

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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LEE AREA TRAFFIC STUDY

2nd PUBLIC MEETING – WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2008

6:30 p.m. at the Lee Elementary School Cafeteria

COMMENTS MADE AT THE 2ND PUBLIC MEETING

1. (Becket Resident) Has BRPC has performed a cost/benefit analysis and if there are grants available since the TIP program has limited funding?
BRPC Response: A cost/benefit analysis has not been performed at this point. Before the BRPC staff recommendation is brought to the MPO, staff will prepare a very rough cost estimate. Alternatives involving major new facilities are estimated to be at least five or ten years into the future. The next level of analysis will examine financial feasibility as well as engineering feasibility. For alternatives involving new interchanges, a financial feasibility study will have to examine the use of tolls. Other smaller alternatives, such as Alternative 1 which would involve adding traffic signals in downtown Lee could be funded through the TIP or CMAQ allocations.
2. (Stockbridge Resident) Alternative 5 (Route 7 interchange) would cross right through the Kamposoa Bog Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which includes habitat of over twenty endangered species. BRPC was encouraged to use environmental, endangered species, and wetland evaluation criterions.
3. (Lee Resident) Route 7 interchange alternative is still ideal. The Lenox Bypass is already there and has already been widened. Something could be done to preserve the land in the ACEC. It wouldn't cost too much to move the interchange to Route 7 and make it northbound only. Traffic could still go south on Route 102 or Route 7.
4. (Stockbridge Resident) Route 7 interchange has been ruled out in the past due to environmental concerns. Alternative 10 (West Road interchange) would be better than Alternative 5 (Route 7 interchange) but West Road has a lot of homes on it and more are going to be built. Zoning should be taken into consideration when BRPC looks at residential impacts. It was this individual's understanding that this would be the only MassPike interchange located in a residentially zoned area. The congestion on Main Street is questionable when the fire department stops traffic for donations. It may not be realistic to measure Main Street traffic based on the number of cars coming off the Turnpike. A lot of traffic uses Route 8 and there are a lot of cars that go other ways rather than use Main Street. Unless a solution is recommended that has less residential impacts, the solution should be within Lee's boundaries.
BRPC Response: BRPC performed traffic counts and turning movement counts at various locations in Lee.
5. (Stockbridge Resident) One individual who lives on Route 7 commented that it sometimes takes them several minutes to get out of their driveway. They asked if a Route 7 interchange would make traffic worse, potentially backing traffic up all the way into town.
BRPC Response: BRPC has not yet assessed these impacts. The next phase of study will consider how all of the alternatives will impact connecting roadways and how well these roadways could handle an increase in traffic.
6. (Lee Resident) People are concerned about safety on Housatonic Street and Main Street. There are a lot of tractor trailers turning by Carr Hardware. There is a playground on Housatonic Street that is only open during the summer. There are a lot of young people walking or riding bikes near the playground. People who get off the Turnpike drive on Housatonic Street at fast speeds. Also, has widening Laurel Street been considered?

BRPC Response: BRPC staff will look at the implications all of the alternatives will have on connecting roadways, such as Route 20 north of Lee.

7. (Stockbridge Resident) A recent AAA study reported that the average annual mileage driven is decreasing. Will this study look at how much the increase in gas prices will decrease mileage driven in Berkshire County and if this will encourage growth in Pittsfield?

BRPC Response: In the new fiscal year, BRPC will study how the increase in gas prices will affect transportation. The Lee Area Traffic Study has not looked at this because a method to quantify how the increase in gas prices affect transportation has not been developed. Another piece of documentation shows that truck traffic in the US will continue to increase. With the increase in gas prices, changes have been made in freight schedules.

8. (Stockbridge Resident) The road names should be shown on the maps and the maps should also show the number of residences on those roads in order to have a fair reaction.

BRPC Response: Details on how many residences might be impacted are available on the BRPC website: http://berkshireplanning.org/3/Lee_Traffic_Study

9. (Stockbridge Resident) Why were the Route 8 alternatives dropped and why is Route 8 not being considered rather than Route 7?

BRPC Response: The Route 8 alternatives impact a significant number of residences. The topography on Route 8 is not conducive to safe freight movement. If any of the Route 8 alternatives would have stayed on the table, the impacts on Route 8 north of Route 20 would have had to be evaluated. Detailed information is available on the BRPC website.

10. (Stockbridge Resident) Has rail service been examined as part of this study? Are there any potential terminals to get trucks to switch to rail?

BRPC Response: In the new fiscal year, BRPC will study to examine opportunities for intermodal connections in Berkshire County.

11. (Stockbridge Resident) At least three new lights have been added on Route 20 and that these lights work well to improve safety. It would be better to think along these lines.

BRPC Response: BRPC will analyze a Transportation Systems Management approach which will include adding traffic lights and/or other intersection changes to the existing system of keeping the traffic on Route 20 through Lee.

12. (Stockbridge Resident) What is the timeline is for going forward and what legal standing does BRPC have to be making recommendations?

BRPC Response: BRPC has a legal agreement with Mass Highway, the Executive Office of Transportation and the County municipalities. Through this agreement, BRPC is charged with the transportation planning for the County. Part of BRPC's professional responsibilities is to provide recommendations to the MPO. BRPC staff expects to provide the MPO with a staff recommendation in the fall. The MPO will most likely ask BRPC to consult with the Selectboards in the affected communities before the MPO makes a final decision. If the MPO approves a recommendation, there will be a period of a few years for money to be allocated for a detailed financial and engineering analysis. Then the project will have to go through a full Environmental Impact Report, design and environmental permitting process. Mr. Karns estimated it would be at least ten years before any construction begins.

13. (Stockbridge Resident) The Kamposoa Bog has archeological evidence. Archeological studies should be part of any chosen alternative. Is Pittsfield doing a similar traffic study?

BRPC Response: The South Street Alternatives Study and a Comprehensive Downtown Circulation Study in Pittsfield have received MPO approval. BRPC used established databases – such as the MassHistoric inventory – when identifying historical sites. If a site was not included in the MassHistoric database, BRPC did not know to include it. Commonly perceived cultural resources were also included, such as the Mount, Tanglewood and Jacob's Pillow. An Environmental Impact Report will include a survey of archeological resources.

14. (Lee Resident) Are there any other towns in Massachusetts that have two interstate exits other than Boston? The distance between Exit 2 and Exit 3 is very big. It is important to differentiate between exits and interchanges. The individual expressed their preference for a four parallel ramp design rather than a cloverleaf design that takes up more land, similar to the design in West Stockbridge. It

was their impression that planners on the MTA had foreseen the need to expand the turnpike where it crosses Route 7 because of the current design. It wouldn't be necessary to have toll booths or lighting at a new interchange if a four parallel ramp design was used. Tanglewood traffic is backed up to Exit 2 and that idle engines contribute to global warming. This should be part of the identified environmental impacts.

BRPC Response: There are less than three miles between two exits in Springfield. The minimum distance between exits is two miles in rural areas.

15. (Stockbridge Resident) Will Route 7 need to be widened? A new interchange on Route 7 would create the need for a new study in Stockbridge about their traffic as trucks would then go through Stockbridge heading north and south bound.

BRPC Response: A detailed engineering study is not within the scope of this study. However, there are mechanisms that can be applied to either Alternative 5 or Alternative 10 to limit an interchange to north/east bound traffic. Impacts on the existing roadways will need to be evaluated.

16. (Tyringham Resident) The Diesel Dan's redevelopment should be taken into consideration because this will significantly increase truck traffic in Lee.

17. (Stockbridge Resident) Does BRPC have any statistical evidence about pedestrian safety in Lee? If Lee has a low accident rate, then safety should not be cited as a reason why this study is needed.

BRPC Response: Currently, none of the intersections in Lee have accident rates at, or above the County average.

18. (Stockbridge Resident) Any new roadways will increase the possibilities for new development, such as hotels, etc. He suggested that this be part of the study.

BRPC Response: This will be discussed with the affected communities. The communities have zoning power. Under current practices, a new facility would most likely be a limited access facility.

19. (Stockbridge Resident) Will the final decision be made by the Selectboard or by Town vote? How much land would be needed to widen Route 7 if the Route 7 interchange alternative is chosen?

BRPC Response: The final decision will be made by the MPO. A travel lane is usually twelve feet wide. The next phase of study will look at the adequacy of connecting roadways.

20. (Lee Resident) One individual expressed his preference for the West Road alternative.