

COMMUTERS BEWARE



John Ewing/Staff Photographer

Tukey's Bridge has the potential to be a trouble spot, with multiple lane closures and modifications. The Baxter Boulevard northbound on-ramp will be closed. Jersey barriers will prevent northbound traffic from exiting the bridge onto Washington Avenue, and they will keep motorists from merging into the northbound lanes when they take Washington Avenue off Munjoy Hill.



Bridge work limits northbound options

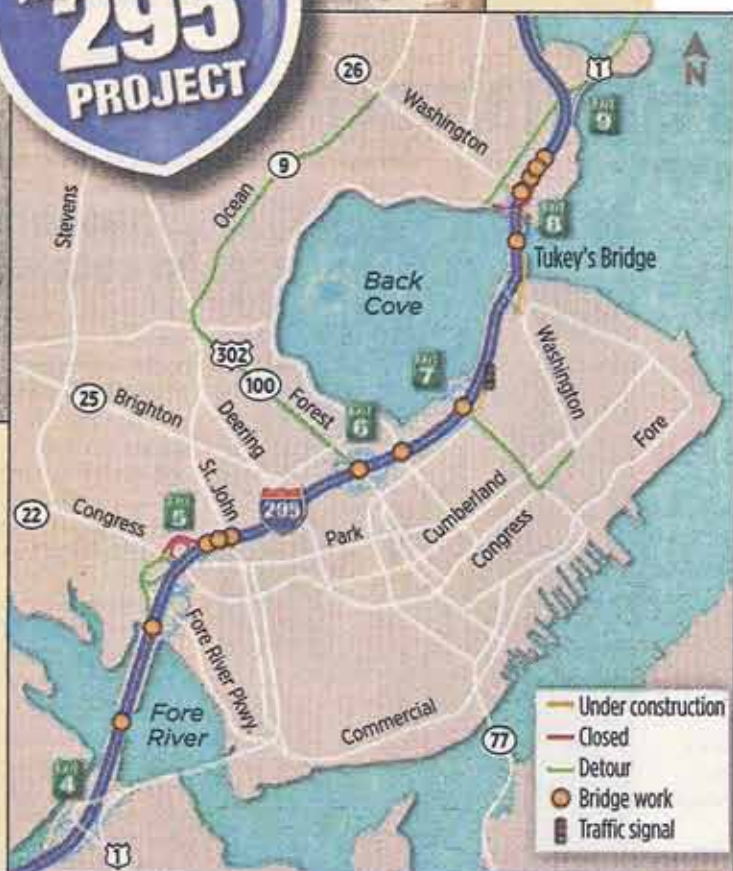
By GLENN JORDAN
Staff Writer

PORTLAND — Monday is the start of Commute Another Way Week.

Considering the ongoing and upcoming construction projects along Interstate 295, people who live or work in Greater Portland may want to extend that event to Commute Another Way Summer.

"We know this will come with some pain," said Joyce Taylor, director of project development for the Maine Department of Transportation. "There is no way to do this without some delays and some impact to people. . . . We're not trying to sugarcoat that."

Taylor spoke Monday at a news conference at the AAA Northern New England building on Mar-



Source: Maine Department of Transportation

ginal Way, detailing plans for a \$24 million series of repair and improvement projects on the highway that runs through the heart of Portland.

Most noticeable will be work on five bridges within a half-mile of each other on I-295 north, beginning with Tukey's Bridge, which carries

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nearly 85,000 vehicles per day across the inlet to Portland's Back Cove.

That project involves closing the northbound Washington Avenue on-ramp and off-ramp, although traffic will still flow from Munjoy Hill to the off-peninsula stretch of Washington Avenue on the outside lane of Tukey's Bridge, making it a local road for the summer.

The heavily used Baxter Boulevard on-ramp for northbound traffic will be closed for the duration, forcing vehicles to detour onto Veranda Street and take Route 1 to Falmouth to get back on the highway.

The project also includes the installation of a pulsing traffic

light on the Franklin Street on-ramp that will allow just four or five vehicles at a time to merge onto I-295 north, reducing the impact on high-speed travel lanes. The light is expected to operate only from 4 to 6 p.m. on weekdays, when traffic is heaviest, although the plan may need tweaking. "I want to assure motorists that we learned some lessons last year," Taylor said. "We will have shorter work zones and we'll have webcams on our website showing actual traffic conditions."

The project also will include adding signs encouraging northbound through traffic to bypass Portland and use the Falmouth spur of the Maine Turnpike to access I-295 north.

The work will be broken into three separate projects, each being done by a different construction company:

■ Lane Construction Corp. is continuing improvements that were begun last year on I-295 south from the Presumpscot River bridge to the end of I-295 in Scarborough.

The Fore River bridge and overpasses above Washington Avenue, Franklin Street, Preble Street, Forest Avenue, St. John Street, St. James Street and two sections of railroad tracks all need repair, much of it to be done between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m.

The budget for southbound improvements is \$12.5 million.

■ Pike Industries is continuing work that was begun last year on I-295 north from Falmouth to Brunswick. Three bridges in Yarmouth will be paved this month. Most of the work will be done at night, with two lanes always open during the day.

On- and off-ramps for exits 22 and 24 will be lengthened,



and traffic will be allowed on milled surfaces. The southbound on-ramp at Exit 28 in Brunswick will have one lane open at all times.

The budget for improvements north of Portland is \$8.3 million.

■ CPM Constructors will begin work soon on a half-mile section of I-295 north to remove pavement, repair concrete decking, install membrane, repave, and repair expansion joints on Tukey's Bridge and the overpasses at Washington Avenue, Sherwood Street, the Canadian National railroad tracks and Kensington Street.

That stretch of road already operates at a capacity of 4,500 vehicles per hour from 4 to 6 p.m. on weekdays, said David Sherlock, the Maine Depart-

ment of Transportation's bridge program manager. To minimize delays, all construction will be done behind concrete barriers and there will be fewer day-to-day changes in traffic patterns.

"What we tried to do," he said, "was keep people in two lanes."

The plan is to begin constricting traffic at Franklin Street, dropping from three lanes to two, and metering the incoming traffic during rush hour through the use of the pulsing traffic signal. "We haven't done this before, and we'll monitor it and see if it needs any adjustments," Sherlock said. "That's where the pinch point might be for northbound traffic."

With Washington Avenue ramps closed for the duration of the project, traffic will continue on two lanes to Falmouth.

The budget for that section of work is \$3.1 million, with in-

centives of \$10,000 per day for the contractor to finish before Sept. 23 - capped at \$250,000 - and similar daily penalties for completion after that date.

To minimize the impact on residents and businesses, Portland has been working closely with the Transportation Department to coordinate the construction with other projects going on in the city, said Michael Bobinsky, Portland's director of public services.

"Understandably, it will cause some delays and backups, especially (during the evening commute) and especially on Fridays," he said. "As commuters head out to enjoy the weekend, remember to be patient, roll down the window and enjoy the summer air."

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