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## Portland Press Herald    Maine Sunday Telegram

### City would benefit from a better arterial

A public planning process creates a chance to fix some of the damage done years ago.

April 17, 2009

It's been more than 40 years since the four-lane Franklin Arterial replaced the old two-lane Franklin Street, consuming dozens of homes and businesses, part of a public park and cutting the East End off from the rest of the city.

An effort is now under way to reclaim some of what was lost with that decision. It promises to be some of the most important public planning to take place in the city since the Bayside vision was developed a decade ago. People who live and work in Portland should not miss their chance to participate.

The issue has been incorrectly cast as a conflict between pedestrians and cyclists on one side and those who drive on the other.

It's true that the alignment of Franklin Arterial, with its four travel lanes separated by an over-wide median, creates a dangerous environment for people who try to cross it.

But this should not be considered a fight between one form of transportation and another. Franklin is a heavily used gateway for cars to enter the city and will remain that even after any re-engineering. Plans under discussion do not reduce the number of travel lanes, but improve pedestrian and bicycle safety by better using the available space. A well-designed roadway should be able to move traffic between Marginal Way and Commercial Street without cutting the peninsula in half.

But in addition to those concerns, redesigning the arterial offers a chance to get back some of what was lost when it was built. In that sense, this should be seen as an economic development issue as well as a transportation issue.

Land that now sits empty could be on the city's tax rolls, and developers could create energy-efficient living and working options that are becoming increasingly desirable.

Along with empty and underused property in Bayside, Portland would have an enviable ability to grow substantially without spreading out.

Building Franklin Arterial was a choice made by civic leaders that changed the face of the city for two generations. Portlanders have another chance to make policy choices that could have an equally long-lasting effect. A community design workshop on April 29 (see [www.portlandmaine.gov](http://www.portlandmaine.gov) for more information) offers a good way to get involved in that process.

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