

Lee Area Traffic Study
Summary of Tenth Working Group Meeting
Wednesday, October 27, 2008, 3:30 PM.
Stockbridge Town Hall, 50 Main Street, Stockbridge, MA

Name	Organization
Doug Bruce	Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Greg Federspiel	Lenox Town Manager
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
Alison Church	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 September 10th Working Group Meeting

The group reviewed the summary of the September 10th meeting. There were no changes or comments.

3. Focused discussion and vote regarding each of the 7 alternatives (Alternatives 1, 2A, 3A, 5, 6B with interchange, 8B and 10) including impacts and benefits

Mr. Karns explained that, subsequent to the last Working Group meeting, one alternative had been identified for reconsideration. At a meeting with the Lee Selectboard on October 7th, the Lee Selectboard asked that a revised version of alternative 8B be evaluated. Alternative 8B would include an interchange at the Becket/Otis/Blandford town lines and use Algeria Road/Bonnie Rigg Road to connect to Route 8 north to Dalton. The revised version involves upgrades to Route 8 from Becket to Dalton including making the road wider, eliminating curves, and increasing the speed limit in order to make Route 8 optimally conducive to an increase in traffic. The alternative has been reassessed with these changes and was presented to the Working Group for consideration.

In response to a question from a Working Group member, Mr. Karns clarified that the Lee Selectboard was not opposed to the alternatives located within the Town's boundaries. However, the Lee Selectboard did question why Lee should have two interchanges. Mr. Supranowicz noted that this is a regional issue. Businesses and employees north and east of Lee will benefit from improved access through the Lee area. Mr. Karns added that BRPC staff will recommend to the MPO whichever alternative or combination of alternatives does the best job possible at improving traffic with the least amount of environmental and community impacts as possible.

Along with reconsideration of Alternative 8B, another goal of today's meeting was to have the Working Group take a vote on all remaining alternatives. Mr. Karns explained that any of these alternatives may need to be reassessed as part of an EIR (Environmental Impact Report).

Mr. Karns noted that, although there was a general consensus at the last Working Group meeting to drop alternative 6B with interchange from further consideration, a vote was needed in order to eliminate this alternative.

The Working Group considered each of the remaining alternatives in turn.

- Alternative 1: Transportation System Management measures to improve upon the existing infrastructure. These measures might include installing traffic lights at Park/Main, Center/Main and/or at Park/Housatonic or reconfiguring parking and/or intersection geometry.

There is a legal requirement to analyze this alternative completely. A detailed analysis of this alternative will include an assessment of Route 20 to see if there are upgrades needed to Route 20 north of Lee to the intersection with Route 7.

- Alternative 2A: One-way pair with Main Street and Canal Street.

Mr. Karns explained that alternative 2A functions similarly to alternative 3A in the Main Street area of Lee. According to the traffic model, this alternative would decrease traffic on Main Street, but it would also increase traffic on Center Street and Housatonic Street. Essentially, this alternative would take half of the traffic off Main Street by moving it one block over to a new through street. This alternative does not have significant environmental impacts as compared to other alternatives. This alternative has greater direct impacts on commercial/industrial land than alternative 3A.

Mr. LePrevost noted that the Lee Traffic Commission does not feel this alternative would be viable or beneficial. The Lee Traffic Commission feels that the outflow of traffic onto Park Street would create more congestion at the intersection with Route 20, especially with the addition of necessary traffic signals. Further, Mr. LePrevost felt that it would be difficult to extend Canal Street south to West Park Street, especially since this would require a railroad crossing and takings.

The Working Group voted unanimously to eliminate this alternative from further consideration.

- Alternative 3A: New bypass located on the west side of the Housatonic River starting near the Summer Street/Laurel Street intersection and extending south to West Park Street near the Marble Street intersection, and continuing south of the Turnpike on the eastern side of Marble Street to Route 102 near the Old Pleasant Street intersection.

Mr. Karns pointed out that this is the only remaining alternative besides alternative 1 that does not involve a new interchange. The traffic model indicates this alternative would reduce traffic on Main Street as well as on Housatonic Street, but it would also increase traffic on Center Street as people from other parts of Lee and the Lenoxdale area would use Center Street to access the new bypass south to Route 102. Mr. Karns added that this alternative would not decrease traffic on Laurel Hill.

Due to its proximity to the Housatonic River, alternative 3A has a greater impact on water resources than 2A. Alternative 3A also has more impacts on residential land uses than 2A in terms of acreage, but neither alternative's impact is dramatically high. Because alternative 3A involves a longer roadway than alternative 2A, the greater amount of acreage impacted is expected. This alternative does have some impacts to commercial/industrial land within a 1,000 acre proximity as well as a small amount of impact to protected open space and almost 1 mile of roadway with slopes greater than 8%.

The Working Group voted unanimously to include this alternative for further analysis.

- Alternative 5: New interchange on Route 7 where Route 7 crosses under the Turnpike.

Alternative 5 was modeled based on a full interchange. Mr. Karns noted that it could be reassessed as a partial interchange. At its current design, alternative 5 reduces traffic at a level comparable with alternative 6B. However, it has fewer environmental impacts than alternatives 6B and 8B. Mr. Karns noted that alternative 5 and 10 are very similar and there is only a 0.8 mile difference in travel distance between alternative 5 and alternative 10 from where West Road crosses the Turnpike up to the intersection with Route 7 heading toward Lenox versus taking Route 7 north to that same intersection. Therefore, it should be noted that the decrease in traffic calculated by the traffic model is overly sensitive to the time/distance relationship.

Mr. Shippey commented that alternative 5 would have a detrimental effect on Kamposoa Bog, which is one of the most protected and pristine bogs in the Commonwealth. Based on the comments made at the last public meeting, Mr. Shippey emphasized that Stockbridge residents do not want an interchange on Route 7. Mr. Shippey also noted that an interchange on Route 7 would impact the area south of Route 7. Mr. Karns explained that further analysis would assess the impacts from the Route 102/Route 7 intersection north past

Highlawn Farm to the controlled access portion of Route 7 in southern Lenox. Mr. Moore noted that both alternatives 5 and 10 would need to be examined during the EIR phase. Mr. Moore specified that an EIR is needed for any major project. Mass Highway typically combined the EIR with the MEPA process.

Five Working Group members voted to include this alternative for further consideration. The vote carried with the Stockbridge representative opposed.

- Alternative 6B with interchange: New bypass located on the east side of Lee starting with a partial interchange east of Exit 2 (northbound only) using a power line right-of-way north to Lenoxdale and crossing at the Woods Pond dam and continuing west to Route 7/20 via Housatonic Street.

This alternative was remodeled with an interchange and a new roadway connecting the interchange to Route 20. The partial interchange is meant to pick up north and east Turnpike traffic headed toward Lenoxdale and Pittsfield. Mr. Karns explained that this alternative uses Housatonic Street because a new roadway farther north would have even greater environmental impacts.

Alternative 6B does very well in diverting traffic in Lee. It also reduces VMT (Vehicle Miles Traveled) and VHT (Vehicle Hours Traveled). This alternative does the best at reducing traffic, but also has a large amount of impacts.

There are a lot of environmental impacts – including impacts to streams, floodplains, habitat, biomap supporting natural resources, Zone A and B well protection - as well as impacts to protected open space. Mr. Bruce noted that BNRC owns land and has conservation rights on other land adjacent to this alternative. Further, Mr. Bruce noted that this alternative would run through the proposed ACEC. Mr. Karns explained that this alternative may have some benefit from an economic development standpoint as it would provide better access for the Lane construction site and industrial areas along Crystal Street. However, it has far greater impacts in Lenox due to the amount of residential development located on Housatonic Street.

Although the roadway would run along the steep slopes rather than across them, this alternative would require a considerable amount of cut and fill, which would have a substantial visual impact. In response to a question from Mass Highway, Mr. Karns explained that improvements needed to local streets have not yet been assessed. Mr. Moore noted that the impacts to residential areas along Housatonic Street may be understated. Mr. Federspiel noted that it would be difficult to widen Housatonic Street due to the proximity of the roadway to existing homes.

Five Working Group members voted to eliminate this alternative from further consideration. The vote carried with the Mass Highway representative abstaining.

- Alternative 8B: interchange at the Becket/Otis/Blandford town lines and using Algeria Road/Bonnie Rigg Road to connect to Route 8 north to Dalton.

Prior to today's meeting, Ms. Church had measured the lane width and shoulder width of Route 8. There is a width of approximately 28-32' on Route 8 south of Washington Mountain Road. North of Washington Mountain Road to approximately the Hinsdale town line, the road is only 24-28' wide, including shoulders. North of Hinsdale through Dalton, the width is again approximately 28-32'.

An assumed greater width of 40' (two 12' lanes and 8' shoulders) was used as the basis for the analysis of this alternative.

Mr. Karns noted that this alternative does not do well at diverting traffic in Lee. However, it does reduce regional VMT and VHT. Mr. Karns noted that the decrease in VMT for this alternative addresses improvements in rural accessibility, specifically for people in Otis and Becket since they would have a more direct route to access the Turnpike. However, rural accessibility is not part of this project's purpose and need. VMT and VHT are the only traffic criteria that alternative 8B best addresses.

This alternative has the most pronounced environmental and land use impacts of all of the alternatives. Ms. Church noted that there is a lot of development in the Route 8 corridor in Pittsfield and Dalton. Mr. Karns pointed out that this alternative would include improvements to 23.5 miles of roadway versus the next longest alternative (6B), which is only 6 miles. Therefore, an increase in level of impacts should be expected. Mr. Karns noted that this alternative does go through some environmentally sensitive areas; there is a large ACEC

in Hinsdale and from Becket village northward, the road runs right along a river. There are also a lot of steep slopes.

Mr. Supranowicz suggested that this alternative be evaluated in terms of how the upgrades to Route 8 would affect travel time. It was determined that BRPC staff will perform a travel time analysis taking the upgrades on Route 8 into consideration. Two routes will be assessed. First, Route 8 from the intersection with Hubbard Ave in Pittsfield to the intersection of Route 8 and Route 20 in Becket will be assessed. Second, Washington Mountain Road from the intersection of Hubbard Ave at Route 8/9 in Pittsfield down Dalton Division Road south to the intersection of Route 8 and Route 20 in Becket will be assessed. The travel time along these routes will be compared against the existing travel time on Route 7/20 from Pittsfield to the intersection of Route 8 and Route 20 in Becket. Ms. Koirala noted that the traffic model does not account for traffic signals, so an assumed amount of delay will be added to account for each traffic signal.

Ms. Church added that it is difficult to know how many trucks would use this route in order to bypass Lee versus the number of trucks that are local to the Lee/Lenox area. In response to a question from a Working Group member, Ms. Church added that there is no recent, comprehensive origin-destination data available.

The Working Group voted unanimously that if these analyses do not show a 10% improvement in travel time with the upgrades to Route 8 as compared to the existing route, alternative 8B can be eliminated from further consideration. Mr. Moore suggested that if the Washington Mountain Road/McNerney Road route has the potential to significantly reduce travel time, this would be the preferred option over Route 8 since the travel distance would be shorter using Washington Mountain Road and the engineering feasibility of widening Route 8 is questionable.

- Alternative 10: New interchange located on the west side of Lee using West Road north to Route 7. This alternative was modeled as a northbound only interchange and is similar to alternative 5. Like alternative 5, alternative 10 reduces traffic at a level comparable with alternative 6B, but has fewer environmental impacts than alternatives 6B and 8B. Alternative 10 does have some impacts to open space and land use. Mr. Karns noted that further analysis of this alternative would include an assessment of the impacts on Route 7 past Highlawn Farm. Mr. Karns acknowledged that this alternative does not have the impacts to the south of Route 7 that alternative 5 has. Mr. Moore noted that from an engineering standpoint, the West Road/Route 7 intersection would be realigned to a more standard "T" design to improve visibility. Mr. Karns added that modifications may be needed on West Road south of the Turnpike in order to control access southbound.

The Working Group voted unanimously to include this alternative for further consideration.

4. Next Steps

Ms. Koirala summarized the next steps in the study. BRPC staff will perform a travel time analysis for Route 8 with the improvements and Washington Mountain Road. BRPC staff will also perform analyses to assess how each of the remaining alternatives will impact the eight identified intersections in downtown Lee for which BRPC analyzed existing conditions. Each alternative will be looked at in depth, including improvements needed to Route 20 from Laurel Street north to Lenox and improvements needed on Route 7 from Route 102 to the controlled access portion of Route 7 in Lenox. A similar analysis will also be performed for West Road. These analyses may lead to the identification of other intersections that will need to be assessed, such as the intersection of Route 7 and Route 102 and intersections along Route 8.

Mr. Karns added that BRPC staff will also begin documenting qualitative information and drafting the final report. A third public meeting will be held after the holidays.

5. Next meeting date

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 2nd at 3:30pm at the Lee Library. At this meeting, the group will review the detailed analysis of the remaining alternatives.