

Wiscasset Transportation Committee
August 20, 2003

Present: Don Jones, Lois Kwantz, Seaver Leslie, Marguerite Rafter, Sean Rafter

The committee chairman, Don Jones, called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m. The minutes for August 4, 2003 were presented, discussed and amended. Seaver made a motion to postpone adoption of the minutes so that he could review them more thoroughly. Marguerite seconded the motion; all in favor.

Don presented a copy of a letter from a Stanley Freeman which had been sent to the local papers and to the TC re: bypass solutions . After review, the committee agreed to file it with correspondence.

Although this was a TC meeting, not a public workshop/hearing, Don proposed opening the floor to comments since there was a large audience in attendance. Most people attending were also at the public workshop which had been held on August 11, 2003 in the Lincoln County Communications Center meeting room. Paul Mronzinski read from an article that had just appeared in the Lincoln County News concerning where MDOT stands in the process of selecting a bypass.. Ed Hanscom of MDOT contends that the routes currently under review by MDOT **do** meet the need for traffic solutions long term and that the town would be better served in attempting to make the current routes the “best that they can be”. Paul stated that the ad hoc route is very similar to one that was rejected last year by MDOT and that the transportation committee should be working to make the existing routes “workable”. Don pointed out that the town manager (Larry Cilley), the economic developer (Andrew Gilmore) and the chairman of the selectboard (Mike Blagdon) have been meeting with the new commissioner and that he is anxious to work with the town.

Karl Tarbox reiterated that the town’s “window of opportunity” to effect changes is very small and that the ad hoc’s route is only a line on a map with many possibilities of fine tuning, but that it preserves the concept of keeping Route 1 S as our place of business development and Route 27 between the primary and high schools as our campus area. Karl also pointed out that Ed Hanscom’s comments should serve as a warning to those in town who still believe that MDOT will not build a route that the town does not want.

Other comments from the audience included things like:

The proposed routes are not a long term solution.

We need a regional route from Bath to Hope.

We voted down the proposed routes to help the folks living in town and now they want to put the route out in the country.

There are too many voices speaking; who speaks for the town?

MDOT will **not** entertain a route from Bowdoin past Camden, so we need to work to fix an acceptable route around the town of Wiscasset which is where MDOT sees to be the problem.

We need to deal with “what is”, not with “what ifs”.

If the by-pass begins around NAPA, what are the plans for “improving” Route 1 south of NAPA?

Improvements to Route 1 may very well come under the new “Gateway 1” proposal. The goal is to make the congested areas of Route 1 more efficient in order to maintain capacity of car movement. MDOT is already suggesting ways to do this with limiting curb cuts, access onto Route 1, promoting secondary road ways for locals and businesses to use, etc.

The Gateway 1 project is independent of the bypass issue; it will move forward; MDOT recognizes the congestion problems and wants to deal with them without building roads.

Are we prepared to accept a 4-lane highway from NAPA to the Woolwich? Do we want a speedway in Wiscasset, like Woolwich has become?

Penny Skillin urged the town to try “no-build” alternatives. She passed out a page with various suggested possibilities (see attached page).

Bill Hanson who works for that state and meets often with various departments that have input re: the bypass routes stated that there is no consensus among the different agencies. There is no consensus in town. He believes that the TC is not listening to “the people of the town” and that the ad hoc’s route is an 11th hour attempt to gain consensus that will not work.

George Jones stated that we have 2 months to bring **all** the people together to decide what is best. There are 2 givens: Wiscasset intends to develop Rte. 1 for business purposes and Rte. 27 has been designated as a school/community area. The MDOT routes violate both of those intentions.

Paul Morzinski pointed out that, last summer, the TC tried to be truthful and clear about the direction of the proposed routes; they tried to educate the community. He stated that the current routes do not cut the town in half because the intent is for the bypass to go over or under existing routes.

If we do not step forward and take a stand, we will have no say in any decisions. Since there is no consensus within the town, should the TC be endorsing any route?

After an hour plus of public comment, Don ended the public participation and moved the TC on to the business of the committee. He pointed out that the TC’s job is to discuss what we have heard from tonight and last week’s workshop. Seaver expressed his frustration with MDOT and the whole process. We can’t get answers from them; our town officials seem to be “dealing” with MDOT without the knowledge of the TC; who is managing what? There is no consensus on an issue that has been in the discussion/planning process since 1988. Don questioned whether the TC must perceive that there is consensus amongst the townspeople before we can make a recommendation. Lois commented that if no one can agree on anything re: a bypass route, then maybe we should simply sit back and let MDOT take its course. Maguerite suggested a referendum re: the ad hoc’s route and bypass sentiments in general. Sean pointed out that MDOT will go ahead with its plans and that we, as a town, **must** propose something better. We should put forth a route with hope of effecting changes that are better for the town. Lois questioned how we can propose a route when there is no consensus within this room or in the previous workshop. Don stated that “the ad hoc committee developed a proposal and

brought it to us (the TC).” As a result, the TC has given the townspeople an opportunity to come to express their opinions. The TC needs to choose what we believe that the majority of the community would support. Don also pointed out that the ad hoc’s route is really a concept, something to be worked on. Seaver expressed his continued opposition to the idea of proposing a new and different route after all the money already spent by the state to this point; he abhors the idea of a 55 mph highway going through a small rural town and believes that we should hold MDOT to non-build alternatives.

After continued discussion around these issues, Don Jones made the following motion:

Although no proposed bypass route is without its own problems and issues, the Wiscasset Transportation Committee, nevertheless, finds merit in the route concept proposed by the Ad Hoc Bypass Committee. We recommend that the Board of Selectmen adopt the Ad Hoc Committee’s concept as the town’s preferred route for purposes of further bypass discussions and negotiations.

The motion was seconded by Sean. Discussion about the motion included Seaver stating that the motion is not a “responsible” one to make. It does not represent the work of the PAC and the previous transportation committee. Sean questioned whether anyone can “talk MDOT out of building a bypass”. Lois proposed amending the motion to include the following sentence:

At the same time, the transportation committee proposes to actively pursue viable no build alternatives in order to alleviate current and future traffic problems.

Marguerite seconded the amendment. With brief comment, the amendment was adopted, 4 in favor, 1 abstention. Lois then read back the entire motion:

Although no proposed bypass route is without its own problems and issues, the Wiscasset Transportation Committee, nevertheless, finds merit in the route concept proposed by the Ad Hoc Bypass Committee in its efforts to preserve Route 1 for economic development and Route 27 as a school campus area. We recommend that the Board of Selectment adopt the Ad Hoc Committee’s concept as the town’s preferred route for purposes of further bypass discussions and negotiations. At the same time, the Transportation Committee proposes to actively pursue viable no build alternatives in order to alleviate current and future traffic problems.

The motion passed, 4 in favor, 1 opposed.

The committee agreed to meet next, on September 15th at 7:00 p.m. at the CEI meeting room. With a move to adjourn, and all in favor, the meeting ended at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted
Lois Kwantz, Secretary