

Lee Area Traffic Study
Summary of Third Working Group Meeting
Tuesday, September 25, 2007, 4:00 PM.
Lee Library Gallery, 100 Main Street, Lee, MA

Attendees:

Name	Organization
Nat Karns	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Jorja-Ann Marsden	Stockbridge
Dana Lacasse	MassHighway District 1
Jerry LePrevost	Lee Traffic Committee
Bryan Emmett	Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Peter Frieri	MassHighway District 1
Christine Neumann	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Alison Church	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Anuja Koirala	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Karns welcomed all to the meeting.
Members introduced themselves.

2. Summary of 07-26-Working Group Meeting; Data pertaining to key findings related to volumes, accidents and speed

Mr. Karns prefaced the meeting by saying that there needs to be a larger attempt made to get participants from Beckett, Lenox and West Stockbridge at the table because there are going to be issues which affect them that will be decided without their input. BRPC started the meeting by reviewing the highlights from the Draft Memo #1 Existing Conditions report and from the first meeting. Mr. Karns introduced the memo by saying that it is evident from all sources and speed delay analysis, that the delay traveling through Lee will only get worse. Ms. Koirala discussed the list of problems noting that the obvious problem is the congestion of these areas. First, she defined Level of Service and explained how LOS was equated. For signalized intersections, the total intersection is considered. For non-signalized intersections, or stop sign intersections, the main roads are relatively free of impediments. Therefore, analysis of these intersections measures the worst delay turning onto the main street from a side street. Mr. Karns added that there is some impediment on the main line due to geometry but not intersection traffic. Usually, a left turn from a side street typically experiences the longest delay. An A rating refers to a delay of less than 10 seconds. An F grade refers to a delay of more than 80 seconds. A summary of how the grading system works is included in the transportation handout. Ms. Church pointed out that it is possible for intersections to deteriorate beyond an "F" grade but that the computer software (Syncro 6.0) is unable to compute a delay beyond 1,000 seconds. Ms. Koirala discussed the Traffic Analysis, which studied the area between the Prime Outlets and the town line to the north. The Traffic Analysis shows there is a traffic delay in Lee that worsens in the PM peak period and during special events. There is an average 2 minute delay over the posted speed limit. Ms. Church concluded that, although the currently failing intersections will remain at an F in 2030, the delay will increase beyond what the software can compute. There is no way to quantify the exact delay, just that it will be greater than

1,000 seconds.

The Accident Analysis shows that Route 20 in the Lee Traffic Study project area has a lower accident rate than the statewide average, possibly due to lower speeds. Housatonic Street had the highest gross number of accidents due to its length and traffic volume. Park Street has the highest accident rate, which is closer to the County average. This may be attributed to the high number of driveways on Park Street and the High Street/Park Street intersection.

3. Existing and Projected Conditions Analysis

The Existing and Projected Conditions analysis shows that there is a lot of variation between AM Peak periods, PM Peak periods, AM Non-Peak, PM Non-Peak, special events and seasonal changes.

Ms. Koirala focused on three scenarios for the analysis of existing and projected conditions. The 3 scenarios are the non-peak period, the peak period and special events. For a forecast into 2030, Ms. Koirala analyzed the no-build scenario. Mr. Karns described how a "D" grade is functional, but will worsen in the future and that it is not appropriate to design new intersections to meet a "D" LOS grade.

Eight intersections were examined. These intersections were shown on a map in the handout packet. The intersections are Main/Center, Main/Price Chopper Driveway, Main/Park, Main/High, Park/Housatonic, Route 20/I-90 off ramp, Route 20/1-90 on ramp, and Route 20/Prime Outlets. The first five intersections of interest are not signalized. The last three are signalized. The intersections at Route 20/I-90 and Route 20/Prime Outlets are all doing well with a B LOS. Out of the five intersections that are not signalized, the three that are the worst are Main/Center, Main/Park and Park/Housatonic. These three intersections have a lot of traffic coming from side streets as well as a lot of driveways.

Ms. Koirala explained how comparisons were being made between the AM peak and non-peak periods and between the PM peak and non-peak periods. All three primary non-signalized intersections in downtown Lee are failing. The tables in the transportation handout show information for the AM and PM peak periods and also non-peak and peak seasons. Each of the three intersections are operating at LOS D during the AM Non-peak season, but fail (i.e. LOS F) during the AM Peak Season. During the peak season, the intersections are failing both in the AM and PM. In the PM non-peak period, the Main/Center intersection is already failing. The side street traffic is backed up and cannot turn onto the major roadway. These three intersections operate at the unacceptable LOS F for all the other existing and 2030 peak periods analyzed.

Ms. Koirala pointed out that even this smaller intersection degrades from an existing "B" LOS to a "D" in 2030. The three signalized intersections in existing peak and non-peak periods are doing well and will continue to do well in 2030, with only slight delay increases, granting the same signal phasing and timing. Mr. LePrevost was surprised to hear that the Park/Housatonic intersection was as bad as it was.

Ms. Koirala described how even though the analysis showed that a LOS grade remains the same, or only decreases by one letter grade in 2030; there will still be an increase in delay. She provided the example, that the Main/Park intersection currently experiences a 74 second delay. In 2030, this will increase to 149 seconds. Ms. Church added that the 2030 forecast for the peak season will see an increased delay beyond 1,000 seconds. Mr. Karns mentioned that it would be difficult to find another area in the County that has this number of failing LOS intersections and such a high level of congestion in such a concentrated area. Ms. Church commented that the LOS grade boxes will be larger on the final version, with leader lines and the name of the intersection attaching them to the map. Ms. Koirala also noted that the Prime Outlet's intersection was not included in the AM peak period analysis because the outlets are not open until 10:00AM.

Ms. Church also added that the AM figures were not carried over to the 2030 forecast because the PM peak is more significant from a traffic standpoint than the AM and rather than be redundant, only the PM analysis is shown.

The next step will be to conduct a Corridor Level LOS analysis that will provide information on the Existing Corridor travel time, travel time in 2030 and how much the level of service has degraded and alternatives to reduce travel time and by how much. Once this is completed, the Draft memo will be complete and then the public comment and review portion can begin.

A comment about the new Gateway at Lee project was made by Mr. LePrevost. This project will include the development of 96 hotel rooms, a restaurant, a drive-in and a convenience store. He also mentioned that all of the local permitting had been given to this project and that the site plan

has asked for a traffic light. Mr. Karns informed the Working Group that MHD had denied the light at this development. Ms. Koirala noted that the consultants for the Gateway at Lee project did a traffic impact analysis for the three signalized intersections.

Mr. Karns asked if the Working Group could think of any other large development projects that are certain enough that they need to be considered. Mr. LePrevost mentioned that there were none he was aware of, but there was also the decrease in trips associated with the closing of the mills to be considered. Mr. Karns made the point that the Future Conditions Analysis needs to include the impacts of new developments like the Gateway at Lee project and factor in the additional trips toward downtown generated from these new developments as well as the loss of trips associated with the closing of the mills. The Future Analysis should discuss what impact these trips will have and how much traffic will be added downtown. The Future Analysis should also account for locations outside of the immediate downtown, especially at the I-90 On/Off ramp intersection with Route 102.

Mr. Karns concluded that the major point of the analysis is that all three of the primary non-signalized intersections in the downtown area already fail during the peak season and only operate at acceptable levels during the AM non-peak period. The PM is already failing and the future will be much more of the same. There will be increases in delay throughout all of the intersections even as the LOS grade stays the same. Ms. Church reiterated that the three intersections that are failing now will only get worse in the future. For the analysis of traffic conditions during special events, BRPC looked at the traffic during James Taylor night at Tanglewood. Both the Main/Center and the Main/Park intersections were at "F" during the event, which was held during the peak season and the 2030 forecast shows that it will be worse in the future. Mr. Karns joked that locals don't even bother coming out during special events. Mr. LePrevost commented that if they do, they find other routes.

Ms. Church concluded that the Existing Conditions analysis demonstrates that the primary problem is an east and north through traffic problem and that the major concentration of traffic is between Lee, Lenox and Pittsfield as illustrated on page 8 of the Transportation summary as well as on the map entitled "Main Street Traffic Distribution." Ms. Koirala described what each map showed. The maps generally showed traffic distribution and where the traffic is going throughout the Lee area. The "Main Street Traffic Distribution" map shows where traffic is coming from. Mr. Karns suggested that these maps needed to have the number of trips added to them. The maps do not show collector or local roads. Ms. Koirala described that the maps showed the most intense traffic congestion is coming from the East side of Lee and there is less traffic heading south toward Great Barrington. There is also traffic coming from points North of Lee but that there is less traffic coming and going to Pittsfield than there is from points east of Lee. Mr. Karns described how the lower intersections with I-90 will have more congestion than the intersections coming down from Route 7. Ms. Church suggested that this finding – that traffic coming to Main Street is from the East rather than from Pittsfield be very clear in the final report.

4. Identification of Possible Alternatives

In prefacing this discussion, Mr. Karns described that the purpose of this Working Group meeting was to wrap up the first phase of the project in determining if there is a traffic problem in Lee. The analysis provided by Ms. Koirala demonstrated that there is a problem. The second phase is to begin brainstorming possible alternatives. Mr. Karns asked the Working Group what some of the alternatives were that immediately came to mind. Alternatives will need to address the primary north and east traffic problem directly in order to be considered viable solutions. The alternative analysis will factor in environmental and socio-economic constraints, community impacts and traffic impacts. Mr. LePrevost asked if MHD will be the group which decides what will be done. Mr. Karns explained that ultimately, the MPO will decide which alternative to go forward with.

Mr. Karns outlined several alternatives that have been suggested.

- The first alternative is to place traffic lights at the three failing intersections. Mr. LePrevost commented that the Town has been leaning toward this alternative, on condition that the lights have correct timing. This alternative would also include possible redesign of roadway geometry.
- The second alternative is lane widening. This alternative was set aside because there is no additional right-of-way and it would involve too many takings.
- The third alternative is "one-way pairs," either at High Street and Main Street, Main Street and Canal Street or at Canal Street and Park Street Extension. Ms. Church

commented that an analysis of alternatives would begin by looking at the feasibility and impacts created by placing traffic signals and then looking at one-way pairs in combination with traffic signals and then without the implementation of traffic signals. This would create a fourth alternative.

- The fourth alternative would consist of the better of the one way pairs and the signalization of the three failing intersections.
- Other alternatives discussed included a bypass opposite Marble Street to the west side of the Housatonic River, a bypass at Main Street and Park Street, interchanges west of current exit 2 or at Route 7 interchange in Stockbridge, a bigger bypass east of Lee through the power line Right of Way to Lenox Dale, and a bypass in Becket at Route 8 in tandem with the Bonnie Rigg improvements. A discussion then took place between the group regarding truck traffic and other traffic impacts.

There was also some discussion of possible evaluation criteria. Along with looking at the environmental and socio-economic constraints, community impacts and traffic impacts, the alternatives should also be evaluated in terms of their impact on freight movement.

There was also some discussion on creating a Special Events Better Management Plan to account for traffic generated by Tanglewood to the west of Lee.

5. Thoughts/Suggestions for the Lee Area Traffic Study 1st Public Meeting

Members of the Working Group asked questions pertaining to their role at the public meeting and clarifying that they would have the chance to review and comment on all the information prior to the meeting. Information they will receive includes the complete draft memo #1, comment form, the public notice and any handouts that will be provided at the meeting. Ms. Church stated that she envisioned the Working Group sitting at a table at the front of the room where she would give them the opportunity to ask questions prior to opening the floor to the public. The Working Group would also be available to field questions from the public during the possible break out sessions. Ms. Church asked for any other comments or suggestions.

The cafeteria at the Lee High School has been booked for November 1st. Members of the Working Group suggested that the meeting start at 6:30pm so that it would not run too late. This was agreed upon by the rest of the Working Group. Ms. Church suggested that people be allowed to arrive earlier – at 5:30 – to draw on the maps and provide input. Mr. Karns felt it would be better to do a presentation first and then ask for comments. To this end, BRPC will provide comment cards for the public to hand in after the meeting or to mail back to the BRPC. Also, BRPC will set up a place on its website for people to send in comments. The website will announce that comments can be provided through email at transportation@berkshireplanning.org, through standard mail or over the phone. Public outreach activities will be coordinated by Ms. Neumann. There will be press releases in local newspapers, and advertisements on public access television. Select Boards will be sent public meeting notices. Ms. Marsden suggested having the Select Boards advertise the public meeting at their meetings which are televised. Fliers will be posted at grocery stores and other local public places. There will also be publicity within neighborhoods south of Lee and north towards Pittsfield as a major focus of this study is regional mobility.

6. Next Meeting Date

It was decided that the Working Group should meet soon after the Public Meeting to work on the evaluation criteria and special events issues. It was decided that the Working Group will meet next on November 6th at 4:00pm. Ms. Marsden suggested that Working Group meetings in January and February not be held on Thursdays due to conflict with a Lee area committee meeting schedule.

Mr. Karns thanked all for coming.