

Maine – New Hampshire Traffic Incident Management Committee
January 15th, 2021, 12:00pm
Zoom Meeting

In attendance were: Stephanie Carver (SMPDC), Eric Sanderson (SMPDC), Lt. Erik Baker (Maine State Police), Gregory Stone (Maine Turnpike Authority), Jeff Rowe (Kennebunk Fire/Rescue Chief), Randy Illian (Maine DOT), Nick King (New Hampshire DOT), Peter Merfield (Maine Turnpike Authority), Mark Kirouac (New Hampshire DOT), Abbey Crowell (Maine Turnpike Authority), Chief Mark Newport (Portsmouth Police Department), Bill McQuillen (Portsmouth Fire Department), Mark Orrico (AutoBase Safety Patrol), Chris Balentine (York Fire Department), Abigail Mendoza (Senator Susan Collins' Office), Steve Landry (MaineDOT), Peter Merfeld (Maine Turnpike Authority), Joe Dubais (MaineDOT)

1. Welcome, Introductions & Agency/Department Reports

Stephanie opened the meeting at 12:03 PM

2. Review of Recent Incidents

Lt. Erik Baker updated the Committee on the fatal incident on the Turnpike that occurred on Tuesday, January 12 at 1:34PM. The driver slammed into a Kittery Police Officer parked into the median, with the officer sustaining injuries. This incident shutdown Northbound Turnpike lanes for approximately 10 minutes. Southbound traffic was also affected, due to the original cruiser chasing the suspect attempting a PIT maneuver and being stuck in traffic lane 1. The traffic was diverted at Exit 7 in York Southbound, and traffic was also diverted through the weigh station in York.

The Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA) had message boards activated and updates sent to users. Approximately 40 minutes after the pursuit ended, there was a report of a double fatal in the Northbound lane in the area of the Kittery Rest Area, with a car hit between two tractor trailer trucks. MTA crews came out to assist, and lanes 2 and 3 were kept open while lane 1 was closed for investigation. Overall, the communication worked well between groups and a criminal investigation is ongoing. Maine State Police also responded on scene.

Chris Balentine added that the York Fire Department initiated the existing call tree on file, and that everyone worked well together. Lt. Baker noted that until the investigation is concluded, the group should not conduct an After Action Review. At that point, the Committee will consider revisiting such a review.

The Committee discussed what updates were given to New Hampshire drivers heading North towards Maine. Nick King updated the group that message boards were believed to be activated, and he will follow up with Lt. Baker for exact times to aid in his timeline.

Nick King updated the Committee of a suicide attempt recently on the High Level Bridge on I-95, and NHDOT notified MaineDOT and the Maine Turnpike.

3. Upcoming planned events

The Committee discussed traffic volumes and potential delays due to Presidential Inauguration and potential protests. Steve Landry confirmed that volumes are evenly spread through the day with peak hour volumes still lower than pre-pandemic volumes, but overall volumes are just short of what they were in early 2020 pre-pandemic.

4. TIM Trainings

Steph discussed the extended contract with Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS), which is used to coordinate trainings statewide and will be used to develop an online training moving forward during the pandemic. A “Train-the-Trainer” course was held in November, which went smoothly. BACTS will try to come up with additional virtual trainings, but Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) prefers a full day or two of training, as opposed to a four hour class.

The Midcoast TIM COmmittee at its meeting earlier this week discussed having a training, and Eric Sanderson added that this training, if it happens, will likely be available to any participants interested from the Maine/New Hampshire TIM Committee.

5. Agency and Department reports

Nick King discussed construction being done in center medians, so impacts to traffic is minimal on the New Hampshire side of the border at this point.

Steve Landry updated the Committee on MaineDOT’s Strategic Plan for Traffic Incident Management. The Plan will look to come up with guidelines for each of the state’s many groups and development of online trainings that are partly interactive. The proposals have been received and will be reviewed on Tuesday, January 19th, 2021 by MaineDOT and others.

Steve also added that MaineDOT is considering ramp metering during and after the high level bridge project is completed. He asked the group if they could please let him know if the Department could help in getting more signage and TIM equipment in underserved areas. Regional Planning Organizations across the state could assist in this matter, and the consultant brought on board for the Strategic Plan will come to a future meeting of the Maine/New Hampshire TIM Committee. This will likely be on the next agenda come spring.

Steph updated the Committee that the Greater Portland TIM Committee is now staffed by the Greater Portland Council of Governments, and that having staff for these Committees that work locally will strengthen the TIM programs across Maine, which could have a great deal of impact on the development of the Strategic Plan. If any group members have any items that SMPDC staff can assist in, please let Steph or Eric know (scarver@smpdc.org or esanderson@smpdc.org).

The Committee discussed traffic speeds increasing despite volumes remaining relatively consistent.

6. Next Meeting Date and Agenda Items

The next meeting will depend on when the TIM Strategic Plan consultant is ready to interview our Committee, but will likely be in the spring around the March or April timeframe. Details will be provided.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:40PM