



Meeting Minutes

Date: December 1, 2008

Project: 08316

Subject: South Berwick Transportation Feasibility Study
Public Information Meeting –Town Hall

By: John Adams

Attendees: Tom Reinauer, SMRPC, 324-2952, treinauer@smrpc.org
Steve Sawyer, STI, 856-0277, ssawyer@sebagotechnics.com
John Adams, STI, 856-0277, jadams@sebagotechnics.com
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Lynne Seeley, STI, 846-6407, lseeley1@maine.rr.com
Roberta Orsini, SB Town Mgr., 384-3300x115, rorsini@sbmaine.us
Carol Morris, Morris Comm., cmorris@morriscomm.net

CC: Attendees via email
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A public information meeting was held to introduce the feasibility study and receive comments from the public. Tom Reinauer had prepared an agenda, which is attached, to guide the initial discussion. The following notations were made during the conversation:

§ Tom provided some introductory remarks to the public. Tom then provided an overview of the meeting agenda. He mentioned that the MDOT is about to complete a study of the Route 236 corridor from Kittery to South Berwick and that this South Berwick feasibility study will focus on the downtown area. He informed the public that there was also a Steering Committee formed for the study that they are welcome to be a part of. He announced that the next steering committee meeting would be on December 17, 2008. Tom stated the goals for tonight's meeting were to receive comments from the public in regards to what the existing problems are today and what the future vision for the downtown area is. The feasibility study is a necessary step in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process that will need to follow this Study to implement the recommendations. Tom then introduced Steve Sawyer.

§ Steve used a series of power point slides and began by talking about his previous involvement with a similar study that was done for the downtown South Berwick that involved looking at a bypass route back in 1986. At that time, the consensus was that a bypass was not wanted. He stressed the need to write a “Purpose and Need Statement” as part of the NEPA process. Steve then went over some traffic information related items included below.

- Population of South Berwick had increased by 50% since 1980, now at 7,000.
- Transportation connections of residential areas being traffic generators and service and employment areas being traffic attractors.
- Reviewed a regional map and highlighted several of the towns in the regions.
- Reviewed population trends from 1990 to 2004 for area towns with noted increases; Berwick 17%, N. Berwick 23%, South Berwick 21%, Sanford 5%.
- Noted AADT (average annual daily traffic) increase on Routes 4 and 236 from 1986 to 2008 – Route 4 8,500 vehicles to 14,000 vehicles, Route 236 10,600 vehicles to 15,300 vehicles.

The following are comments from the audience (names are included if known) and for study team members.

- Resident: Approximately 100 cars bypass the downtown area by using Highland Avenue in the AM & PM peak hours.
- Resident: Much of the traffic that passes through the downtown area is from other Towns, not residents.
- Resident: We need to address village issues. We may want to consider making it harder to use the downtown area for through traffic, i.e. – try to discourage commuters.

§ Carol Morris then spoke about the importance of the “Purpose and Need (P&N)” statement that will need to be developed for the feasibility study and the NEPA process. She reviewed examples of P&N statements that were developed for other projects. She indicated the first step was to define the problem in South Berwick, specifically, ‘How does congestion in South Berwick affect your life and why?’ She then encouraged members of the public to share their comments on the question.

- Resident - John Rudolph: Has previously served as Chairman of the South Berwick Traffic Commission which performed a similar study in 2005 and although he appreciates this Study, he feels the data is not complete and the South Berwick Traffic Commission has already created a P&N statement for their previously completed Study. They have listed many items in their P&N statement; John then read their Setting and P&N statements. A copy is attached.

- Resident - Jack: There are many existing local roads that are functioning as mini bypass routes due to the congestion of Main Street. These roads include: Liberty, Vine, Great Works, Witchtrot, Academy, Norton, Young, Parent, Sewall, Colcord, Goodwin, Highland, Hewett and others. He also feels that pedestrian access is very important.
- Resident - Jerry: He had participated in a previous Legislative study (1998-1999). MDOT and police did study of Route 236 corridor from I-95 to Route 236 in Berwick. Some of the recommendations included; redesign of the Route 91/236 intersection, Route 236 in downtown South Berwick – add left-turn lanes, etc. He also noted his frustration with the Study after Study that seems to happen with no actual improvements being made.
- Resident - John Rudolph: The study needs to be regional and must include regional dialogue with a regional consensus.

§ Steve Sawyer added that we will look for ways to manage demand using carpooling, bus routes, park & rides, etc.

- Highland Ave Resident: Very difficult to pull out of driveway in the AM peak hours. There are regional effects on downtown area such as when there are accidents on Route 16 vehicles divert to Route 236 which becomes a nightmare with congestion. Thinks it is important to keep downtown walkable, friendly, narrow, user friendly – all ways to improve quality of life.
- Resident - Anne: Part of problem is lack of carpooling. There is an excellent location for a park & ride site on Railroad Avenue. Also traffic calming and mass transit options may be funded with carbon offsets.
- Resident - Michelle: Lives on Parent Street, kids can't cross street, crossing is impossible. Also lefts in & out of Parent Street and exiting Academy Street are very difficult and dangerous. She suggests use of one-way streets at different times of the day. Gorrill-Palmer did a study of the downtown looking at parking and how the sidestreets operate. She suggests using grant money to fund the solution.
- Brattle Street Resident: Suggests activating old trolley bed that exist.
- Resident: Residents using local roads as mini-bypass routes to get around town. These mini bypass routes are needed. How much worse would it be without these roads? Also some local bridges out of service, which will make traffic problems worse. After accidents in the area it takes a long time for traffic to recover to normal levels/operation. From the south, the intersection of Route 91 and Route 236 needs a traffic light and also the speeds on Route 236 should be reduced. There is a 50 mph zone about 1 mile long that should be reduced. Overall, we need consistent lower speeds limits in the area. We should look at reducing commuter traffic by using bus service – C&J could offer a stop in Town.

- Resident: Noted that the key to lower speed limits and reducing speeds is consistent enforcement, however, manpower is a problem for enforcement.

§ Steve Sawyer added that speed limit signs are not enough, motorists drive at the speeds that the road allows or that feels comfortable for the driver.

- Resident: Noted that originally Route 236 was built/designed as a high speed highway to help get traffic off of Route 101.
- Resident: She lives south of downtown and does not come into town during peak traffic times. Congestion definitely impacts local businesses negatively. Need to divert commuter traffic around the downtown area by using a bypass. If a bypass is built, it needs to be a limited access highway.
- Resident: Asked if a bypass is a realistic option?

§ Carol Morris indicated that all options are going to be looked at, ranging from doing nothing (status quo) to building a bypass.

- Resident: Suggested having a weigh station on Route 4 as a way of discouraging large truck traffic and keeping them on I-95. MDOT may not be able to fund a weigh station so could locals fund it?
- Resident: New South Berwick resident would like the problems solved. Right now she travels the downtown area by knowing the local routes and what the best times to use them are.
- Resident - Terry: Will the solutions engage the large employers such as the Shipyards and Hospitals? Also will C&J and The Coast bus services be contacted?

§ Steve Sawyer indicated that yes they can be contacted. We already have some info on employees address by zip code from a study we are working on for Dover, New Hampshire.

- Resident - Pat: Adjusts times to travel to the downtown area based on the congestion.
- Resident: Vitality of the downtown is very important. The lack of parking and congestion is negatively impacting downtown.

§ Steve Sawyer noted the study he completed in 1986 concluded that the businesses did not want a bypass, maybe this time businesses will think differently about a bypass.

- Resident: No parking in the downtown except for on-street parking.
- Resident: We need to slow down traffic in the downtown area.

§ Carol Morris poled the audience on two questions; the first was, Is it important to maintain the downtown area? – a majority said yes, the second question asked if the perception of the downtown congestion was worse than reality? – approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of audience said yes.

- Resident: Stated that the perception of congestion on Route 236 south of downtown was worse than reality.
- Resident: Indicated that north of the downtown area you can always find parking near businesses and never have to wait more than 5 minutes. They feel it is important to reduce speeds of traffic in the downtown area.
- Resident: Lives on Brattle Street and it is very difficult to enter and exit. They try to avoid downtown during the AM & PM peak hours. Noted that they felt PM not as bad as AM peak. Also need to encourage carpooling and use of mass transit (buses).
- Resident: It would help downtown situation if more children used the school buses to travel to school, however, the buses are severely underutilized because parents drive the kids to and from school instead.
- Resident: Very important to keep school in the downtown area.
- Resident: Participated in the T.Y. Lin study in 1986, there have been numerous other studies and nothing has come of them – no solutions. Does not believe that a solution will come of this study. No one (MDOT) will solve the problems, therefore, we will have to do it for ourselves. He thinks we should make downtown area an urban compact community so we will have more control of what happens.

§ Steve Sawyer stated that this Study team understands the frustrations of the public over the multiple Studies that have been completed with no real solutions implemented. It is not our intent to re-invent the wheel with this Study, but to utilize the previous work with some additional analysis to give a full range of solutions. This will lead us into the next step for implementing the solutions, which is the NEPA process.

- Resident: The school system and other larger players in the area must be brought into this study.
- Resident: Traffic from I-95 is a problem; People use the area routes to avoid tolls on I-95. We need to re-establish the tolls that are paid when they get off I-95, this will discourage using local routes to bypass I-95.
- Resident: Want better parking downtown so that local business can thrive.
- Resident: Noted that the Maine Turnpike completed a study in the last year or two on toll avoidance.

- Resident: We are losing our quaint village look.
- Resident: Has followed trucks off of I-95 and back onto I-95 to avoid tolls.
- Resident: Concerned if the bypass is the solution, there will be no money to get it built.
- Resident: During the summer months the recreation traffic increases in the downtown area.

These minutes represent the understanding of the author as to what transpired at this meeting. If there has been a misinterpretation of any aspect of the discussion, please let STI know so that these minutes can be updated. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this regard.

Respectfully submitted,

John Adams
SEBAGO TECHNICS, INC.

JQA:jqa/df