



Maine Turnpike News

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Forecasting Model Predicts Jump in Columbus Weekend Traffic

--Volumes expected to increase by 7% at York toll plaza--

PORTLAND—Reduced gas prices, peaking fall foliage and a promising weather outlook will bring plenty of visitors to Maine over the upcoming Columbus Day Weekend, according to a traffic forecasting model developed for the University of Maine Center for Tourism Research and Outreach (CENTRO) and the Maine Turnpike Authority. The forecasting model predicts that overall traffic at the Maine Turnpike's York toll plaza will increase by about 7% over last year. It predicts that roughly 35,000 vehicles a day will enter the Turnpike northbound on both Friday and Saturday. Some 36,000 vehicles are expected to head southbound through the York toll plaza on Monday.

The heaviest traffic is expected on Friday between 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. in the northbound direction, on Saturday between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. in the northbound direction and on Monday between 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. in the southbound direction. The Turnpike Authority has suspended all construction activities from Friday through Monday to accommodate weekend traffic.

In recent years, Columbus Day Weekend has surpassed Labor Day Weekend to become the Maine Turnpike's second busiest long holiday weekend of the year. In 2005, more than 680,000 vehicles traveled the Turnpike system-wide from Friday through Monday on Columbus Day Weekend. Fourth of July Weekend ranks as the busiest of the holiday weekends with more than 714,000 vehicles traveling the Turnpike system-wide. Labor Day Weekend ranks third and Memorial Day Weekend fourth.

The forecasting model has been developed by Dr. Charles Colgan, of the University of Southern Maine Center for Business and Economic Research. It is designed to consider not only past traffic data, but other key tourism industry drivers, including weather and gas prices. In the future, the model will be expanded to consider more complex data, including national economic trends and the impact of Canadian visitors, with the goal of providing the tourism industry with seasonal and annual projections for planning purposes.

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