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## Portland Press Herald Maine Sunday Telegram

### Franklin Arterial planning speeds up

Planners are looking at a range of ideas for revitalizing neighborhoods while moving traffic.

By TOM BELL, Staff Writer

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PORTLAND — In the late 1960s, city officials decided that the best way to revitalize downtown Portland was to make it easier for drivers to get there. So officials demolished a swath of rundown neighborhoods and built a divided highway from Back Cove to the waterfront, creating Franklin Arterial.

Today, planners are working to undo the damage to the urban fabric while maintaining the arterial's ability to move thousands of motorists through the corridor every day.

The Franklin Arterial Study Group, which has been meeting since the fall, is considering a number of ideas, including realigning the state-owned road and squeezing the east- and westbound lanes closer together to open up land for development.

The committee also is considering installing roundabouts -- small versions of rotaries -- to slow traffic and eliminate delays at traffic lights.

The committee is also looking at ways to reconnect streets that Franklin Arterial divided, such as Federal and Oxford streets.

The committee is not looking at reducing the number of lanes.

The 15-member committee includes representatives from neighborhoods, business leaders and the Maine Department of Transportation.

Several city officials are helping out, including Public Services Director Mike Bobinsky and city planners Alex Jagerman and Bill Needleman.

Boyd Marley, a former state legislator from Portland, and Markos Miller, a former president of the Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Association, are co-chairs.

The committee is inviting the public to participate in a design workshop on April 29 at the Ocean Gateway terminal.

The event is designed to generate ideas for the committee to translate into feasible design concepts, Miller said. The committee's goal is to create three options for further evaluation.

There is a lot of real estate for the committee to work with. Because of its wide grassy median, Franklin Arterial is 210 feet wide at Oxford Street, its widest point, and 80 feet wide at its narrowest point, Marginal Way.

Eliminating much of the median would free up 5 or 6 acres for development, committee members said.

On Wednesday, committee members prepared for the April 29 meeting by participating in the kind of brainstorming session they will ask the public to have.

Divided into two tables, committee members worked on an aerial map and used color-coded paper to designate roadway, open space, residential development and mixed-use commercial development.

At times, committee members disagreed over the height of buildings that could be built on the corridor and the location of roundabouts.

"This is a fascinating and hopeful process," said Bobinsky, who took notes of the discussion on a flip chart.

When the planning and feasibility analysis is completed, he said, the city will be in a good position to pursue state and federal dollars for the project.

He added that the sophisticated "context-sensitive" planning process will help win attention in Washington, D.C.

The sale of land for development would also generate money for the project, Miller said.

John Duncan, director of the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System, observed the meeting.

He said that state and federal officials have told him they are impressed with the committee's work.

"They are energized and well-organized," he said. "They are really working hard."

The April 29 workshop will begin at 7 p.m. Participants should register at [www.portland.gov](http://www.portland.gov).

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