

**Libbysville Traffic Circulation and Streetscape Study Public Meeting
June 10th, 2013**

Meeting started at 6:34 pm

Councilor Ed Suslovic opened the meeting. He gave a brief review of the study's topic, asked the advisory committee members in attendance to introduce themselves, and thanked them for their work.

Lucy Gibson took over and presented the goals of the study. They were to improve safety for all users, reconnect the neighborhood, improve mobility for all transportation modes, and to improve the economic climate of the neighborhood.

Lucy reviewed the study area and the other projects being undertaken or proposed in and around the neighborhood. She then introduced the four alternatives the study had considered (Table 1).

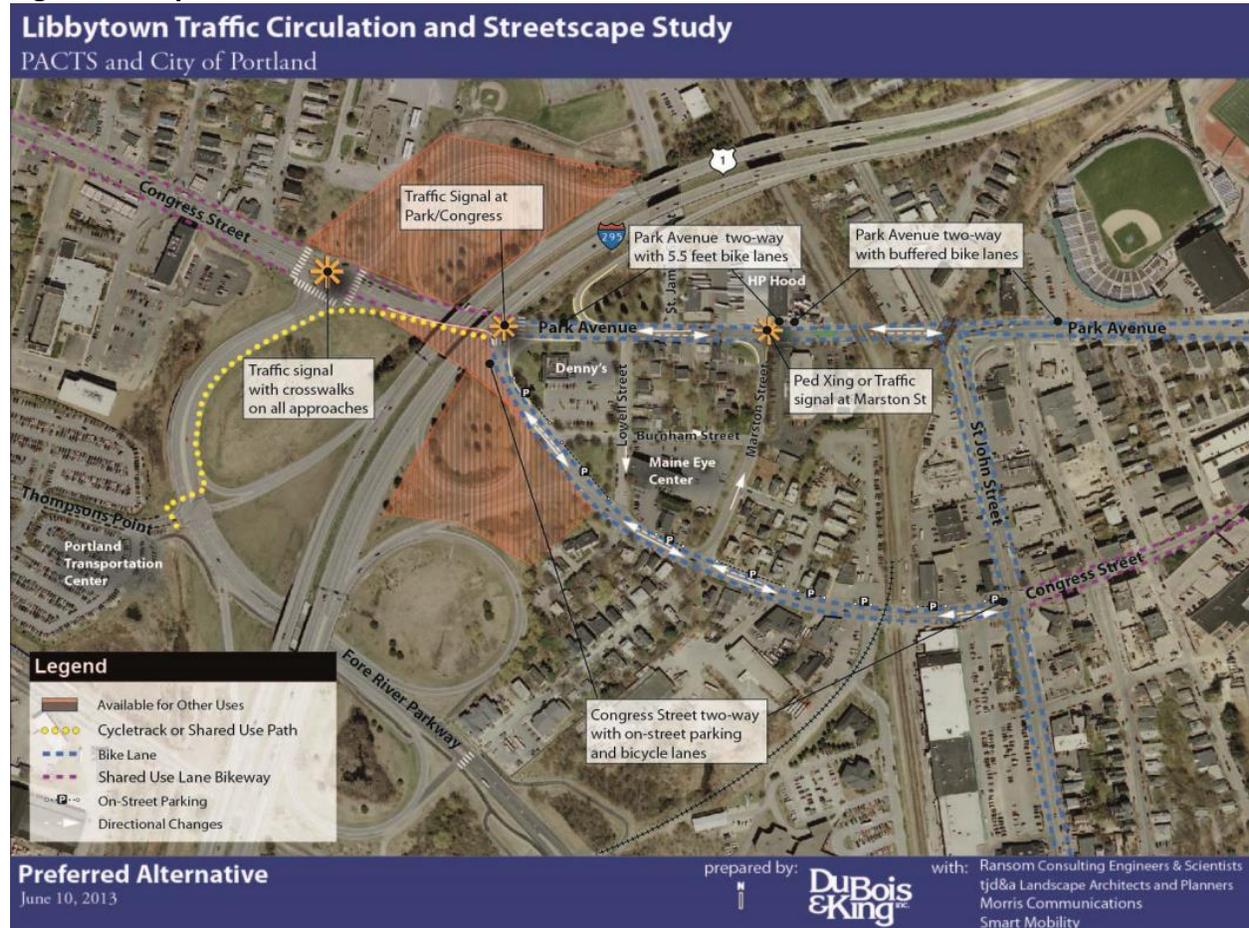
Table 1: The Four Identified Alternatives

	Interchange Configuration	a) Park-2 way Congress 1-way	b) Park-2 way Congress 2-way
Alternative 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close 5 ramps: A,B,C,D,F • Directs all interstate traffic to Fore River Parkway Interchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park is major route into downtown • Congress is major bicycle route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both routes serve traffic • Park is major bicycle route • Congress provides on-street parking
Alternative 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close 4 ramps: A,B,C,D • Eastbound access to Ramp F • Less traffic on Fore River Parkway Interchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congress 2-way between Marston and St. John • Congress provides on-street parking • Park is traffic and bicycle route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal emphasis for traffic, bicycles and parking on Congress and Park • Larger signal at Congress/Park/I-295 NB

Two primary alternatives were identified based on ramp closures. Both alternatives had "A" and "B" possibilities reflecting either a one or two way Congress St.

At this point Lucy presented the preferred alternative (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of the Preferred Alternative



This alternative would close the four ramps that directly connect to Congress St. and leave the northbound on ramp from Park Ave. open. Both Park Ave. and Congress St. would become two-way roads and have bike lines. Congress St. would have on street parking on one side.

Removing the ramps was primarily a safety decision. All of the four ramps contained high crash locations either where they met the highway or where they met the local streets. Some had high crash locations on both ends. Traffic diversion from closing these ramps can be absorbed by existing streets without seriously impacting traffic flow. There was public support for these closures as well as for keeping Ramp F.

Park Ave. was recommended to be made two way so as to provide a access point to the city that did not have an at grade rail crossing. Further it would allow for two-way bicycle traffic and be better for transit. There was also public support for this change.

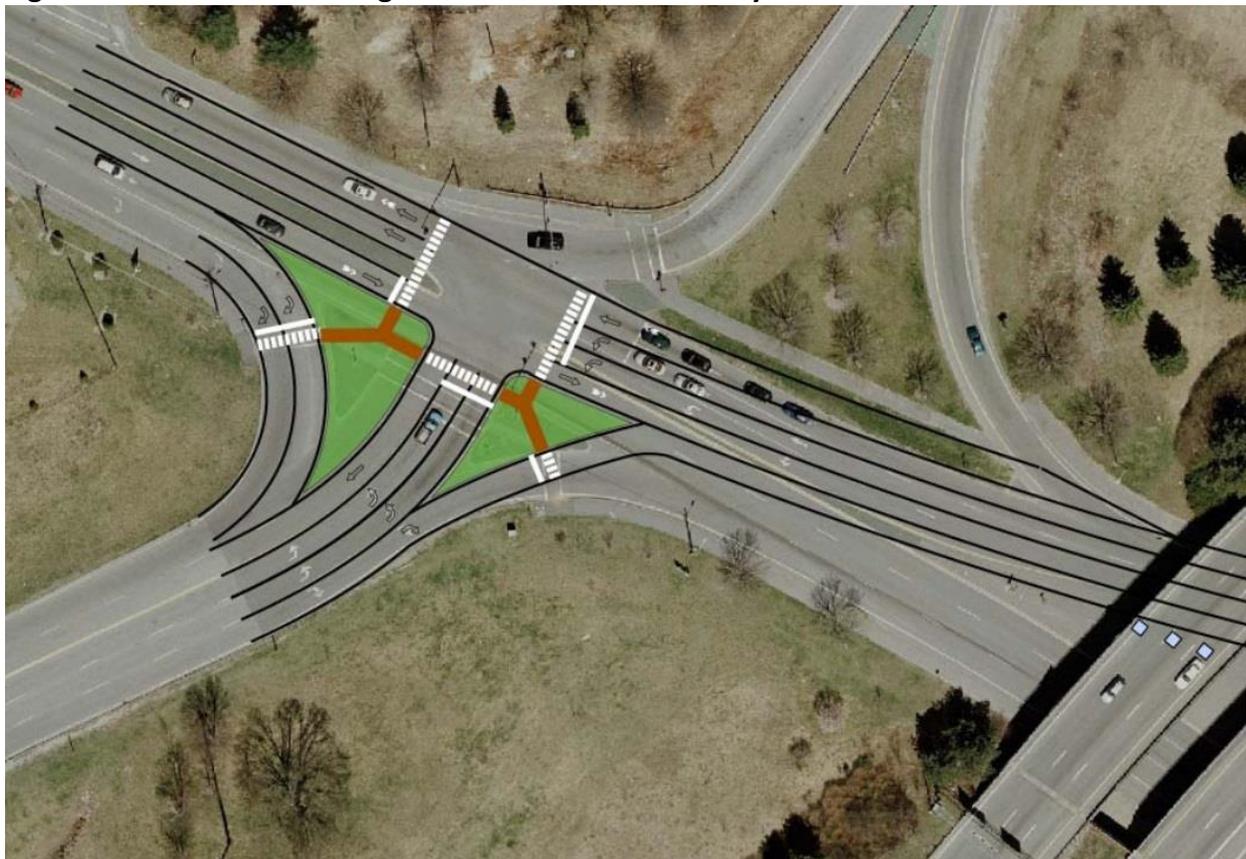
Congress St. was recommended to be made two-way for a number of reasons. Traffic modeling showed that the closing of the ramps would lead to congestion on St. John St. if Congress St.

was kept one way but that making Congress St. two way would relieve this. The two-way option also allowed for better bicycle and transit flow through the area. There has been mixed public opinion on this with fairly even responses in favor and against.

At this point Lucy presented the modeling results for the preferred alternative. Traffic would be increased on the Fore River Parkway, Veteran's Bridge and St. John St., all roads that can handle additional traffic. Traffic on I-295 through the city would decrease. The study team theorized that this would be because people would be more likely to use surface roads for short, in town trips. This would be balanced by an increase on traffic on Park Ave. between Preble St. and St. John St. Both Congress St. and Park Ave. would see a reduction in traffic volume between St. John St. and the Fore River Parkway. Overall the reduction in this area would be 20%. The remaining traffic would be split with 60% using Park Ave. and 40% using Congress St.

Lucy then started to present possible layouts for each of the major intersections in the study area.

Figure 2: Intersection of Congress and Fore River Parkway



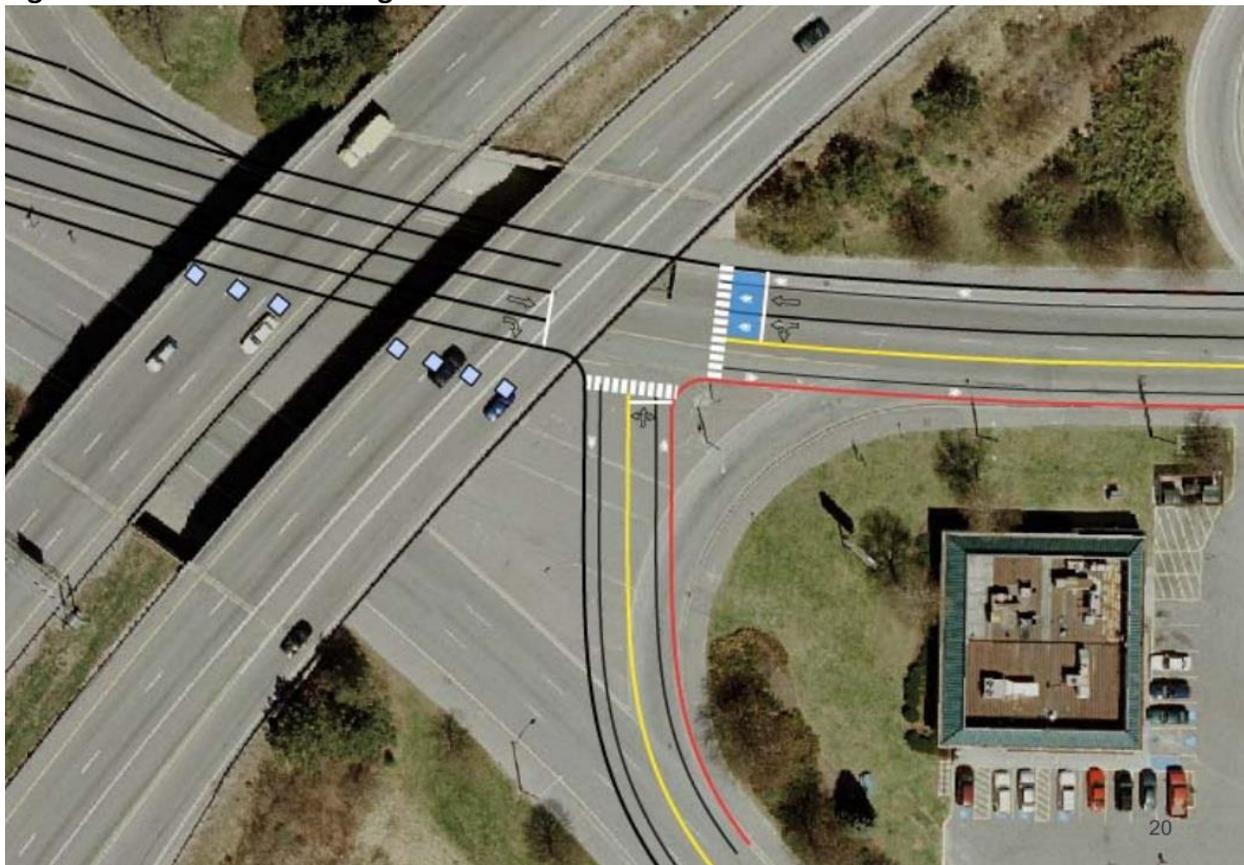
An audience member noted that they knew a sidewalk was in the works on the east side of the Fore River Parkway and asked why there wasn't a sidewalk pictured on the west side.

Lucy responded the study team has been primarily focused on the traffic aspects including pedestrian crossings. She noted that Public Advisory Committee has also expressed a desire for a sidewalk on the west side of the Fore River Parkway.

Councilor Suslovic noted that nearby Sewall St. is being improved as a pedestrian way to provide access to the Transportation center so that pedestrians from the west do not have to go all the way to this intersection.

Lucy presented a recommendation to narrow up the inner lanes of outer Congress St. so to all for wider shared lanes that would be friendlier to bicyclists.

Figure 3: Intersection of Congress St. and Park Ave.



Lucy noted that while it is tight to fit the road to the north of the piers it should fit. She also pointed out that the alignment of the intersection is such to deemphasize Congress St. and make Park the through movement. People wishing to take Congress into town would have to slow and make a deliberate turn.

An audience member wondered that if the road only narrowly fit between the piers and the embankment, what would it be like in the winter and asked that that this be kept in mind.

A question was asked how the front pier would be protected from accidents.

Lucy said that there would be a curb and a guardrail.

An audience member voiced concern that the removal of the ramps would put more traffic through the northbound on and off ramps at the Fore River Parkway. These ramps require weaving at the highway and they found it already a hard movement to make.

Lucy acknowledged that the weaving was less than ideal but felt that as the new portion of the interchange, it was better built to handle traffic than the older section that also requires significant weaving.

At this point there was some discussion clarifying the ways in which the study felt traffic would be diverted. Some people were skeptical of the model. Christian MilNeil of the PAC helped to explain how the model's predictions made sense.

An audience member voiced the opinion that they felt the Congress St. ramps were safe before the Fore River Parkway ramps were built.

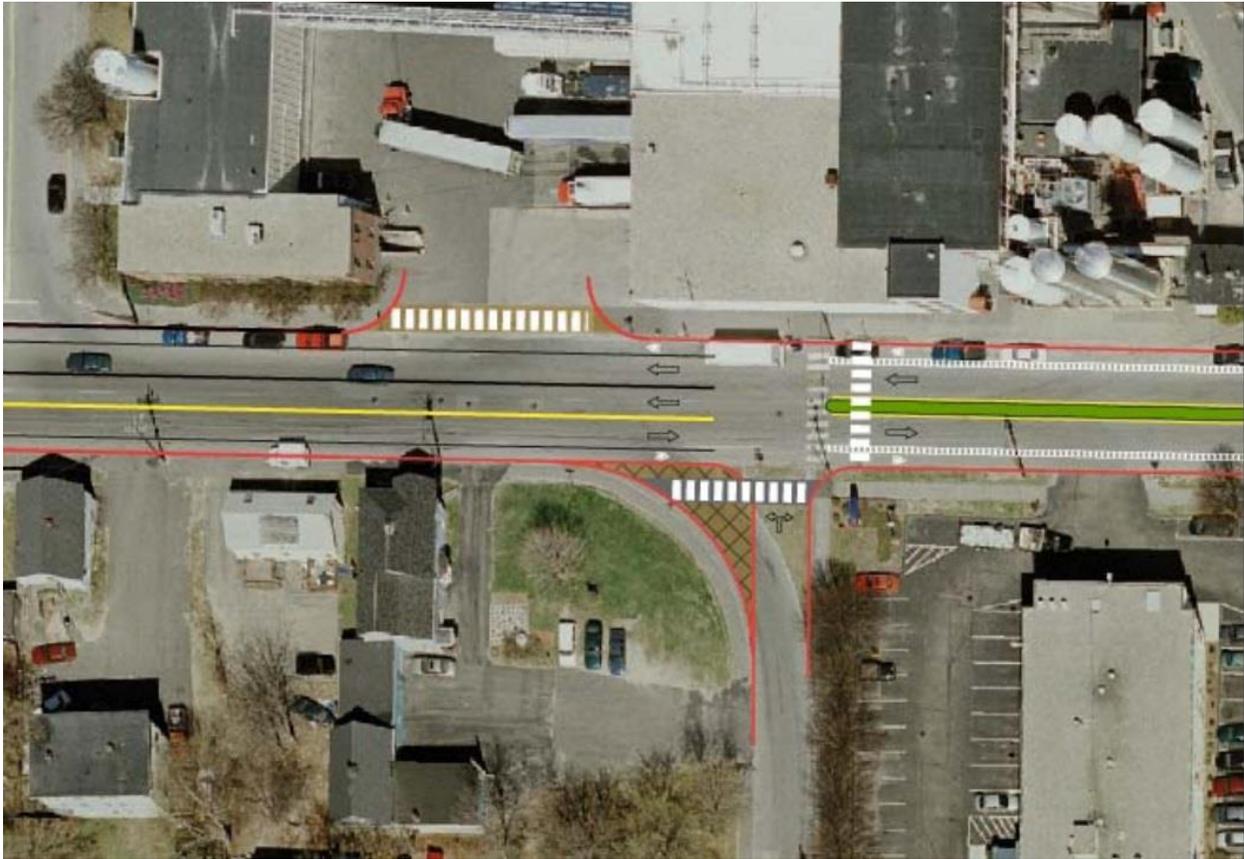
Lucy pointed out that the ramps were narrower, had tighter turning radii, and shorter merge lanes. They also had higher crash rates where they met the surface streets. This steered the study toward favoring the Fore River Parkway ramps.

An audience member asked to clarify that the northbound on-ramp from Park Ave. would not be closed. They felt strongly that it should remain open and was happy to see that that was the case.

Another audience member asked if the amount of truck traffic in the area had been taken into account in laying out the intersections.

Lucy responded that it had been a major concern and that the study team had been working closely with Hood to make sure that the recommendations presented here did not negatively impact their business. Carol Morris added that Hood was represented on the Public Advisory Committee.

Figure 4: Intersection of Park and Marston

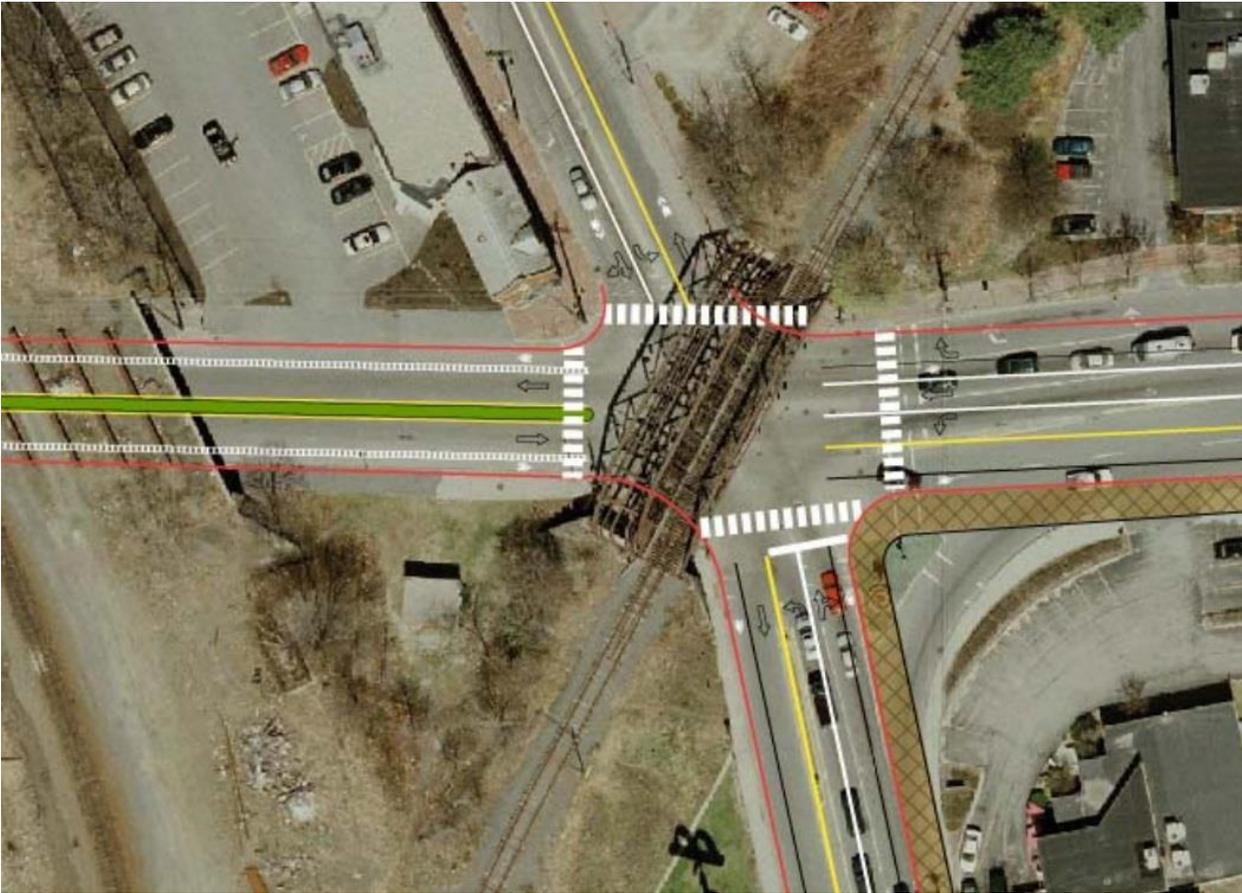


Lucy noted that working with Hood, they had done some on-the-ground tests to make sure that their trucks can make the turns.

An audience member asked how Park would work with the added traffic. They felt that Park Ave. “doesn’t go anywhere” and that additional traffic would lead to additional congestion.

Lucy responded that any additional traffic added does not actually come from the changing of Park to two way. The model shows a reduction in traffic on this section of Park Ave. The increase in traffic on Park Ave closer to town is due to short, local trips taking it instead of getting on the highway. She then presented a photo simulation of Park Ave. looking east from just before the Marston St. intersection.

Figure 5: Intersection of Park Ave. and St. John St.



Lucy noted that this is currently a high crash intersection. She also pointed out that the closing of the protected right turn is a project already planned and will be completed soon.

Figure 6: Intersection of Congress St. and Marston St.



Lucy said that they had heard that there is a lot of demand for parking in the area and so they added it to Congress St. to meet this need. She also pointed out the bumpouts at the intersection that would narrow the road and make for a shorter crossing distance.

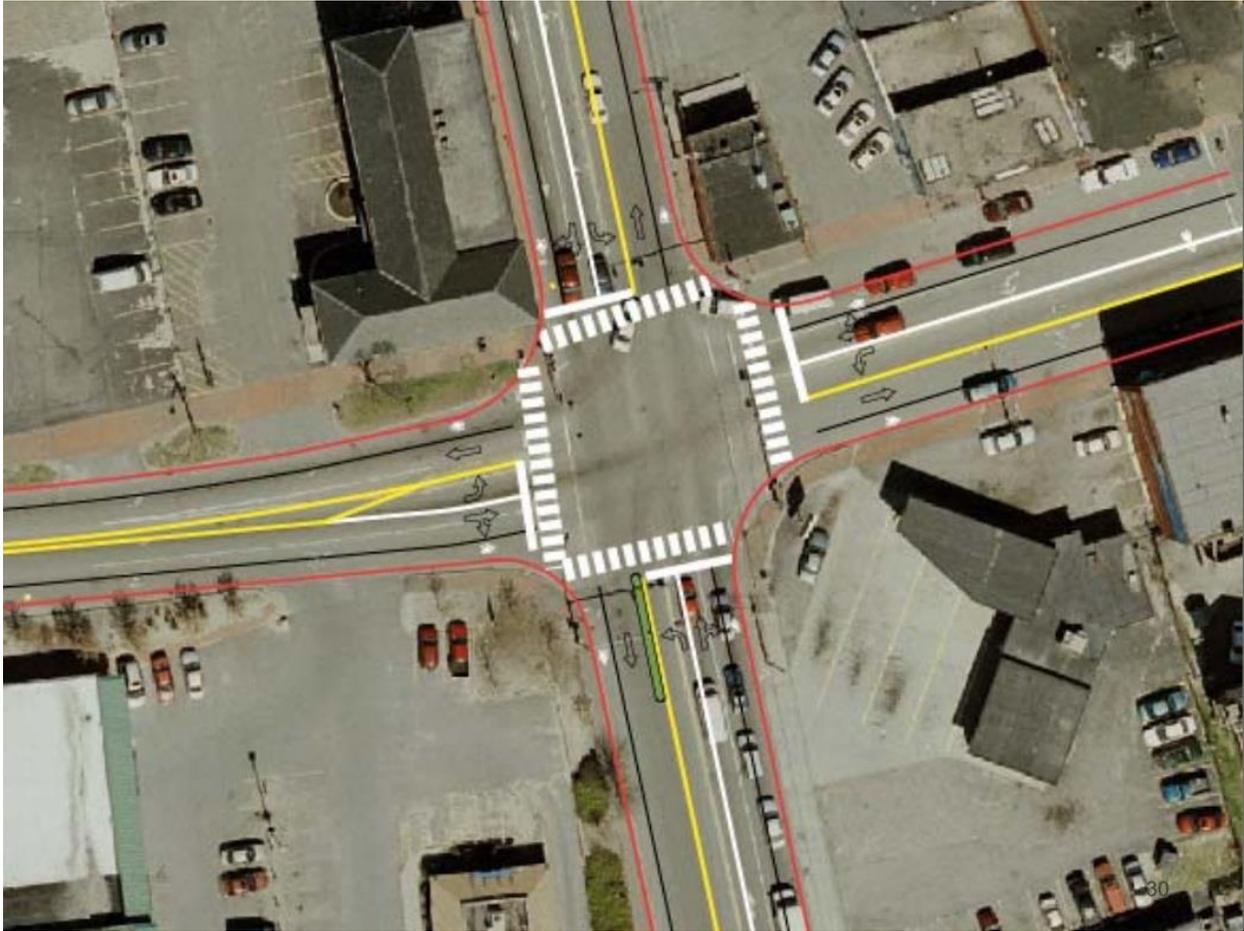
An audience member asked if Marston would be two way.

Lucy responded that they had left it one way but the PAC had voiced some compelling arguments for making it two way and so the study team will be looking at that.

An audience member noted that they would be concerned about cross traffic using Marston St. to get Frederick St. to St James St. and vice versa.

Lucy said that the team would keep that in mind. She then presented a photo simulation of the intersection.

Figure 7: Intersection of Congress St. and St. John St.



An audience member asked what would happen to the median that is currently in Congress St. on the western side of the intersection.

Lucy responded that it would be removed.

At this point Lucy presented the team's recommended implementation strategy. They felt that the first step would be making Park Ave. a two-way street. It could be done without a new signal at its intersection with Congress St. and does not rely on the removal of the ramps. The next step would be working with MaineDOT to define the process and ultimately close the four highway ramps. MaineDOT seems to be open to this conversation with particular interest in improving the safety of the interchange. The third step would be making Congress a two-way street. This can only be done after the removal of the ramps. After this, streetscape improvements can be considered followed by looking into new uses for the land freed up by the removal of ramps. Also at this point the city can look into whether they would rather have roundabouts at the Congress St./Park Ave and Congress/Fore River Parkway intersections.

Lucy reviewed the next steps. A meeting with the city's Transportation, Sustainability, and Energy Committee will take place next week. A final report would be released in two to three months.

Jeremiah Bartlett, transportation engineer for the City of Portland, pointed out that there has been conversations with MaineDOT informing them of many of the ideas that had been presented and that the city would be keeping them involved. They have been open to hearing the ideas and understand the current safety issues.

An audience member asked what the timeline of these recommendations was.

Lucy replied that they were just recommendations at this point but she could see Park Ave. becoming a two way street in around two years and that the ramps might take five years.

An audience member asked if the recommendations would include lighting. They also asked what percentage increase in bike and pedestrian users were expected as part of this project. They felt there was a lot of money being used for Bike and pedestrian infrastructure and wanted to be sure that that was needed.

Lucy replied that lighting would be part of the recommendations with particular focus on the areas under the bridges and overpasses in the study area. She noted that some numbers on bike and pedestrian use can be retrieved from the model. On top of that, local and national trends show a big increase in walking and biking while car use is holding steady or by some measures even declining.

Jeremiah added that he would consider bike and pedestrian amenities a side benefit to the ideas recommended there tonight. The primary benefit is increased safety throughout the area. The recommendations reflect a potential for a much safer and more functional area with a series of smaller intersections rather than a few major ones. Due to limited time, the crash rates were not fully presented but the area is unsafe and has a history of accidents to back that up, even when looking at automobile-only accidents.

An audience member asked if Lucy could explain how reducing traffic speed can actually reduce congestion.

Lucy responded that that is in fact the case. Studies have shown that higher speeds do not increase the ability for a road that has intersections to handle more cars. It has been determined that for maximum efficiency traffic should be moving around ~30 mph.

Councilor Suslovic stepped in at this point to note that it was time to move on to the next topic. He noted that this study was only the beginning of the process. He assured everyone that there would be a lot more public involvement in the future. As of now it would have to get approval from the Transportation, Sustainability, and Energy Committee and then the City Council before

they could seek funding to begin implementing the plan. He thanked everyone for their hard work.