

## MaineDOT Roadway Context Classification System Explanation

MaineDOT has created a context classification system that applies to all public roads in the state. The primary purpose of this classification system is to help determine speed limits and scope projects in a repeatable and reasonable manner.

### Proposed MaineDOT Roadway Context Classification System

MaineDOT is implementing five context classifications. The five current contexts are as follows:

- Rural.
- Rural Town.
- Village.
- Suburban.
- Urban.

These context categories will not replace urban compact lines which are important existing agreements for maintenance and cost share responsibility.

#### *Rural*

Rural roadway contexts in Maine exist statewide and serve as higher-speed connections between communities. The land use in these areas may be natural, agricultural, or dispersed residential. These road segments often have higher posted speeds (typically 40 to 55 MPH), fewer buildings with larger building setbacks from the road, low access density, low density of public and commercial facilities, and lower bicycle and pedestrian volumes. Roads in the Rural context primarily serve to provide safe and reliable mobility for people and goods between communities.



**FIGURE 1: MAINE RURAL CONTEXT EXAMPLE  
IMAGE IN WALDOBORO, ME  
(GOOGLE EARTH, 2023)**



**FIGURE 2: MAINE VILLAGE CONTEXT EXAMPLE  
IMAGE IN DAMARISCOTTA, ME  
(GOOGLE EARTH, 2023)**

### *Village*

Rural villages are very common in Maine, and they can vary significantly in size and density of development. MaineDOT has split these areas into two contexts, “Village” and “Rural Town”. The Village context represents the centers of heavily developed rural communities such as Boothbay Harbor, Bar Harbor, Norway, and Calais. Village areas are developed at a similar intensity to Urban areas, but they typically cover a smaller area, serve fewer people, have lower traffic volumes, and have less variety of land uses and businesses present.

Villages are also more likely to be isolated communities than urban areas, separated from other high population towns. Village contexts always have buildings constructed close together and close to the road. Heavy active transportation activity is expected. Sidewalks and on-street parking are common.

### *Rural Town*

Rural Town areas in Maine are less developed than the Village context and tend to appear either around the outskirts of a Village area or as the standalone center of a smaller rural town. These contexts areas are often referred to as a “rural crossroads” where small, built-up areas suddenly appear to drivers after traveling through miles of high-speed Rural context. These contexts are developed slightly closer together and closer to the road than Rural context areas, but they are not as densely developed as Village context areas. Rural Town locations in Maine typically provide a cohesive community of public facilities, commercial establishments, and residential land use, which outlying rural contexts do not have. Pedestrian volumes are often higher where sidewalks have been built, but moderate levels of ped and bike activity can be expected even when these facilities are not present. A Rural Town context can be completely residential if this happens over a significant distance with high development density.



**FIGURE 3: MAINE RURAL VILLAGE CONTEXT  
EXAMPLE IMAGE IN MONSON, ME  
(GOOGLE MAPS, 2023)**

### *Suburban*

Suburban contexts in Maine often occur in outlying areas of Urban contexts (and less frequently outside Village contexts) where a higher density of commercial stores, light industrial businesses, and residential users are interspersed. This context is characterized by a higher density of driveway access, moderate pedestrian or bicycle use, and larger building setbacks. Suburban contexts do not always have buildings constructed close to the road and the average building size tends to be larger.

Large commercial “big box” shopping areas are usually classified as Suburban. Other areas of moderate development are classified as Suburban when located in metropolitan areas outside of the Urban context. In daily use, these contexts experience a lot of turning movements and potential conflict with vehicles entering and exiting these commercial areas. Speeds and traffic operations should promote safety while allowing adequate mobility for business access. High-priority roads through Suburban contexts are some of the highest traffic volume roads in Maine because they are commuter corridors for people who live in the Rural and Suburban towns adjacent to the city.



**FIGURE 4: MAINE COMMERCIAL/SUBURBAN CONTEXT  
EXAMPLE IMAGE IN AUGUSTA, ME  
(GOOGLE MAPS, 2023)**



**FIGURE 5: MAINE URBAN CONTEXT EXAMPLE IMAGE  
IN BANGOR, ME  
(GOOGLE EARTH, 2023)**

### *Urban*

Urban roadway context in Maine exists in cities and metropolitan planning areas with dense land use, smaller building setbacks, often taller buildings, on-street parking, mixed commercial and residential use, and higher use by pedestrians and bicyclists. Speeds in the urban context should prioritize safety for all road users to foster comfortable access to businesses, public facilities, and residential neighborhoods. Urban contexts always have buildings constructed close together and close to the road. Sidewalks and on-street parking are common.