

Lee Area Traffic Study
Summary of Ninth Working Group Meeting
Wednesday, September 10, 2008, 3:30 PM.
Stockbridge Town Hall, 50 Main Street, Stockbridge, MA

Name	Organization
Bryan Emmett	Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Greg Federspiel	Lenox Town Manager
Robert Gorden	Becket Representative
Stephen LaBelle	Becket Representative
Jerry LePrevost	Lee Traffic Commission
Jorja-Ann Marsden	Stockbridge Town Administrator
George Shippey	Stockbridge Selectboard Chair
Michael Supranowicz	Berkshire Chamber of Commerce
Mark Moore	MassHighway District 1
Peter Frieri	MassHighway District 1
Nat Karns	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Anuja Koirala	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Christine Neumann	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

1. Introductions

Mr. Karns welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Summary of August 27th Public Meeting

The group took a few minutes to review the materials from the 2nd public meeting held on August 27th. Working Group members indicated that the materials accurately portrayed what they heard at the meeting. Based on the comments he heard, Mr. Shippey noted that it seems clear Stockbridge residents don't want an interchange on Route 7. Mr. Karns acknowledged that (a) there was probably a lot of comments not formally stated or recorded at the meeting and (b) that there was a common thread throughout the communities in the study area of not wanting an interchange in their community.

Mr. Karns addressed one comment made at the public meeting regarding the way BRPC staff measured potential impacts. Mr. Karns clarified that BRPC staff measured existing residential development and did not measure potentially affected areas that are zoned residential. With the exception of alternatives 1 and 2, which would keep traffic in downtown Lee, the rest of the alternatives would involve changes to areas that are zoned residential.

Mr. Karns explained that BRPC staff met with representatives from the Mass Turnpike Authority (MTA) on Monday, August 25th. The representatives made it clear that MTA did not expect that they would be able to provide funding to build an interchange. However, the representatives were open to the possibility of an interchange if there was community consensus. Mr. Karns noted that two miles is the minimum separation between interchanges in a rural setting, which this area of the Turnpike is considered. Alternative 10 (West Road interchange) is just outside that two mile threshold. Alternative 5 (Route 7 interchange) is slightly beyond that. On the east side of Lee, the alternatives might require design exceptions.

Mr. LePrevost mentioned the possibility of a new interchange east of the first Turnpike underpass on Route 20. Mr. Karns noted that the MTA representatives suggested this as a viable option. The MTA's biggest concern with a new interchange is having weaving traffic, which is considered an unsafe condition, and that the only way to avoid weaving traffic is to increase the separation between interchanges. This was one of the reasons BRPC staff decided to have the Working Group reconsider Alternative 6B with interchange. BRPC staff would look at the traffic impacts first, to see where the interchange would work best, and then examine it from an engineering perspective to see where the interchange could physically be built. Because the traffic is a north-east problem, Mr. Karns noted that a full interchange may not be needed.

Mr. Shippey shared an aerial map which a Stockbridge resident had brought to the Stockbridge Town Hall. The individual drew a potential new road east of the existing interchange in Lee, but west of October Mountain. The route would pass on the east side of the Berkshire Railway Museum and would extend north to Adams and North Adams. The individual suggested this route would be the best long term solution because the route would accommodate traffic created by increased development in North Adams, Adams and the eastern side of Pittsfield. Mr. Shippey added that the existing roads towards North Adams do not allow for a lot of industrial development. Mr. Karns noted that this route is similar to Alternative 6D, but located in Lee instead of Becket. This route, like Alternative 6D, would involve a lot of environmental issues and construction on steep slopes in order to avoid residential areas. Mr. Karns noted that a general assumption going into the study is that Pittsfield is considered the northern terminus of the "affected area."

Mr. Federspiel asked if Stockbridge residents had the same objections to Alternative 10 as they did Alternative 5. Ms. Marsden indicated that Stockbridge residents have expressed greater objections to Alternative 5. Mr. Shippey added that there are fewer homes on West Road between the Turnpike and Route 7 and there are also not as many environmental issues.

Mr. Emmett noted that the Route 7 interchange would bisect Highlawn Farm. He noted that this would be a major environmental and community impact which would affect Highlawn Farm's viability. Mr. Karns suggested that Route 7 may not need to be expanded beyond the two existing lanes, but this depends on the determination of traffic number expectations during the detailed analysis. Route 7 may warrant shoulder widening and improvements may be needed at the Summer Street intersection. The visual impacts would be the biggest issue, especially to the row of maple trees lining Route 7, which as both Mr. Karns and Mr. Shippey noted are dying off. Ms. Marsden noted that there is approximately 1.5 miles between Route 7 and the limited access portion of the Lenox Bypass.

3. Summary of August 4th Working Group Meeting

The group reviewed the summary of the August 4th meeting. There were no changes or comments.

4. Discussion regarding next steps, including analysis of "Alternative 6B with interchange"

Ms. Koirala introduced Alternative 6B with interchange. This alternative is similar to Alternative 6B. It would start east of Exit 2 and continue north to Crystal Street near Woods Pond and use Housatonic Street to connect to Route 7. In the previous analysis, Alternative 6B ranked "medium" for negative environmental impacts and "high" for both negative transportation impacts and negative land use impacts. With an interchange, the negative score for transportation impacts improved to "medium." The negative score for environmental impacts also improved to "medium." The negative score for land use impacts continued to rank "high." Both Alternative 6B and Alternative 6B with interchange ranked "medium" for both sharp turns and slopes greater than 8%. Alternative 6B with interchange did well in reducing traffic at three major intersections in Lee: Center St./Route 20, Main St./Route 20, and Housatonic St./Route 20. The amount of traffic reduced in Alternative 6B with interchange was comparable to the amount of traffic reduced in Alternative 10. In response to a question from a Working Group member, Ms. Koirala noted that the reduction in truck traffic was based on inputting into the model the percentage of trucks within the total traffic volume.

The Working Group discussed whether or not Alternative 6B with interchange should be kept for further analysis. Mr. Emmett noted that this alternative would involve a new roadway, construction on steep slopes and would have a high level of residential impacts. Mr. Karns noted it would be necessary to use Housatonic Street rather than extend a new roadway farther north because a new roadway farther north would have greater environmental impacts. The environmental impacts were discussed. Although the area has several gravel beds that may already be environmentally degraded, these areas would still appear on the environmental data layer because of their proximity to the Woods Pond resource area. Although there was limited participation in the discussion, there was concern about high land use impacts of 6B. Although the Working Group did not vote, the apparent "consensus" was to not advance Alternative 6B with interchange for further analysis since the alternative has a high level of negative land use impacts.

Ms. Koirala summarized the next steps in the study. BRPC staff will perform a detailed transportation analysis over the next two months to assess how each of the remaining alternatives will impact the eight identified intersections in downtown Lee for which BRPC analyzed existing conditions. East-north travel time will also be examined. BRPC staff will also prepare a preliminary cost analysis. Once these analyses are completed, BRPC staff will compare the five remaining alternatives against each other and determine short and long term recommendations. BRPC staff will provide summary sheets of the analysis for each alternative and the cross comparison to the Working Group. Mr. Karns reiterated several things that, if a new interchange is recommended, a detailed engineering

feasibility study and financial assessment will be needed.

5. Next meeting date

The next meeting date was left open. BRPC staff will prepare the detailed analyses and recommendations to Working Group members and plan to have the next Working Group meeting by early November. At this meeting, the Working Group will discuss the detailed analyses and BRPC staff recommendations. There will be one more public meeting. BRPC staff will also give presentations to the Select Boards of Towns within the study area (Becket, Lee, Lenox, Stockbridge and West Stockbridge) as well as to interest groups, including economic development and environmental organizations. BRPC staff will then develop a complete report to provide to the MPO.

Mr. Karns noted the upcoming MPO caucus set for October 9th and urged participation by the municipalities.