

MEMORANDUM

To: Route 236 Implementation Committee and Interested Parties

From: Josh Mack, Transportation Planner

Date: March 9, 2006

RE: Meeting Notes from 236 Meeting on March 8th, 2006

Those in attendance included David Burke, South Berwick Planning Board; Diane Brandon, Community Wellness Coalition; Dennis Emidy, Maine DOT; Cathy Goodwin, Greater York Chamber of Commerce; Jonathan Labonte, Maine Turnpike Authority; Josh Mack, Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC)/KACTS; Fred Michaud, Maine DOT; Terry Oliver, South Berwick Public Works; Kate Pelletier, Eliot Planning Department; Tom Reinauer, SMRPC/KACTS; Rick Rossiter, Kittery Public Works.

Staff updates:

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

- Per the Committee's request, the Maine State Police sent a 2003-2005 crash analysis of overlimit commercial vehicle crashes statewide. In that three year period there were three fatalities in the state involving overlimit commercial vehicles. With regard to the Route 236 corridor, there were four crash incidents, none of which involved a fatality. Three of these crashes occurred in Eliot, and one on Main Street in South Berwick. More summary information on these crash statistics will be posted on the Route 236 Corridor Website on the documents page.
- Staff are preparing a list of access management regulation improvements for the town of South Berwick. Staff will be meeting with the South Berwick Planning Board on Tuesday, March 23rd to go over these recommendations with the Board.
- Staff met with the Eliot Planning Board on March 7 and made a presentation offering technical assistance in strengthening Eliot's access management regulations. The Board agreed to accept this service. Staff will begin putting some recommendations together and meeting again with the Planning Board again in the Spring.

Long-Range Visioning

After the update, staff presented large wall maps that were requested by the committee to use as "visioning" tools to further develop long range goals of the Route 236 Action Plan. Tom Reinauer explained that over the last year, the group has focused primarily on the short and medium range action items set by the committee. With regard to these action items, the committee has done a very good job following through with these goals. However, at the last meeting, it was agreed by the committee that long range objectives need further development. In addition to the maps showing southern York County, copies of the existing 236 Action Plan

purpose and needs statement and long range goals were handed out to the committee. The following observations were made by the committee with regard to a long range visioning:

- Communities in area feel like they are running around in circles sometimes in developing transportation study after study, but to what end?
- One prominent long-term vision for the corridor is some kind of traffic solution around Main Street in South Berwick.
- Maine DOT tends to cover their ears when the word “bypass” comes up as a potential solution. Committee members pointed out that the reasons for this include the transportation project demands of such a large state, the limited financial resources, and the state and federal mandates which require a balanced alternatives analysis.
- In the visioning process, there is a need to determine if 236 should be a community boulevard or a highway to move commuters. It can’t be both.
- Need to pay attention to aesthetics of highway improvements.
- How can we long-range plan with turnover of committee members pushing for a long-range solution for this corridor?
- Route 236 may be the ideal corridor for testing a possible upcoming Maine DOT initiative to develop corridor protection plans. Maine DOT’s current thinking is that maybe it would be useful to think of certain highways as “rivers”. Just as we utilize shoreland zoning to protect waterbody resources, are there lessons we can learn to protect highway resources?
- Maine DOT’s upcoming study for the 236 corridor will be to collect baseline data and information which will be input into a traffic model simulation program. This program will show the road performance 20 years into the future if no road improvements are made. How will this help/What does this mean for the long-range vision of the corridor?
 - This will likely generate a list of projects to mitigate existing and potential short to medium-term problems on the highway.
 - These projects *might* (because of limited funds and competition with the rest of the state) get funded over the next 10-15 years.
 - The study may “buy” the corridor another 15 years of useful life as a mobility corridor, but it does not have the budget or scope to meet the long-term alternatives analysis that the committee believes the corridor needs.
 - The committee is confident that a long-term mobility vision for the corridor is needed.
 - This Maine DOT study is important for the short and medium term, and the model will provide some needed data to support the committee’s strong confidence that the level of service and the safety will depreciate to intolerable levels.
- If, for the sake of an example, that a bypass was found to be needed for the region, it would take at least 12-15 years for such a project to actually be implemented.
- Communities will continue to depend on a dependable commuter route in this region, because of the draw of jobs in the Portsmouth area and Boston Area. People will continue to drive regardless of gas prices. People will also continue to seek more affordable housing in interior York County placing consistent pressure on this commuting route.
- Route 236 has been fortunate at this point not to draw any major high traffic generation developments. However this is likely to change as Metro Boston expands.
- Route 236, like other York County arterials, is starting to experience more developments seeking to capitalize on pass through traffic, which creates safety hazards and tends to add a minimum number of additional new car trips.

Based on this discussion, the committee made a decision that the appropriate course of action is that an alternatives analysis will be needed for this corridor, and the sooner a formal request is made for the analysis, the better. Tom Reinauer briefly described the alternatives analysis process, often using the recent alternatives analysis done for the Gorham bypass as an example. The Gorham alternatives analysis developed 6-7 potential alternatives that were evaluated using a number of cost/benefit analyses by a detailed engineering process with input from a committee comprised of town officials from a wide range of communities in the Metro Portland area. The major legislation guiding this process was the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) which requires a very intensive and detailed analysis ensuring that an alternative is merited, that the alternatives are as low impact as feasible, that they are a balanced analysis of modal alternatives, and that the selected alternative is the best expenditure of public funds for the traffic relief that it will provide to the area. Based on this conclusion the committee developed the following new action to support the long-term objectives of the action plan:

- **Make a formal request to the Maine DOT requesting an alternatives analysis for the Route 236 corridor. Staff will write a letter from the committee and provide suggested language to towns for municipal letters regarding this process.**
- **Take advantage of the municipal solicitation process that is occurring this week to organize the towns in the area to include the alternatives analysis in their packet application.**

Upcoming Maine DOT Traffic Study

The other part of the meeting focused on providing Dennis Emidy, engineer for the upcoming Maine DOT engineering study of Route 236, input on various traffic issues on the corridor. Dennis prepared a series of orthophoto maps showing various portions of the corridor. He explained that the study will range from the Portland Street (Route 4) and Main Street (Route 236/4) intersection in the village of South Berwick down to the Interstate 95 exit ramps on Route 236. Dennis explained that the study will contain some of the following elements:

- Traffic model simulation predicting No Build Option (no traffic improvements) out into the future 20 years;
- New Level of Service information. It was pointed out that the last Level of Service study was back in 1989.
- New turning movement data. Dennis showed various locations on the maps indicating the intersections that he will be analyzing.
- There remains an issue with data collection that Pike Industries still needs to complete its repaving project for Route 236. **Terry Oliver agreed to contact Pike Industries to discern the remaining project area that needs completion. Tom Reinauer agreed to call the Maine DOT project manager Dean Lessard to get a sense of what needs to be done and the schedule.**
- Dennis will be doing benefit/cost analyses for potential projects on the corridor. Dennis would need to submit projects from this study by September 15 in order for any projects to be considered for Maine DOT's next work plan. His schedule will be tight because he will be concurrently doing a Route 1 study in Brunswick.

Staff provided Dennis with various other intersections on the map that he should be aware of, and gave him information on certain rush hour trends on the corridor. Dennis took his own notes of these committee observations.

At the conclusion of the meeting, **Tom Reinauer announced that per the committee's request at the last meeting, staff would attempt to develop some possible alternative routes that the committee could use as a basis for understanding future building options and how they might relate to the physical constraints and conservation areas in southern York County.**

The next meeting for the Route 236 Implementation Committee will take place on Wednesday, May 3rd, 2006, South Berwick Town Hall, Council Chambers.