

Transportation Committee Meeting August 1, 2005

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

Absent: Marguerite Rafter

The meeting opened at 7:05 PM. We will review both July's and August's minutes at the September meeting. We moved right to old business, that being the crosswalks here in town. They are being done at the present time. There is no indication that one will appear at the Washington St./Hodge St./Route 1 intersection as recommended by this committee. The existing crosswalks are being repainted in the exact same manner as previously, not with our recommended format. As new road commissioner, Roy Barnes has received no instructions from the board of selectmen to do them any differently.

At their July 18th meeting, the selectmen voted to take a stand on the bypass issue and specifically regarding routes. They decided to list their preference for a route in order of first to last choice:

1st Choice: a southern route across Westport Island

2nd Choice: the ad hoc committee's concept for a northern route that goes beyond the high school

3rd Choice: a No Build choice over any of the currently proposed routes. They stated that they would actively oppose any of the existing routes on the table.

4th Choice: if necessary, N2 preferred over N8c.

This information was relayed orally to Don Jones but Don stated that the minutes for the meeting should be on the town's web site by now. As a result of this vote, Andrew had sent a letter to the commissioner re: this decision and vote. There was a meeting this morning (August 1st) between Wiscasset town officials: Mike Blagdon and Alex Robertson, as well as Jeff Hinderliter and Don Jones with Commissioner Cole, Dep. Com. Greg Nadeau, Kathy Fuller, Carl Croce and 2 people from the planning staff, Ed Hanscom and Dale Doughty plus Senator Dana Dow and the public relations consultant, Carol Morris. The meeting was held to discuss the selectmen's vote re: a southern route. According to MDOT, the reason for eliminating the southern route was because of the Coast Guard requirement of a 135-foot high bridge. That requirement would make the bridge so long that it wouldn't even be able to touch down on Westport Island. An "operating" bridge is out of the question because it would cost 5 times as much to build as a stationary one. Mike Blagdon wanted to know if anyone has talked with the Coast Guard recently regarding this requirement and MDOT said they would consider the possibility of discussing bridge height further with the CG, BUT they are very resistant to this route. They asked if Wiscasset really wants to give up the right to tall-masted ships coming up river to Hinckley. MDOT firmly believes that the current routes are final (N8c and the three N2 variations). The EIS is to be completed by the end of 2005 and they do not want to add any more routes. The Federal Highway Administration has "signed off" that these routes are acceptable to be reviewed for the EIS. Wiscasset officials pointed out that the PAC had removed some routes from consideration but not S1 or S2; John Melrose was the one who removed these southern

routes. The Sverdrup Group were the consultants at the beginning and they did not remove the southern routes but in July 2001, Melrose removed all the southern routes and dissolved the PAC. MDOT is only willing to reconsider those routes if there are factual errors that appear in the EIS but Wiscasset has no access to the EIS in its current form. If Wiscasset were to file a Freedom of Information Act request, then perhaps MDOT might release some info in the EIS to us. Don found it interesting that Commissioner Cole stated that MDOT would, as a result of analysis of EIS, propose a preferred route to the FHA. Wiscasset officials were taken aback that MDOT was going to state a preference for a route. The Needs & Purpose Statement for the bypass study states that "because of traffic/mobility concerns in Woolwich/Wiscasset/Edgecomb/Newcastle, there is a need to improve safety, mobility and the environment" (natural, built, social & economic). One of the things that Don came away with from this meeting is that the bridge route is there because it is a viable option and needs to stay on the table but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is the preferred solution for MDOT. It was stated that an effective bypass is one where people approaching have an option to go the slow route but end up back on the major route, as opposed to having to drive backwards out of town to pick up the major route once again. As a result of this morning's meeting, what should Wiscasset do? Do we hire a traffic consultant to do a study in an effort to prove that the figures are wrong, particularly the traffic diversion figures? MDOT offered for Doughty and Hanscom to come down and to go over once again their analysis of the "ad hoc committee's" route. Should we wait for the EIS and comment period, or start right away to prepare a defense, or begin to study the graphs re: traffic diversion numbers in order to prove that the assumptions are faulty? We, the TC, feel pretty certain that, when all is said and done around the EIS and the proposed route, there is most likely going to be a lawsuit filed by someone - Sheepscot Conservation group or Edgecomb? After discussion, Sean Rafter made the following motion: The TC recommends that the town of Wiscasset should promptly examine the possibility of retaining traffic engineering expertise in order to explore the feasibility of challenging questionable assumptions in MDOT's analysis of route alternatives in order to support the selectmen's stance re: the proposed bypass routes. The motion passed with three in favor and one opposed.

Our last order of business was brainstorming the names of possible members for the transportation response panel designed to work on Gateway 1. In addition to the current TC members, we felt that other people should include one comprehensive planning committee member, one selectperson, the town manager or a designated replacement, possibly an emergency response person, etc. Some of the names that were mentioned were Sarge Potter, Karl Olsen, Jo Bryer, Jim George, Cindy Fisher and Steve Jarrett. Once again we strongly urge the town manager and the board of selectmen to appoint additional community members to be included on the TRP along with the TC members. We recommend advertising the need for additional members for the TC as well. We adjourned at 9 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lois Kwantz, Secretary