style United States and other parts of the world, made with the quality that people have come to expect

from the restaurants inside Hollywood Casino.”

In addition to the World Table options, the Epic Buffet will begin featuring churrasco style grill-prepared meats, meaning grilled, often on skewers, and a unique assortment of offerings from beef and pork to chicken and sausages.

“This style of cooking and dining is tremendously popular in parts of the United States,” said Flores. “We thought that it fit in nicely with our World Table theme, while also giving diners at the Epic Buffet the opportunity to try something that is relatively unique in Bangor right now.”

The World Table theme at the Epic Buffet will run \$19.99 for dinner on Fridays and Saturdays and \$15.99 for Sunday brunch. This

represents a lower price for the buffet which Hollywood Casino thinks will add to the excitement.

“People love seeing and tasting new things,” said Flores. “People also like saving money. With the new World Table theme, diners can have a four-course meal – or more – including desert and a non-alcoholic drink, with entrees prepared by a tremendous in-house chef, all for less than 20 bucks. That’s a pretty good deal no matter what your food preferences are.”

The Epic Buffet is open for dinner from 4-9 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, and from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. for brunch on Sundays. Kids under 12 can eat for half-price. The Epic Buffet is also open until 8 p.m. on select non-Friday/Saturday Waterfront Concert dates.

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