

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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LEE AREA TRAFFIC STUDY

3rd PUBLIC MEETING – WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2009

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

COMMENTS MADE AT THE 3rd PUBLIC MEETING

1. (Lee Resident) In what timeframe was the study done? Where is the money for a new exit? With the present state of the federal deficit, would money ever be available? Has the state of the economy been taken into account? Would the MTA have to approve a new exit? Would the MTA pay for a new exit? Is there any town between Berkshire County and Boston with two turnpike exits?
BRPC Response: Traffic data was collected in 2006. Some traffic data is available from Mass Highway every year. The Berkshire MPO would have to determine the funding source. The Berkshire MPO's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which includes transportation projects, must be financially constrained. The Berkshire MPO is given a target funding amount for the next twenty years. The MTA would have to approve a new exit. Through meeting with representatives from MTA, it is clear that the MTA does not currently have the funding for a new exit. BRPC staff is unaware of any other town between Berkshire County and Boston that has two turnpike exits.
2. (Stockbridge Resident) Stockbridge residents know people need to enjoy a slower pace of life. Stockbridge is a unique town. Pedestrians are able to cross Main Street safely, but thoughtfulness is tested at the corner of Main Street and the Red Lion Inn. Stockbridge must resist any further volume of traffic.
3. (Lee Resident) There will be antagonism no matter which route is chosen. The economy has changed. The history of truck traffic has increased. One primary reason is that rail freight transportation has decreased because the Housatonic Railroad is underfunded. There is a railroad that goes from New York into Pittsfield. Without affecting lights or streets, with increased funding, this railroad could be improved to carry volume equivalent to CSX. Money should be assigned and allocated for rail.
4. (Pittsfield Resident) The individual was involved in the Route 7/20 moratorium twenty years ago and had made suggestions for alternatives at that time. First, the individual suggested that Exit 1 in West Stockbridge become a full interchange so that people coming from NY could get off before Lee. There is an old truck stop on Route 102 for trucks to get off. This would benefit truckers who wouldn't have to go to Lee when coming from NY. A full interchange would make a nice entrance into the State and would take traffic out of Lee. Second, the individual proposed that the Becket interchange be re-evaluated. The interchange could be located somewhere between Bonnie Rigg and the Blandford rest stop using an existing road or a new spur road to Route 20 and Route 8. The individual disagreed with BRPC staff's assessment of travel time on Route 8. This route has less lights and less stopping and would result in less wear on trucks.
BRPC Response: BRPC stands by its technical analysis.
5. (Becket Resident) Stockbridge doesn't want an exit and Stockbridge doesn't need one, neither does Becket. Parts of Washington Mountain Road/McNerney Road are very steep. There is a 90 degree turn at the bottom of the hill on Route 8. Tractor trailers can handle it in the summer, but it is very difficult during the winter. Route 8 follows a stream and has several sharp curves. Route 8 is fine in the summer, for cars. During the winter, it is very dangerous for tractor trailers. BRPC staff was very good at providing the methodology behind the technical analysis and the Working Group based their decisions on fact. Lee was the logical place for an exit years ago because of the mills. Lee benefits from having an exit and advertises itself at the "gateway" into the Berkshires. The businesses in Lee profit from having the exit in Lee. This would not be the case in Stockbridge or Becket.

6. (Stockbridge Resident) According to Peter Berle, the secret to land preservation and management in the Berkshires and in Stockbridge in particular, are the exits and entrances into and out of town. The Stockbridge Land Trust has worked to preserve the land. An additional exit for truck traffic, which might or might not be impacted by the current economic situation, is a foolish investment because of air, light and noise pollution.
7. (Lee Resident) The quality of life would be affected by a new roadway and the noise it would create. Lee should not be perceived as being flexible to additional exits. There are a lot of people who do not want another exit.
8. (Lee Resident) The individual submitted her comments to BRPC and expressed disappointment that the technical analysis materials were not on the website prior to tonight's meeting. After attending the Lee Selectboard meeting on January 13, 2009 and listening to the presentation, the individual believes that the three final alternatives to help alleviate truck traffic do not seem viable. The proposed interchange and exit in the unknown area close to West Road and Route 7 makes no sense. Why would anyone approve the destruction of a neighborhood, homes, the environment and the community? There should not be two exits in rural Lee in close proximity to one another. Why wouldn't trucks still continue to go up Route 20 through Lee? The traffic study of trucks was conducted five years ago, before the closing of five mills in Lee. It is clear that Lee and Stockbridge are concerned about the impact these proposals would have. The individual strongly encouraged a joint meeting with Lee, Stockbridge and Lenox as well as Tyringham, which also uses these roads. The individual proposed a one-way rule to limit trucks depending on size. Large trucks would only be able to go north on Route 20 through Lee. The trucks would only be able to go south on Route 7 to Stockbridge and then would take Route 102 to the Mass Pike. This would cut the truck traffic impact in half in both towns. This simple solution could provide community, neighborhood and environmental savings and save time and money. Would the MPO members who are present consider this suggestion?

MHD Response: Mass Highway would have to wait for the final report.

9. (Stockbridge Resident) As diesel oil and gas prices increase, truck traffic will decrease, as it did six months ago. There are also two climate change legislations that would involve a significant increase in the cost of oil – cap and trade and carbon tax methods. The global climate crisis is widely accepted, and the objective is to reduce the use of oil and truck and car traffic. We need to think of different ways of reducing truck traffic, including upgrades for rail transportation. How much have these issues been considered in the truck traffic projections? Also, how much did the project's carbon footprint factor into the analysis?

BRPC Response: BRPC looked at two national studies related to projections in truck traffic. The studies indicate that truck traffic will double in the next twenty years. It is BRPC's opinion that this has to do with the location of our distribution and manufacturing centers. Railroads don't tend to give priority to shorter hauls – the railroads are more interested in long distance hauls over 1,000 miles. The fuel prices have the most dramatic impact on longer hauls. Housatonic Railroad is slightly different. Norfolk Southern, which is combining with Pan Am/Guilford Railroad, runs through northern Berkshire County. Norfolk Southern is building two very large truck terminals – one in Fitchburg and one in Mechanicville, NY. The Environmental Impact Report will include an assessment of the project's carbon footprint, as greenhouse gas emissions are now required as part of an EIR. Stop and go traffic has more of an impact than through traffic.

10. (Stockbridge Resident) Vermont had the exact same problem between Bennington and Manchester. They didn't want traffic to go through the towns, so they built a bypass. The individual is a pilot and suggested building a new highway from Becket to Pittsfield through state property on the west side of October Mountain State Forest because it would not impact any homeowners and would help the economic development of Pittsfield, Adams and North Adams. Colorado built a highway through Vail that runs in and on a river. The environmental concerns were addressed, so it is possible. These studies affect the values of houses and businesses along the alternatives.
11. (Lee Resident) Doesn't FHWA avoid putting ramps in residential neighborhoods? How will the movement of businesses into downtown Lee be affected if cars are taken out of Lee? The individual provided a list of signatures from people on Devon Road and West Road who do not want a new exit.

BRPC Response: The EIR will look at specific measures to mitigate residential impacts and assess economic impacts. The legal restrictions will also be evaluated through the EIR. It is unlikely that there is a legal restriction to keep a route open for trucks only.

12. (Lee Resident) The individual provided a copy of a letter and traffic count data which they collected on January 21. On January 21, the individual counted the number of trucks on Main Street during a two hour period. There were 21 trucks going northbound and 20 trucks going south bound. This was not the number talked about in the past, which led the individual to deduce that something has happened to truck traffic. With the closing of five mills in Lee, the closing of KB Toys in Pittsfield and the downsizing of Sabic Plastics, the industrial base is decreasing and the number of trucks is decreasing. Truck traffic has decreased since BRPC first studied it. The alternatives no longer fit, as the situation is changing. The individual advised against an interchange. The individual served on the BRPC Traffic Study Committee in 1998 and several years later protested against a proposal to build a highway on Railroad Ave over to Canal Street. Touching even a blade of grass in the west of Lee would destroy the better part of the tourist trade. The integrity of High Lawn Farm and the sensitive nature of Kamposa Bog will be threatened. Governor Patrick and President Obama are calling for a paradigm shift in our vision for the future of transportation. The individual suggested that everyone be more visionary. Rail service for freight and passengers should be examined, as well as bicycling for day trips. Are you really asking us to destroy homes and roads and lands for a solution in another part of town that will only cause more congestion? Where is the townspeople's consensus?

13. (Lenox Resident) How could the ramps be placed on West Road when the Turnpike Authority has plans to shut down the travel plaza?

BRPC Response: During the meeting BRPC had with the MTA, the MTA did not indicate they would shut down the travel plaza. The specific design of the exit is beyond the level of study performed by BRPC.

14. (Lee Resident) What component of BRPC staff is looking at rail and light rail for this area? More roads will only make more congestion.

BRPC Response: The transportation staff consists of three people. The Transportation Bond Bill included funding for the initial feasibility work of extending the northwest commuter rail from Danbury into Pittsfield. BRPC supported the Housatonic Railroad's request for economic stimulus funding for track upgrades for freight transportation and future commuter services. The Housatonic Railroad has indicated they are interested in commuter rail.

15. (Stockbridge Resident) The website was inaccessible yesterday. If the exits will only be one way – the trucks will still need to get back on. It can't just be an off-ramp without an eastbound on-ramp. Where will trucks from the south and Connecticut go? Why should they have to go to Lee? Why not just go up Route 7? Route 7 will need to be widened and opened for development because all of the extra trucks and cars will need travel services.

BRPC Response: The primary traffic flow through Berkshire County is traffic from the east and north. The study only addressed the east/north traffic flow. The proposed exit would have a westbound off-ramp and an eastbound on-ramp. However, the exact design of the exit is beyond the level of study performed by BRPC. It has not been determined whether Route 7 would need to be widened.

16. (Lee Resident) The Bennington bypass is a great example. Every alternative seems to be in Lee, and that's not right. We're all in the same boat and the communities need to work together. Trucks going south and east already go up Route 7. The new interchange will not bring any more trucks to Stockbridge, but will help trucks going north and get them out of Lee. The communities need to work together and not dump everything in Lee. The study needs to look at the impacts to quality of life. The individual suggested that the Selectboards and town officials from Stockbridge, Lenox, Lee and Becket get together and hash things out.

17. (Lee Resident) The individual provided letters from other people in opposition to a new interchange. The individual suggested that the lights need to be coordinated on Route 7/20. How can an exit between Route 7 and West Road be under consideration when there is an ACEC and protected open space? The individual indicated preference for the use of current roads and modifications to the existing system as a first step rather than a more invasive new roadway. Did BRPC study accident and safety data on Route 7? The configuration of downtown Lee lends itself to safety because trucks

have to go slow through Lee. Trucks would be able to travel much faster on Route 7 which is very icy during the winter.

BRPC Response: New coordinated lights on South Street in Pittsfield from Berkshire Life to Crofut Ave are under design. The lights from Cranwell to the Lenox Shops are mostly coordinated. They are not triggered by the presence of side street traffic. The ACEC raises the permitting threshold and would be considered during the EIR. There is a much larger ACEC in Hinsdale. BRPC staff did not assess the accident and safety data for Route 7. An assessment of this data would be included in the EIR.

18. (Lee Resident) The individual expressed frustration with the process. Alternative 5/10 could be located in a number of places and there hasn't been public input. As the decisions get made based on impacts, dialogue becomes harder and harder.
19. (Lee Resident) Nothing good has been said of the remaining alternatives. The new bypass using Laurel and Summer Streets is not feasible because of steep slopes and turns. Would this alternative involve the taking of homes? The Route 7/West Road exit is a train wreck. Since the truck traffic was monitored in 2006, the individual suggested comparing the 2006 data with truck traffic data from 2009. The data needed is from north of the Prime Outlets. Berkshire truck traffic is declining and a comparison is needed.

BRPC Response: At this level of study, which is not engineering specific, BRPC staff looked at direct impacts to homes, which would require takings, as well as indirect impacts at various buffer sizes. Any of the alternatives directly impact some number of homes. Other homes are indirectly impacted. BRPC staff did try to measure the level of impact. Mr. Karns explained that 2008 data from MHD's continuous traffic counters are just now becoming available. Mr. Karns concurred that BRPC staff needs to look at the 2008 data from the continuous counters.
20. (Lee Resident) It seems that nobody wants an exit between Route 7 and West Road. The Transportation Systems Management approach, including the addition of traffic signals, is the way to go.
21. (Stockbridge Resident) The individual commented that their house has salt in the well because of the Turnpike. The implications of what we choose to do are very far reaching. Did BRPC staff look at truck traffic patterns? Where are the trucks going? Why are they here? The individual noted that they could not imagine that the MTA would want to build another exit in the middle of an ACEC and in an area where there are already two interchanges.

BRPC Response: Origin-destination data from private consultants for truck traffic is incomplete. BRPC attempted to analyze truck traffic destinations without this data.
22. (Stockbridge Resident) The individual suggested that the Selectboard members who made the original request for the traffic study meet again and advise on the recommendations.
23. (Lee Resident) Is there any merit to the suggestion that the northbound trucks could go north on Route 20 and the southbound trucks could go south on Route 7 and use Route 102 to get back to the Turnpike? Is there hope for a compromise?

BRPC Response: This suggestion was not considered. Based on the traffic analysis, going south and then northwest (Route 7 and Route 102) to the Turnpike adds so much time and distance that it is unlikely that trucks would use this route voluntarily. BRPC staff cannot comment on the potential legal restrictions for one way truck traffic on state highways.
24. (Pittsfield Resident) There should not be two interchanges in any one town. The Route 8 alternative should be reconsidered. Route 8 is underutilized and trucks are already using it. Route 41 is the same way. Keep the Route 8 exit and the full interchange at Exit 1 alternatives on the table. The interchange on Route 7 would not help traffic on Route 7/20 through Lenox or at Park Square in Pittsfield.
25. (Lee Resident) How will an exit on West Road divert traffic? From the BRPC website, there is an ADT of 18,000 on Housatonic Street in Lee and only 3,300 from the Pike.

BRPC Response: The 3,300 number from the Pike seems low. There are a variety of places that traffic comes from, including Route 20 east, the Pike and Route 102. The ADT on Main Street in Lee is 16,000 and the ADT at the Lee/Lenox town lines is 12,000. It is estimated that some portion of the

12,000, which is mostly through traffic, is coming out of downtown Lee. 10,000 to 12,000 vehicles are manageable on a two lane road, whereas 16,000 or 20,000 are not.

26. (Lee Resident) Why was the full interchange at Exit 1 alternative taken off the table? Will it be reconsidered?

BRPC Response: If Exit 1 was a full interchange, it would only serve traffic from and to the west, for which there are other routes (Route 22 to Route 295 or Route 20). The western traffic was not part of the study's intent, which was to address the north/east traffic flow. BRPC staff has not argued against the validity of a full interchange at Exit 1, just that it does not fit into the scope of this particular study.

27. (Stockbridge Resident) What would be the economic impact on Lee if traffic was diverted out of the downtown? Why would traffic from the east go past Lee to go to Route 7 in order to get to Pittsfield? Has the study looked at the economic impacts to Lee?

BRPC Response: The difference in mileage is not much. Cars don't mind going through downtown Lee. Truckers would make the trip to the new exit because it would be more convenient than having to go through downtown Lee.

28. (Lee Resident) It seems that major decisions are being made strictly based on numbers. Truck data was collected during the summer, when traffic is much different from the rest of the year. The decisions should be based on the traffic patterns from the rest of the year. BRPC needs to go back and look at the long term impacts on the entire region and consider what is best in the long term for the entire region. The MPO needs to look strategically at the long term impacts on the entire region, not just Lee.

29. (Lee Resident) The individual noted that they do not see any trucks in Lee on the average day. Truckers don't live in Berkshire County and don't pay taxes. Residents don't care about making routes more convenient for truckers. The proposal will destroy the lovely Lee/Stockbridge area and the Prime Outlets if the exit is moved. This would have a devastating impact on the economy. The Selectboards should get together and take a long hard look at these proposals.

30. (Lee Resident) The individual observed that the vast majority of people don't want a new exit in any of these towns. Lee may not want trucks, but neither does Stockbridge. People are now living with a cloud over their head wondering which proposal will go forward and when. The Selectboards need to get together and stop the proposals.