BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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Lee Area Traffic Study
Summary of Eleventh Working Group Meeting

Tuesday, December 9, 2008, 3:30 PM.
Lee Library Gallery, 100 Main Street, Lee, MA

Name	Organization
Doug Bruce	Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Greg Federspiel	Lenox Town Manager
Stephen LaBelle	Becket Representative
Jorja-Ann Marsden	Stockbridge Town Administrator
Bob Nason	Lee 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 October 27th Working Group Meeting

The group reviewed the summary of the October 27th meeting. There were no changes or comments.

3. Discussion regarding elimination of Alternative 8B based on results of Travel Time analysis and previous vote of Working Group

Subsequent to the last Working Group meeting, BRPC performed a travel time analysis for Alternative 8B. This alternative involves the creation of a new interchange at the Becket/Otis/Blandford town lines using Bonnie Rigg Hill Road to connect to Route 8 north to Dalton. A second, alternate route would use Washington Mountain Road instead of Route 8 north to Pittsfield. Travel time analyses were performed on both of these options as well as for the existing route which uses East Street to South Street to Route 7/20 to Route 20 to Exit 2 and using I-90 from Exit 2 to the new interchange at Bonnie Rigg Hill Road.

The starting point (Point A) for Option 1 (using East Street to Merrill Road to Dalton Ave. to Route 8 to Bonnie Rigg Hill Road), was determined to be Woodlawn Ave. in Pittsfield. Mr. Karns noted that this location was chosen because of its location within a center of economic activity in Pittsfield. The intersection of Bonnie Rigg Hill Road and Route 20 was used as the end point (Point B). The same starting and end points were used for Option 2 (using East Street to Merrill Road to Dalton Ave. to Hubbard Ave. to Division Road to Washington Mountain Road to McNerney Road to Route 8 to Bonnie Rigg Hill Road) as well as for the existing route.

BRPC staff drove each of the three options on November 12th. The actual travel time was very similar to the travel time calculated by the model. The model was consistently one minute shorter than the actual travel time. The projection to 2030 with improvements to Route 8 and Washington Mountain Road provided a travel time of 41 minutes for Option 1 and 36.5 minutes for Option 2. The existing route took the least amount of time (34.5 minutes). Based on these calculations, BRPC staff concluded that none of the options provided much of an improvement. Previously, the Working Group had voted that if the projection with improvements did not show a 10% decrease in travel time, this alternative could be dropped from further consideration.

Mr. LaBelle noted that because BRPC staff used a car to drive the routes, the travel time would be longer for large trucks. Mr. Karns noted that the analysis represented a “best case” scenario.

In response to a question from a Working Group member regarding the condition of Washington Mountain Road, Mr. LaBelle suggested that the road has an approximate 8% grade and a climbing lane would have to be added. Based on the travel time analysis, Mr. Supranowicz noted that unless trucks were forbidden from driving through Lee, there would not be any incentive for them to use this alternative.

Mr. Karns noted that BRPC's final report will include a summary of the constraints of the Alternative 8B options. These constraints include the fact that this alternative would include improvements to 23.5 miles of roadway and that this alternative has the most pronounced environmental and land use impacts of all of the alternatives.

Mr. Karns asked each Working Group member if the analysis performed by BRPC staff satisfied their concerns and if there was consensus that this alternative could be dropped from further consideration. Working Group members indicated that they were satisfied by the analysis. Mr. Shippey indicated that a previous Stockbridge Selectboard supported not having this as an option. Furthermore, he indicated that the terrain seemed to make this alternative not feasible. Mr. Moore added that trucks cannot fit under the underpass on Hubbard Ave. The Working Group agreed to eliminate this alternative from further consideration.

4. Level of Service (LOS) and Travel Time analysis of the remaining four alternatives (Alternatives 1, 3A, 5 and 10)

Travel Time Analysis:

Ms. Koirala went through the Travel Time analysis handout provided at the meeting. The travel time analysis for the remaining alternatives looked at the starting point (Point A) and end point (Point B) previously noted as well as two other points in the downtown Lee area. Point C is located at the intersection of Route 7 & Route 20 in Lenox. Point D is located at Exit 2 off the Turnpike in Lee. These points were chosen in order to analyze the reduction in travel time through the downtown area in Lee. Travel time analyses were performed for each remaining alternative from Point A to Point B and from Point C to Point D for the 2030 projection both with and without the addition of traffic signals along Route 20. The model calculated travel times for 2030 with traffic signals at the Main St./Center St., Main St./Park St., and Park St./Housatonic St. intersections.

Please refer to the attached handouts which detail the Travel Time and Level of Service (LOS) analyses.

It is important to note that the travel times for Alternatives 3A, 5 and 10 were not affected by the addition of traffic signals in downtown Lee because these alternatives bypass the downtown.

Mr. Karns summarized that none of the remaining alternatives show a major difference in travel times. The addition of traffic signals in the downtown would increase delay but are needed in order to help the side street traffic turn onto Main Street.

Ms. Church added that based on the travel times alone, Alternative 10 offers the highest reduction in travel time, but that there is not much difference between Alternatives 3A, 5 and 10. She also noted that the one major difference between the remaining alternatives is that Alternative 3A would not draw as much traffic as Alternatives 5 and 10 because Alternative 5 and 10 are new interchanges whereas Alternative 3A would be located along local routes. Ms. Church emphasized that Alternative 3A should move forward, at least into the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), in case the Turnpike Authority is not amendable to a new interchange.

Level of Service Analysis:

It is important to note that Level of Service (LOS) is calculated differently for signalized and non-signalized intersections. For signalized intersections, the performance of the complete intersection is considered. For non-signalized intersections, or stop sign intersections, the LOS refers to the amount of time it takes for a vehicle to turn onto the main street from a side street. Typically, a left turn from a side street experiences the longest delay. An A rating refers to a delay of less than 10 seconds. An F rating refers to a delay of more than 80 seconds. Delay of more than 1,000 seconds is not recordable.

Ms. Koirala went through the LOS handout. Alternative 3A does show a reduction in delay from more than 1,000 seconds to 78.6 seconds at the Main St./Center St. intersection, but this does not improve the intersection's F rating.

Mr. Moore suggested that the public meeting materials be clear on the fact that LOS for non-signalized intersections refers to the amount of time it takes vehicles on the side streets to maneuver through the intersection. Mr. Moore suggested that the through movement LOS be noted on the public meeting materials along with the side

street LOS. Mr. Moore also suggested that the alternatives may divert more traffic than the model shows. Mr. Karns agreed that the model can only show the relationship between distance and speed and that there is a "psychological" component regarding the ease of use associated with each alternative that cannot be calculated.

Mr. Karns explained that the model is overly sensitive to the time/distance relationship and that the distance between Alternative 5 and Alternative 10 is too small to warrant the increase in travel time calculated by the model. Although the model shows a greater decrease in delay between Alternative 10 and Alternative 5, Mr. Karns noted that the two alternatives are essentially equal.

The Level of Service analysis for the remaining alternatives showed that, without improvements to traffic signals along Route 20, none of the remaining alternatives offer any real improvement in Level of Service to the intersections in downtown Lee. Ms. Church noted that, without the addition of traffic signals along Route 20, there would be very little improvement in LOS.

Mr. Karns noted that the addition of traffic signals in the downtown would increase delay but are needed in order to help the side street traffic turn onto Main Street. However, even with the addition of traffic signals along Route 20, the intersections will fail in 2030 without the addition of other improvements. Only in combination with the remaining alternatives does the addition of traffic signals offer any real improvement to LOS.

Mr. Karns noted that BRPC's final report will clearly note the impacts of each of the remaining alternatives. Alternative 10 has fewer impacts than alternative 5 but the difference in impacts is not great. In response to a question from a Working Group member, Mr. Karns added that the potential impacts to the Kampoosa Bog will be included in the final report. BPRC staff will also coordinate with Mass Highway District 1 to include cost estimates in the final report.

BRPC staff plans to recommend that each of the remaining alternatives move forward into an EIR. The recommendations will be taken to the Berkshire MPO, which will make the decision as to whether these recommendations should move forward into a more detailed Environmental Impact Report phase of study.

Mr. Moore added that both Alternatives 5 and 10 will need to be considered in the EIR.

Mr. Karns noted that along with the BRPC staff recommendation to the MPO about the remaining alternatives to be carried into the EIR phase, BRPC will also be recommending that traffic signals be installed at the three intersections previously noted (Main St./Center St., Main St./Park St., and Park St./Housatonic St. intersections). Ms. Church added that, along with an EIR, a traffic signal warrant analysis would be needed before the traffic signals could be installed.

Mr. Nason expressed the opinion that the Town of Lee does not want traffic signals in the downtown. He added that Lee would not like to see a second interchange in the Town. Mr. Karns noted that although BRPC plans to recommend the installation of traffic signals in downtown Lee, it will be the Town's decision whether or not to install them.

Mr. Karns explained that he will be meeting with the Select boards and other interested organizations and that BRPC will be holding a Public Meeting in January before making a recommendation to the MPO sometime in the winter/spring.

5. Thoughts/suggestions for the Lee Area Traffic Study 3rd Public Meeting to be held on Wednesday, January 21st, 2009 at Lee Elementary School Cafeteria

Mr. Karns explained that if the MPO decides to take action, all of the remaining alternatives would need to be included in the EIR, along with possible variations that may operate within the same method. For example, the exact location of a new interchange somewhere along the Lee/Stockbridge Town Line – whether it be on Route 7 or West Road or somewhere in between – would be determined during the EIR phase. Further, whether this interchange would be a full interchange or a partial, northbound only interchange would be determined during the EIR phase, which would include engineering feasibility as well as environmental and community impact review.

6. Next meeting date

It was determined that the Working Group would not meet again before the 3rd Public Meeting, which is scheduled for January 21st at 6:30 at the Lee Elementary Cafeteria. In case of inclement weather, the Public Meeting will be held on January 28th. Mr. Karns thanked everyone for their continued participation and support throughout this long process.