

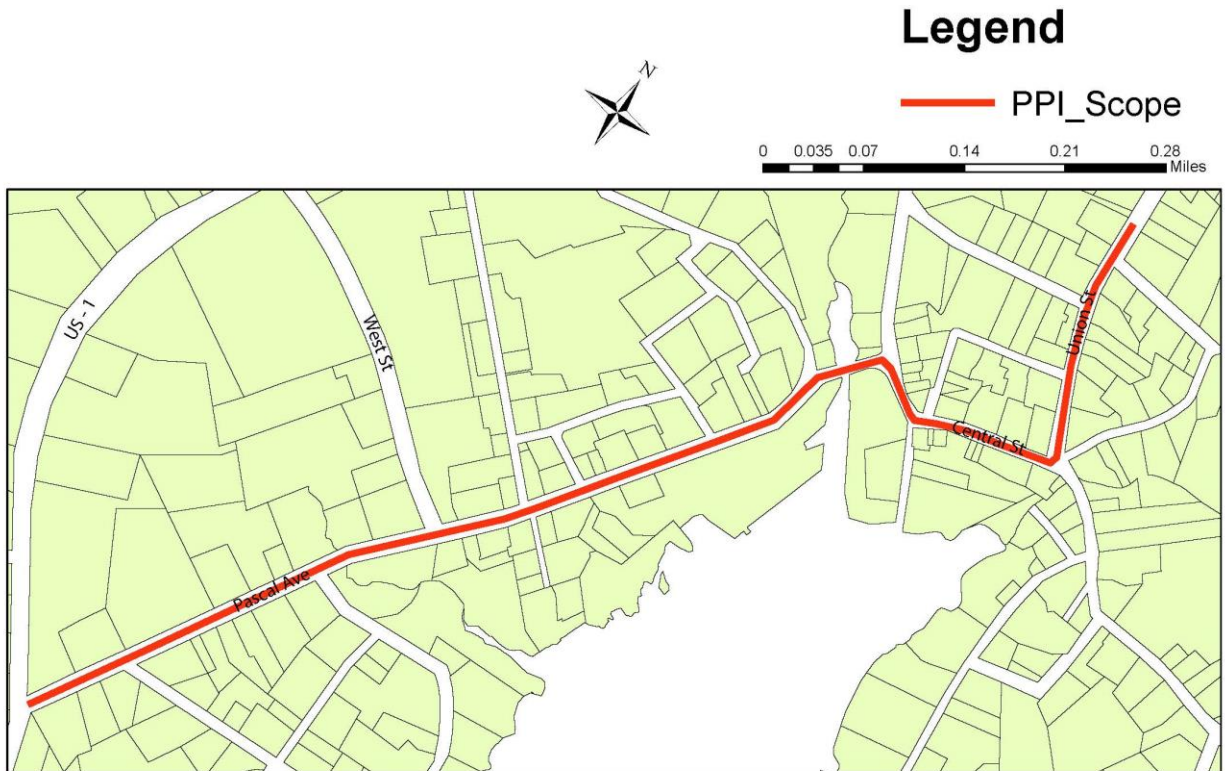
Introduction

The small village of Rockport, Maine is located on the steep banks of Rockport Harbor, where the Goose River empties into the harbor. Over 127 of its stately Greek Revival, Italianate and other historic houses and buildings located on 12 picturesque streets that hug the mouth of the Harbor, were designated as the Rockport Historic District by the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. In 1990, the Maine State Planning Office nominated Rockport's Harbor and viewshed for designation as a "critical area", characterizing it as, "One of Maine's most visually cohesive villages with a strong orientation to its deep, well defined harbor."

Rockport's small "downtown" is located between the public library at the northeastern end and multiple restaurants, parks, a hotel, gallery, and businesses which are north of the Goose River bridge. This revitalization of the business district has occurred over the past 10 years, but the infrastructure to support parking, vehicular, bike, and pedestrian flow have not kept pace with this growth. The village is centered on the bridge that crosses the river and which has seen multiple revisions over its long history resulting in some unusual and awkward situations for vehicular, pedestrian, and cyclist traffic. Compounding the current awkward arrangement is the pending repair/replacement of the bridge by the MDOT for the 4th time in its history, which presents both complexities as well as opportunities for the improvement of our downtown business district. The opportunity to participate in the PPI program will enable us to make improvements to our village infrastructure that will benefit local businesses and residents, as well as the tourism industry on which our village depends.

Scope of proposed Study

Scope Area



Description of Problematic areas.

1) Pascal Avenue

As this avenue approaches and crosses the bridge from the southwest, it encounters a number of confusing crosswalks, pedestrian pathways, parking, tight curves and intersections that contribute to poor sightlines. The safety issues posed for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists by the poor sight lines are compounded by a speed limit of 30 mph on Pascal Avenue. Although Pascal is residential, its speed limit is inexplicably 5 miles higher than a similar stretch on Elm Street, just beyond Camden's downtown, which is actually Route 1. Many local residents feel that 30 mph is too fast for both the residential area as well as the complex of intersections at the bridge. The Town believes a traffic calming study for this area is vital.

The pedestrian pathways to and from the harbor allow access to the bridge and the business district, avoiding having to walk on the steep narrow Marine Park access road where there are no sidewalks. The pathways, however, are in need of improvement and deliver the pedestrians to the side of the bridge where there is no sidewalk to guide them to the business district. Rather, they need to use 3 crosswalks and go up a short flight of stairs that are not ADA compliant which can be quite daunting in view of the traffic on Pascal Avenue.

2) Bike lanes

Pascal Avenue does have a bike lane as it approaches the bridge. Once at the bridge, however, the bike lane disappears and the biker has to negotiate a sweeping uphill turn to the right with an Armco barrier on their immediate right-hand side. (NOTE: There is language in the hotel parking study that specifically addresses this point and it might be helpful to quote the expert/engineer.) right before and which creates a blind corner due to the steep hill up from the Harbor.

The parking problem in the central village has been examined on an ad-hoc basis for the purpose of previous Planning Board applications. This data needs to be collectively analyzed to look for possible solutions and identify any areas that need to be studied further.

4) Goose River Bridge

Rockport is in the unique position of being scheduled to have its problematic bridge replaced at the same time that the town is exploring possibilities for participation in the VPI program. As noted above the bridge is located in the middle of the area designated as encompassing the VPI project. In addition to any structural deficiencies the bridge may have, it also has many deficiencies from vehicular, pedestrian, bicyclist, safety, lighting, and aesthetic viewpoints. The town's VPI Task Force envisions a sidewalk/bike path along the side of Main Street as it curves uphill from the bridge to join Central Street at the main business district. For this to be accomplished however, the new bridge will need to accommodate the bike lane/sidewalk on its southern side. Conversations with the MDOT Bridge section are currently underway but there is some concern about the ability to coordinate the bridge and the VPI projects.

5) ADA compliance

Due to the steep nature of the Goose River banks several sidewalks need to have stairs incorporated into them which pose obstacles to those with mobility handicaps.

6) Stop sign on Rte.1 at intersection with Union St.

This unique situation encourages traffic to use Pascal Avenue, Union Street, and Russell Avenue as a bypass to the Route 1 traffic that backs from the stop sign on Route 1.

Underground utilities

The Town has been pursuing the idea of moving the extensive unsightly overhead utility lines on Central Street underground. Towards this end the Town commissioned an "as built" engineering study showing the underground location of all of the existing utilities in the village. This study has been sent to CMP which has developed the plan to relocate the utilities. This project is essentially ready to be implemented once funding is found.

Recommendations:

Rockport would like to work through the MDOT PPI to improve the Pascal Avenue flow onto the bridge, with a sidewalk/bike path on the southern side of the Goose River bridge and extend that sidewalk/bike path around onto Main street and then up onto Central Street. This would include lighting for safety on the bridge. These improvements would also include upgrades to the harbor pathways (and lighting for safety) and integrating the harbor pathways traffic flow into the new south side sidewalk on the bridge.

The Town would like to obtain funding for a traffic calming study including Pascal Avenue, the downtown stretch of Main Street, Central Street and the immediate Village surrounds.

The Town would like to obtain funding to implement the underground utility line program.

The Task force would also like to review existing parking studies with the MDOT to identify areas suitable for additional parking, opportunities for improved use of existing parking, and additional study if needed.