MaineDOT Fact Sheet

MaineDOT Policies and Laws Related to Bridges in Maine

The Maine Bridge Law (23 MRSA, Chapter 9, Subchapter 4-A) was amended in 2001 to clarify roles and responsibilities of municipalities and MaineDOT as it pertains to bridge structures.

Effective July 1, 2001, bridges were classified by size:

- A "Bridge" is defined as having a span length of at least 20 feet, in accordance with federal law.
- A "Minor Span" is defined as having a span length of at least 10 feet but less than 20 feet.
- A "Culvert" has a span less than 10 feet or is multiple pipes or other structures with a combined opening of less than 80 square feet in area.

FMI: mainedot.gov/bridges

Background

Since 2001, changes in stream crossing regulations began to require that replacement structures have significantly longer span lengths. In addition, permits may be needed from the Army Corps of Engineers, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, US Fish & Wildlife, Maine Inland Fisheries &Wildlife, or the Maine Department of Marine Resources. Because the length of these replacement structures may change its legal bridge definition, the following information is critical to understand prior to design or construction.

MaineDOT Policy and Laws

- According to 23 MRSA § 563 (1), MaineDOT may post or close a structure when it reasonably determines that the closure is necessary to protect the traveling public from an imminent hazard. It is recommended that a new bridge is engineered to ensure that it can handle expected traffic loads. This includes all structures on a public way with a span greater than 20 feet as measured from abutment face to abutment face along the centerline.
- MaineDOT will inspect all minor spans and bridges on a public way every two years, and will notify municipalities of any substantial deficiencies. A "public way" is defined as one that is 1) maintained by a public authority and 2) open to public travel with standard passenger vehicles, without restrictive gates or prohibitive signs or regulations
- Minor spans on town ways remain the full responsibility of the municipality.
- Pursuant to 32 MRSA §1254, a licensed professional engineer is required when the completed project cost estimates exceed $100,000 and does not create an undue risk to public safety or welfare.

Examples

1) If a municipality creates a low use or redundant bridge* (LURB) when replacing a culvert or a minor span:

- The maintenance responsibilities will remain with the municipality.
- Upon petition by the municipality and approval by MaineDOT, future capital responsibility for LURBs may be shared 50/50 between the state and municipality if funding is available.
- Municipalities are strongly encouraged to provide the design to MaineDOT early in the design process for review and input. The design also must be load-rated in the design process and reviewed by MaineDOT staff to comply with federal requirements. If MaineDOT does not review the design beforehand, it might still have to post a new bridge for weight if it poses a hazard.
- MaineDOT's Bridge Maintenance office must be contacted when the project is completed.
- This LURB will become part of the statewide bridge inventory and MaineDOT will begin inspections every two years.

2) If a municipality creates a minor span when replacing a culvert:

- Maintenance responsibilities will remain with the municipality.
- Future capital costs will remain with the town.
- This minor span will become part of the statewide bridge inventory and MaineDOT will begin inspections every two years.

3) If a municipality creates a bridge when replacing a culvert or a minor span:

- The municipality should contact the MaineDOT Bridge Maintenance office (207/624-3600) immediately to discuss this option early in the planning process.
- After discussion with MaineDOT, if the bridge is built to standards found in the Bridge Design Guide **(mainedot.gov/bdg)**, future capital improvements and maintenance will be the responsibility of MaineDOT.
- If a municipality chooses to build a structure greater than 20 feet but does not request for MaineDOT to have future maintenance and capitol responsibility, this can occur with an agreement between the two entities. The bridge is still inspected by MaineDOT and can be posted as stated earlier.
- The MaineDOT Bridge Maintenance office must be contacted when the project is completed.
- This bridge will become part of the statewide bridge inventory and MaineDOT will begin inspections every two years.

* Low Use or Redundant Bridges: A low use bridge is a bridge on a town way with an average daily traffic count of less than 100. A redundant bridge is a bridge located on a town way with an average daily traffic count multiplied by the detour length of less than 200.

Hydraulic standards for new bridges can be found in Section 2.3.10.2, Subsection A in MaineDOT's Bridge Design Guide **(mainedot.gov/bdg)**

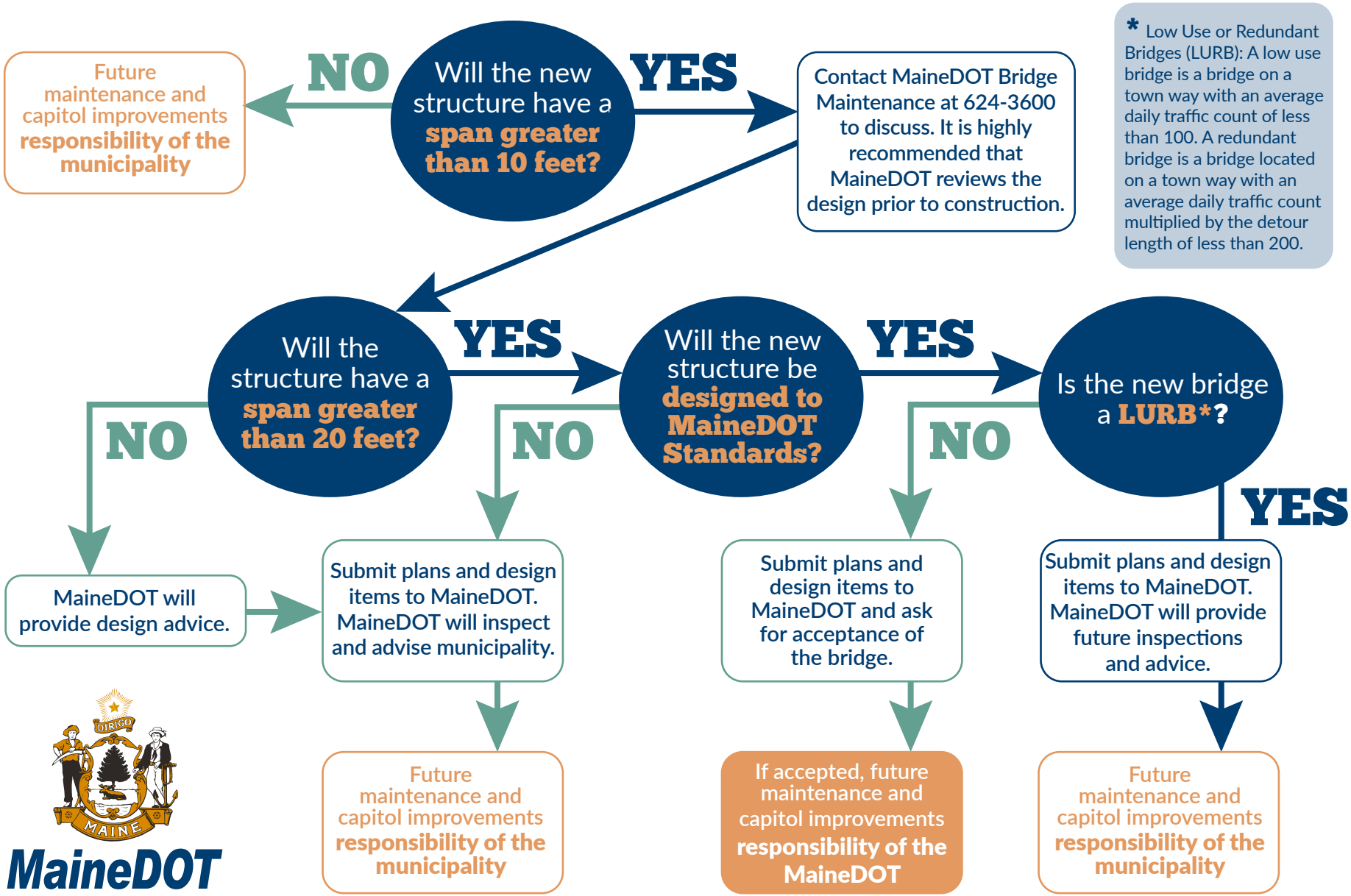
Not Recommended

Examples of design elements not recommended by MaineDOT are aluminum box culverts, precast block abutments, metal bin abutments, bridge foundations that are scour critical, bridges that do not have designed or crash tested bridge rail.

MaineDOT recommends that bridge designs be completed by design firms found on the department's pre qual website mainedot.gov

Upgrading a Crossing Structure?

MaineDOT maintains the responsibility to inspect and review public safety on all structures greater than 10 feet in span. This includes posting of bridges when necessary.



MaineDOT

September 2021