

MEMORANDUM

To: Route 236 Implementation Committee and Interested Parties

From: Josh Mack, Transportation Planner

Date: January 31, 2006

RE: Meeting Notes from 236 Meeting on January 26th, 2006

Those in attendance included Dan Blanchette, Eliot Town Manager; Diane Brandon, Community Wellness Coalition; Jonathan Labonte, Maine Turnpike Authority; Josh Mack, Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC)/KACTS; Terry Oliver, South Berwick Public Works; Tom Reinauer, SMRPC/KACTS; Rick Rossiter, Kittery Public Works; Duane Scott, Maine DOT; Steve Workman, Eastern Trail Management District.

After introductions, the meeting began with a staff update on various Route 236 Corridor Committee activities:

January 11th Truck Issues Meeting Update

- The focus of the meeting was truck enforcement. Several state police representatives were on hand. There was clarification by the state police of the traffic laws that local police can already enforce. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed by all parties that Eliot Police Chief Ted Short would follow up with Colonel Poulin, Chief of the State Police, requesting access to additional training for local officers to strengthen truck enforcement in the area.
- Staff presented a data packet with information breaking out permitting information, truck average annual daily traffic (aadt) and truck crash histories in the vicinity of Route 236 and Route 4. Route 236 experiences roughly 4% of the entire permitting a load in the state. By comparison, the Maine Turnpike Authority handles roughly 25% of the permitting load.
- At the meeting, staff were asked to follow up and examine additional data. The Maine Turnpike Authority requested information as to the percentage of manufactured homes traveling on the Turnpike. According to the Overlimit Permitting Office's FY 2005 data, manufactured homes represent less than 1% of the entire overlimit traffic passing through the Turnpike. Another data request was a breakdown of the number of crashes involving overlimit vehicles in the Route 236 area and in the state. Staff is currently working with the State Police to try to attain that information.
- John Rudolph asked staff to confirm the figure in the packet that cites the number of overlimit vehicles that are traveling on Route 236 that are able to travel on the Turnpike. Staff did not have the packet at the meeting, but agreed to repeat it in these notes: *Ninety-three (~6%) of the loads routed through Route 236 had the option of taking the Turnpike in their routing instructions, meaning the load dimensions, weights and routing was such that the load could avoid Route 236 by going on the Turnpike. All but one of these loads was a modular home. Eighty (~86%) of these loads had destinations out-of-state. Most of the load destinations are listed as simply "NH Line" without mention of*

the out-of-state city destination, so it is difficult to ascertain if the destination of the load would make it more convenient for the driver to take Route 236 instead of the Turnpike (page 3 of packet).

- Josh Mack noted that he would follow up with Representative Sally Lewin to get more information about the parcel that she spoke of at an earlier meeting that had been offered by the owner in the past for truck inspection/enforcement activities.

Planning Board Workshops Update

- Tom Reinauer announced that he met with the South Berwick Planning Board on January 17th to explain the technical services that staff can provide to the board to improve access management planning for the town. The planning board was receptive to this offer. Staff will follow up with Town Planner Jim Fisk to develop next step actions.
- Staff have arranged a meeting with the Town of Eliot Planning Board on March 7th to also introduce staff's technical services. The Town of Kittery will be contacted shortly for a similar meeting.

Eliot Traffic Issues

- Tom Reinauer announced that he wrote a letter on for the Town of Eliot requesting Maine DOT to reexamine the Bolt Hill Road flashing beacon proposal. The town has not made a determination as to whether they want to submit the letter to Maine DOT at this point.
- Eliot Police Chief Ted Short has made a request to Maine DOT to reduce the speed limit in front of Eliot Crossings to 35 MPH. Maine DOT had agreed in a return letter to change the speed limit to 40 MPH.

Rick Rossiter letter to Route 236 Committee

- Rick Rossiter presented a letter he wrote to the Route 236 Committee concerning the likely financial burden that towns on the Route will face in the future. He noted that per a Maine DOT ruling, Kittery will now be accommodating roughly 1.3 more miles of Route 236 as an urban compact zone. The area in which they will be assuming responsibility will extend from the Kittery Traffic Circle to the road that leads to the town's maintenance facility on Mackenzie Road. This means that the town will now assume maintenance responsibility. Rick noted that South Berwick and Eliot are nearing the current threshold of a 7,500 population to be eligible for an urban compact designation. The committee and towns need to keep this in mind in the future since it is likely that the new Census will show that at least South Berwick will rise above the 7,500 population threshold. This will mean that towns will need to raise new funds for road maintenance. Rick explained that he viewed Maine DOT rulings on urban compact zones as being "arbitrary and capricious" so it will be difficult to predict the urban compact changes to the corridor in the future. He explained that Kittery has assumed up to 17 miles of roadway since the urban compact rule went into affect. The Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation Study (KACTS) MPO budget allocation of \$1.3 million is not sufficient to keep up with these additional costs. Rick also pointed out that he sees the committee's role as a group to plan and ensure that the road's level of service (LOS) remains high, and is concerned that urban compact zones will undermine the LOS. Rick asked what the current LOS is for the highway.

- Duane Scott offered to contact and invite Maine DOT's Peter Coughlin to a future Route 236 meeting to discuss urban compact designations and clarify ways in which they change financial and maintenance responsibilities.
- Tom remarked that Maine DOT as part of its study will examine the road's current LOS and develop a model to predict future LOS based on a "no highway improvement" analysis.

Development of Medium and Long Term Goals

This discussion proceeded to a group dialogue about the need to further develop medium and long term goals for the Route 236 Action Plan. The following points were developed during this discussion:

- John Rudolph asked if the Maine DOT study will provide information that will point us in a medium and long term direction? Would the study help point to the feasibility of developing an equivalent of an express lane or a series of access roads? Josh noted that Committee's plan continues to be that the Maine DOT study will be used as the data and modeling capacity to help the group and towns evaluate the next step for improving the traffic congestion and routing challenges of the Route 236 corridor in the medium and long term.
- Tom noted that considering the traffic volume level that Route 236 is lucky thus far not to attract more traffic intensive development.
- Terry Oliver noted that the time has come to investigate ROW possibilities for alternate routing.
- Diane Brandon said that it would be very important when assessing the routing and traffic problem that it also incorporate the Route 1 and Turnpike area, since all traffic patterns affect each other.
- Jon Labonte asked to be brought up to speed with the group. Is there compelling evidence that the mobility and safety of Route 236 are in danger, before the Maine DOT study is finished? Should we wait for the study to be completed? Tom answered that there are specific locations, particularly the South Berwick downtown area, where there is no question that mobility is a problem and a fix will eventually need to happen.
- Steve Workman answered that the group also has a compelling case from a emergency management standpoint. Recent events with flooding and crashes on the Turnpike, Route 236 and/or Route 1 have made our highways virtually parking lots. Tom added that he is not aware of a plan to rectify these emergency situations. He also pointed out that the project schedules for the Spaulding Turnpike and the Memorial Bridge on Route 1 point to another cause to begin developing medium and long term routing solutions.
- Jim Fisk said that all new construction projects are done as a "design-build" concept. No funding is in place, so the design, build and then toll a road is a increasingly accepted practice in this country.
- Terry observed that KACTS funding is not really enough to maintain what we already have for infrastructure. It appears obvious that any traffic improvements to the current roadway is likely just to buy the towns on Route 236 some more time. From a long-term standpoint, it appears obvious that a limited access is needed for this region. Terry also noted that limited access highways do not need to be a Turnpike solution, citing the private group Washington Construction's activities around the country.
- John Rudolph said that it is vitally important that transit get more than just "lip service" from this group as being an alternative for this corridor. Tom noted that staff expect to

meet with transit groups next month to kickoff a discussion of transit feasibility in the region to discuss this alternative further.

- Tom noted that staff have access to basic map coverage information which could be used as an exercise for the group to understand the physical constraints in southern Maine to address the existing mobility constraints of the region. The group could use this information for a future visioning meeting if the committee was interested. Duane and Tom offered that maps could show trouble spots known by committee, high crash locations, traffic lights, future projects, etc.,.
- Duane explained that Maine DOT cannot “draw lines” on a map, because it could be perceived as being inconsistent with several state and federal mandates, even if a visioning meeting drawing lines on maps was simply a way to understand the physical constraints of the region.
- Tom noted that perhaps the committee should also revisit the Purpose and Needs statement and Action Plan as the committee moves forward on medium and long term goal making and implementation.

The committee agreed to have a March Visioning Meeting. Identified goals of the meeting would be to begin developing medium and short term goals by revisiting the purpose and needs statement, the action plan, and marking up maps with various data layers presented. It was agreed that this visioning meeting should probably occur before a full public meeting is presented. For the public meeting, the group agreed that they should more fully develop medium and long term goals for presentation. The group scheduled a meeting for March 2nd from 9-12, meeting location to be announced. **This meeting time has been rescheduled for Wednesday, March 8th from 9-12 because of a staff meeting conflict. The meeting will be held at Kittery Town Hall.**