

Towns of Wiscasset and Edgecomb
Joint Boards of Selectmen Workshop
Re: Wiscasset/Edgecomb US Route 1 Traffic Issues
November 14, 2011
Chapin Hall
Location: Chewonki Foundation Campus
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Facilitator: Jonathan Reitman

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Jonathan Reitman reviewed the agenda and proposed a set of Ground Rules for tonight's meeting.

Gerry Audibert discussed MaineDOT's role in this process and how they would like to proceed.

The hope is that the two Boards of Selectman will redevelop stronger working relationships with MaineDOT, and develop a common Vision and set of Goals for the Route 1 corridor in the two communities. The Department would like to work with the Boards to identify potential specific non-bypass strategies to implement the Vision.

We are not going to be able to solve all of the Route 1 traffic problems in the two communities. We all understand that there will not be a bypass. Any solutions must be performance-based, measurable and realistic, and we should keep our expectations real. The real question is: What do you want Route One to look like in 20 years, 10 years, or 5 years for now?

MaineDOT envisions that this will be a relatively short process (one year or less).

Purpose for tonight's meeting.

One of the primary reasons for this meeting is to reestablish strong working relationships both between the two communities and between the communities and MaineDOT.

Desired Outcomes for tonight and December 12: Jonathan noted that by the end of tonight's meeting, the group should have reviewed traffic data provided by MaineDOT, addressed some preliminary questions, developed a Vision and Goals for the area, and developed a set of criteria to use in evaluating any proposed strategies.

By the end of the meeting on December 12, the group will have agreed on a set of strategies that they would like MaineDOT to evaluate and implement in the short term (by summer, 2012). There may also be recommendations on longer-term strategies which may require MaineDOT to acquire and analyze data. Finally, there will be an understanding about how MaineDOT and the communities will continue to work together on an ongoing basis. MaineDOT expects the process will have a short duration (1 year).

Gerry noted that many non-by pass strategies have already been suggested over the years, but this is an open forum for more ideas. He then presented relevant data in a PowerPoint format (attached):

Discussion of PowerPoint Presentation:

Some participants wondered why MaineDOT was using 1988 traffic origin and destination data, when the Gateway One study is only 5 years old. It was noted the earlier study was much more detailed. **Goal for next meeting.** Report back on whether the Gateway One data significantly changes the traffic figures.

There was interest in the fact that much of the traffic which crosses Davey bridge is only going to Edgecomb or Boothbay, but a large portion continues on to points east and even beyond the county.

Information regarding travel distances and times for alternate routes to major points east of Boothbay was presented. It was noted of the alternate routes to Route 1 are routed highways and not local roads.

MaineDOT defines major delay as one in which traffic speeds drop below 25 miles per hour at either Wiscasset Ford or Birch Point Road in Wiscasset (northbound) and/or at Route 27 in Edgecomb (southbound).

There were roughly 20,000 vehicle hours of delay in 2010 and 2011. A vehicle hour of delay can be thought of as one vehicle delayed one hour or 2 vehicles delayed 30 minutes each.

There was discussion on the effectiveness of the 2010 uniformed officer traffic management pilot project. MaineDOT concluded the effort had minimal impact, although it did make things less chaotic. A Wiscasset participant asked in looking at traffic flow during the pilot project whether MaineDOT had taken into account that for 3 to 5 weeks during the study CMP and Asplundh had cut traffic down to one way traffic. Gerry noted the contractors were asked to advise the Towns when they were going to restrict traffic but did not do so, and that there are no laws requiring such notifications for the type of work that was being done. Several people commented that it is worth doing a police officer study again in the summer of 2012. One participant felt that the two officers did not understand their mission.

Section 106 & Historic Preservation Act --- the purpose of this slide was to show that we have constraints that we have to abide by in coming up with solutions. There was a brief discussion of the impact of Red's Eats on traffic flow in Wiscasset. This topic was deferred in a "parking lot" to discuss when the group considers specific strategies.

Participants were referred to page two of the "Establishing a Joint Vision" document where several "Questions to Ponder in Establishing a Joint Vision and Goals for US Route 1" were posed:

What are "acceptable" traffic delays in Wiscasset?

Gerry said that the department is interested in hearing from participants what they think is an acceptable traffic delay in terms of their quality of life.

One person said that "my first response is that no delay is acceptable. But if it is occasional then you tolerate it, but if the delays are everyday then that's a problem."

It was noted that this is a complex question for individuals to answer, because it is a subjective question. What is acceptable to one person may be intolerable for another.

Another participant said a 15-minute delay from Holbrook's Pond (at the end of Old Bath Road) through town was acceptable.

"If you live around here you know there is a delay and you plan your lifestyle around it. You learn during the summer not to go downtown during the day" another person said.

People generally understand that when you enter an urban setting traffic slows down and most people give themselves an extra 10-15 minutes because they know they will be held up in traffic.

Another person said a reasonable goal is to reduce travel time down to 20 minutes instead of 30-40 minutes.

Access Management and Land Use.

The land use as it is developing along Route 1 in the two communities is not necessarily fine, but it was noted that local control over these issues is important. The two towns would consider exploring a requirement to connect parking lots, share curb cuts, and are examining possible re-zoning. Zoning in both communities right now encourages development along Route 1.

Traffic Speeds

It was noted the northbound speed limit in Edgecomb increases quickly after the Davey Bridge.

There seems to be agreement that the speed limit approaching Eddy Road should be reduced for safety reasons.

Historic and Cultural Values

There was broad agreement that the Wiscasset Village Historic District designation was very important, and that any traffic strategies should be consistent with the historic designation.

"The history in this area is why people come to Wiscasset—it is important whether people are new residents or old."

"Improvements can be made so that they look period and historic." Bath was used as an example of a community that has modernized while maintaining a historic look.

Money

Several people asked whether there is going to be money to support these ideas. Gerry responded that funding is always something we have to address. Potentially there could be MaineDOT funding, Town funding and private funding for some strategies. He noted currently there is a small amount of money available for next summer to implement low cost solutions.

The core evaluation criteria will be costs and benefits. Those solutions that have a high benefit-to-cost will rise to the top.

MaineDOT was asked to look at alternate routes and work with people so they can see where the alternate routes are located.

It was also asked that MaineDOT work with companies that provide GPS information, like Google maps to let people know there is an alternate route because of delays in traffic. There are multiple places where that information can be sent. MaineDOT can provide information to travelers on alternate ways to go but we cannot force people to take alternate routes. (Post-workshop note: MaineDOT currently provides some traffic information to Google, but is not yet consistent in reporting major traffic delays. This is an area MaineDOT hopes to improve upon in the near future).

Establishing a Joint Vision & Goals for US Route 1:

There was broad agreement that we should smooth out the traffic flow by minimizing volume. Another way to think about this is that we want to maximize volume while minimizing delays. We should also minimize jay walking, as it impedes traffic flow.

Our vision includes improving traffic flow by examining directional flow of traffic along streets within Wiscasset. We must have a safe and smooth traffic flow for visitors and residents. We are pedestrian friendly and want to offer them good opportunities to cross Route 1 without inhibiting traffic. Safety (for drivers and pedestrians) remains our priority concern.

We (the towns and MaineDOT) must maintain our credibility by implementing something soon. The strategies we choose should protect and enhance the historic values of the area.

Our vision acknowledges that the most severe traffic problems are in July and August (“After September 1 you can drive to Damariscotta and not see a car.”).

We still want to be a destination, but our vision offers alternative routes for “through” travelers.

Our vision incorporates multi-modal approaches (e.g. buses for in town travel once people have parked.) Since Boothbay Harbor traffic is 18% of the traffic through Wiscasset and Edgecomb could there be a ferry system? Boothbay Harbor is able to accept larger ferries. Acknowledge that Boothbay is the number one tourist destination in Maine now.

Work to ensure Davey Bridge is no longer seen as a barrier for the rest of Lincoln County.

Criteria used to evaluate potential solutions

- 1) How much does it improve the traffic volume situation (benefits)?
- 2) What is the cost?
- 3) Is it sustainable? Keep in mind if you increase the capacity by decreasing the delay you will eventually fill the capacity up and we will be right back here.
- 4) What are the impacts on historic values?
- 5) Do something short term and then follow through with longer term goals. MaineDOT has lost credibility, and needs to improve its credibility by taking concrete actions.
- 6) Is the proposed strategy acceptable to the surrounding communities? Acceptability depends on what you are doing. You have to get the acceptance from the various communities and the municipalities that are affected the most.

Next Steps:

- MaineDOT was asked to “Give us something concrete...these sessions and task forces don’t lead to anything. “
- “MaineDOT should present us with something so that we can evaluate it.” The majority felt that MaineDOT should review a number of solutions that have been presented over the years and see if any of them meet the current criteria. MaineDOT was specifically asked to review the list of 38 potential non-bypass strategies (from the “Potential Non-Bypass Strategies” document), and eliminate ones that were unlikely to be funded. “Let’s not waste our time discussing strategies that should not be on the list.”
- Participants felt that “MaineDOT has the most data, so it knows what the best ideas are and those which are worthy of funding. We want MaineDOT to let us know what the Department thinks are the best ideas. We’d like MaineDOT to come to the next meeting with a “game plan” for what can be done in the short term.
- We don’t want to waste time in process; we need to do this in two meetings.
- Gerry stated he heard these comments and said that MaineDOT’s preference is to receive participants’ input before coming up with a game plan. He added that anything that will be implemented with state and federal monies has to be acceptable locally and regionally. He then handed out a packet that identified the current Potential Non-By pass Strategies.
- MaineDOT wants to be sure that other communities which are affected are kept well informed. If we have good communication with them, this will lead to understanding and that will lead to acceptance. It is important that after a meeting like this there is accurate and proper notification of what the discussion was about. At the next meeting, we should also decide how to keep surrounding communities involved.
- By the end of the December 12 meeting we will have identified top priority strategies we want the Department to implement in the short term and evaluate for the longer term. “Some we can do right away. Others will need more research and technical evaluation by MaineDOT,” Gerry said. We are not talking about a lengthy study; we are talking about a comprehensive list of ideas for next summer.

“Parking Lot” Ideas for Further Discussion:

- Red’s Eats
- Campaign for Alternate Routes to decrease volume, especially for those with destinations further Downeast.
- Traffic alerts through GPS technology.
- Use of other technologies while protecting drivers’ privacy.

Attachments – PowerPoint Presentation