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Midcoast Bypass Task Force Meeting Minutes, January 24, 2009

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Meeting Minutes for the January 24, 2009 Task Force Meeting

MIDCOST BYPASS TASK FORCE MEETING REPORT FINAL VERSION January 24, 2008 6:30-8:30 pm Eddy School, Edgecomb

Attending: Bob Faunce, Lincoln County; Don Hudson, Chewonki Foundation; Norma Dreyfus, Friends of Coastal Preservation; Amanda Russell, Edgecomb; Dave Bertran, Westport; Joanne Cameron, Edgecomb; Tom Woodin, Boothbay Harbor; Pat Hudson, Newcastle; Tom Eichler, Sheepscot Valley Conservation Associates; Doug Baston, Alna; Arthur Faucher, Wiscasset; Dave Nichols, Don Jones, Wiscasset; Wiscasset; Jaimie Logan, Boothbay Regional Chamber; Barry Johnston, Edgecomb; Ed Hanscom, MaineDOT; Dale Doughty, MaineDOT; Carol Morris, Morris Communications; Kat Fuller, MaineDOT; Peter Kleskovic, FHWA.

Objective of Today's Meeting: Carol Morris opened the meeting, saying that the objective tonight is to hear thoughts and comments about the Wiscasset DEIS public comments binders the Task Force members have received. She said the goal is to end the meeting with a plan for the topics the Task Force wanted to weigh in on, and a timeline on when to discuss them. MaineDOT has a pivotal role to play, as they will have to produce research on these items; they have brought a timeline to give idea of how this might play out. Carol then went over the agenda and explained that Category A comments were those that she had thought the Task Force would like to weigh in on, Category B were those that required action or research from MaineDOT but not necessarily Task Force review, and Category C were those that did not require action. Category B Comments:

MaineDOT Research Overview:

Ed: The comments we received from federal agencies (Army Corps of Engineers, NOAA, US Fish and Wildlife, EPA, etc) are fairly typical of what MaineDOT gets on projects such as this. The Army Corps has requested additional information on eelgrass for example, and they have questioned why they have not yet received a permit application. We will be meeting with them as well as the other agencies at our monthly interagency meeting to understand where they come from on some of their comment and talk about how we can address them. The Army Corps understands that we have a Phase One sign off, and the reason we didn't move to the next phase is because of this Task Force process – our need to understand the comments that we have received and get context for them.

Don Jones: The question I noticed is that they were suggesting not actually issuing decision on LEDPA for several years, maybe not until closer to construction.

Dale: I didn't interpret it as that. I believe that the Army Corps thought our process would take longer. We don't want the department to recommend an alternative, have FHWA agree, and then have a different determination on the LEDPA.

Don: So you agree it is essential we have LEDPA before the decision.

Dale/Ed: Yes.

Dale: Their comment is an allusion to bringing the systems into a parallel track. They want to put to together so we are on the same timeframe.

Carol: When will you start working with the agencies on this issue?

Dale: Very soon, at our next interagency meeting. One of the next activities is to work on the permit application, on the components that we can provide today. The Army Corps understands that we are working this process slightly differently.

Carol: Any other questions? No? Are there any other topics you feel the Task Force wants to be on the discussion list? Task Force member: Do we need to talk about the individual comments?

Carol: Well, the individual comments in Category C are fairly brief opinion or preference, then there are individual's comments that have more information, for example, we should take this action because reason X, Y and Z. A lot of those more detailed comments were placed Category A, including new alignment proposals and specific comments about solving congestion problems in the village.

Carol: Are there any thoughts from environmental stakeholders? I know there was a lot here to go through.

Dale: How about giving people the option to email anything regarding issues in Section B to Carol over the next week. All: Agreed. Bob Faunce: I don't recall where, but in several places, agency comments were in conflict with each other. Will this be internally resolved or...? Dale: That's why we have the interagency meetings, to understand each others point of view. They're looking at it from their agencies point of view. One is more concerned about historic properties, others on wetlands. They also understand the perspective of other agencies. Some have specific regulatory standards, etc. We'll report back to you on that. Category A Comments: Topic List Discussion: Carol: The first issue I listed for Task Force discussion is the Traffic Diversion Analysis. In this section there is one letter from Don Jones, and one from Nigel Calder, talking about that issue from two different angles. It seemed important that that this analysis be above reproach, as so many opinions used this analysis as a foundation. The second issue I saw is the possible addition of Interchanges on a bypass alternative - we've known that's an issue from the beginning. Third, the whole Englebrekt Rd, and Davis Island comments, essentially that MaineDOT didn't categorize as a neighborhood, potentially missed historic buildings, etc. Also, there were several comments (at meetings), that since the DEIS was developed there has been more developments on Davis Island, that there are water and sewer rights along Rte. 1 north of the island, with other potential developments that are not at permit stage yet. We need to look at this area again so that the final EIS will take into account the future of the area. Edgecomb and MaineDOT can work together for this. Dale: This is what Task Force is for; Augusta can't understand the neighborhood or the vision for

Davis Island. Amanda: How do you do that (the research)? Dale: I don't think the MaineDOT can know what you're planning for there. If you can explain the vision, we'll work with it. In terms of Englebrekt Road, we'd like to sit down with you and say, "This is the criteria for a neighborhood, why did we not see it?" and then bring it back to the Task Force. We need to know what your citizens are seeing that we're not. Carol: It will be important to talk with your town planner, etc., decide what do you see twenty years from now? Amanda: We can give you present ordinances that define the vision. Dale: That's what we want. Carol: We also want to make sure we don't forget the Eddy road comments. Jo Cameron: There are concerns that it's a danger and cannot fruitfully be changed, except expanding where it enters into Rte. 1, but it has a causeway and you can't change it. Barry: Any change at the intersection would help. Lots of crashes (blue water, car, sky) in that area, because depth perception is difficult. Carol: The fourth issue is the thing we heard the most: you haven't convinced us that enough was done in downtown to try to solve the problem there. We heard this both from people who want a bypass now, not in ten years and from people who don't want a bypass at all. Finally, in regard to other proposed alternatives, I talked to Dale earlier today and what DOT would like to do is look at any new alternatives, develop some analysis, and come back to the Task Force. We've looked at a lot of alternatives already. But we will look at these based on the criteria we have been using and look for fatal flaws, of which one can be cost. If there are no fatal flaws, we will look at it deeper. David Bertran: A lot of the no build comments, I'd say 80 percent, we had already looked at during this process. I haven't seen much that is new or earthshaking in the comments. Norma Dreyfus: With people that I talk to at SPCA, people are concerned that various things have not been pursued in the no build option. I think that is the real issue. Tom Woodin: How did you distinguish between Category A and Category B? Carol: Category A includes comments with substantial input on existing alignment choices. Category B includes suggestions on new alignments, such as the VanOrsdell proposal, which MaineDOT will have to vet. Don Jones: The key word is new? Carol: Exactly. Thank you. Did anyone find anything else find anything for discussion? Jo: The topics are broad categories, and cover most items. The Rte. 1/27 interchange is of great importance to Edgecomb. Something should be done no matter where the bypass is. Bob: Going back to the first item, traffic diversion, do federal rules require that specific analysis procedure, is that dictated? Dale: Not dictated, but it is appropriate state-of-the-art methodology. Bob: When I looked at it as a math exercise, trying to quantify the exercise when everything is qualitative, "I had a hard time agreeing that the actual differences among alternatives was as great as indicated in the analysis." "I guess I could be convinced, but right now I believe that adding a minute to a trip should not be a deciding factor. Dale: I think that one thing we talk about is the schedule. We will want to spend a night on just that analysis: The attributes, how to influence driver behavior, all help us decide whether an extra minute is a user cost or not, for all the stated reasons. Carol: And if after that explanation, you need more, we'll go from there Bob: I just want people to understand better, that that's really the best way to estimate the difference. Dale: We'll schedule a meeting primarily on that. Carol: Others? Don Jones: A number of the comments could be moved into other sections. Can I go through them? Under A, from Frank Barnako- "I don't think you guys noticed my house," belongs under B: Individuals"" comments for MaineDOT to deal with. Carol: That letter had more than one topic, which is why it was placed in the A

section. I think, also that Mr. Barnako's specific question to DOT, which made it a B-type letter, has been handled by Ed already. Don: I don't see any other topics in the letter. Ed: What happened, his property was between the two alternatives on Clark's hill. He wasn't being directly affected. The Ice Pond people informed him he would be, so he sent us a letter. I have spoken with him. Don: Another is Morrison Bonpasse's, which I think belongs in A: Interim and long-term solutions. Carol: Okay. He's got several letters - we will move it. Don: In A: Official Town/Task Force member comments, there was a statement from Newcastle. Is it correct or not that any alternatives cut off of Rte. 1 access from Cochran Rd.? Carol: Pat Hudson is here, and that was her comment, so she can clarify if necessary. Dale: There was no intent to cut off Cochran Rd. Pat: It looked to us as if the route was bound to cut off access to Rte. 1 and people on Cochran Road would have to use Station road to get to Rte. 1. Ed: There are three types of connection with Rte. 1. N8c connects with Davis Island, in which case Cochran Road would still have access. N2F-1 would take Rte. 1 traffic on the bypass and bring it around to rejoin just west of Cochran Road. Carol: So it would still come out onto Rte. 1? Ed: Yes. Now other way would be between Englebrekt Rd. and cross road, going through the area just north of the post office. Cochran Rod would still have access to Rte. 1 and carry local traffic. Pat: We weren't sure from the maps. Dale: That's good to clarify. It was worth a comment. Carol: Thanks Don, what else? Don: Under the B: Individuals' comments section, where you have a comment from the Mozinskis on such things as trucks, noise, and speed limits, I'd like to see that discussed under A. A lot of people were concerned about that. Carol: That's good. Don: Another comment in same category, B, one comment from a fellow named Tom Nadeau, let's just say that I agree with him. It was difficult to post comments online. He wasn't able, neither was I. If I wasn't committed, I would have given up. Carol: Well, of course many people did get through, but there was an intermittent glitch that was a problem, yes. I was not happy about that. Don: It should be arranged so that comments shouldn't blank out if it doesn't go through, so people don't have to start from scratch. Carol: Absolutely. Don: In B: New alignment proposals page 2 was missing for Ken Rendell. Also, he is the only person whose comment is included twice? Carol: One comment was very specifically DOT oriented (on takings) but he also covered broader issues. The missing page is part of tonight's handouts. Don: My final comment is same section, James McQuaid, had comments on the bikeway issue. I'd like to move those to Category A to stimulate discussion. Carol: Okay, we'll do that. Bob: At public hearings, people brought up a pedestrian overpass in the Village. In the future, can DOT bring a sketch of it and talk about why or why not it's feasible? Carol: That was mentioned numerous times. I have sent Ed a document that summarized all the downtown suggestions, and we will be going through every single one. Bob: It also is coming up in Letters to the Editor. Dale: There are physical considerations for the pedestrian overpass. Norma: I'm interesting in seeing the extent that various traffic mitigation proposals would have on the construction project. If successful, might they delay construction? Carol: I think that is the crux of the discussion we will be having regarding all the downtown suggestions. Should we move to setting meeting dates and topics? Arthur: Did you dig across opposite Red's to find the water table level? Dale: It is typical, it changes in different places, the level rises with sand. In clay, may rise .5 feet. In the land surface it's down 2-4 feet. Determine Meeting Dates/Topics: Ed: What we handed out is a timeline for Category A subjects. It shows across the top 17 weeks, listed by Friday of

each week. At each block, you can see when we could have a meeting on the topic.

Amanda: If the Task Force met two weeks after the date you have indicated, then you'd have the information available? Ed: Yes. Doug: Does this mean that for the interchange discussion we will only be talking engineering use and benefit? Why just those two parameters? Ed: We would look at that for the first meeting. Once you see that, we can hear what you're interested in pursuing and we will look at other impacts and the human element. It will be a two-stage process. Look at traffic benefit, the rough implications, then go back and see deeper implications. Carol: This could even be broken up into three meetings. This is a big one, we're not going to shortchange it. Doug: This is all a two-stage process. You as DOT need to look at what is best for the state of Maine, and then second, what are the benefits and drawbacks to each of the towns. We want minimum impact on the towns. Dale: I agree. We're speaking the same language. We want to find the best technical solution, and then look at human/environmental issues. Carol: Logically, we might decide to look at this from the biggest issues to the smallest, for example, look at new route ideas first. But those are a lot of work for DOT, so that puts us in March before we start and we lose momentum. This way may be more confusing as we will be looking at items out of order, but we just have to accept the fact that progress will be incremental and we will not get a conclusion at every meeting. Dale: The tax issue is not listed on here. We need to look at the mill rates and assessed values to see if they are accurate. Carol: This is the loss of tax revenue based on takings of residences and businesses. This was a Wiscasset issue. Does it need to be discussed with the Task Force? Amanda: I want to be a part of that, just to know what going on. Tom Woodin: Not really Dale: Perhaps we can have a separate meeting with Edgcomb and Wiscasset and report back. (This was agreed upon.) A question was asked regarding the limited potential tax increase from a bypass if the road is limited access over the whole loop – where would this business enhancement take place? Dale: Some would say that if you bypass Wiscasset downtown and have access over the bridge to Davis Island, it would boost the attractiveness of these locations to business. It could have a long-term positive effect. A Task Force member commented that Damariscotta and Belfast are examples of this. Arthur: Are there any case studies of before and after bypasses? Kat Fuller: There are some but they are not very comparable. We can do another quick search. Dale: On Wilson St. in Bangor, they were concerned about losing pass-by traffic. So they went to MDI, took out business ads, subsidizing it through the city. This reminded people that the businesses were there. The identity of the area started to grow. You need a find a vision for the city and capitalize on it. Doug: I have a thesis: the effects of large public works projects are worse in imagining than in practice. Bob: The Conway bypass is a good example. Dale: Maybe this would be a good topic to get regional planners to come in to talk about. Bob, let's discuss that later. A Task Force member commented that this would be good for selectmen of the communities to hear as well. Carol: My other question is on the Edgcomb land use issues: do we want to work directly with Edgcomb and then report back or....? Bob: How could we not be in on that? All of us should hear about that issue. Amanda: I think it should be down at our Town Hall. We can have an interim meeting, DOT and Edgcomb, do the initial homework to bring back here to a meeting. Carol: Let's get these scheduled. Should we meet every two weeks? (General concurrence) After discussion, the following schedule was agreed to, with all meetings taking place on Thursdays at 6:30 on an every-two-weeks basis starting February 7.

Locations are to-be-determined. Meeting Schedule/Topics Feb. 7: Traffic Diversion Analysis: 1st Congregational Church, Wiscasset Feb. 21: Complete Traffic Diversion, Begin Interchange if possible: Location TBD March 6: Interchange: Lincoln County Communications Room, Wiscasset Mar 20: Complete Interchange: Lincoln County Communications Room, Wiscasset April 3: Downtown Village issues April 17: TBD May 1: TBD There was some final discussion that when the proposed “new” alignments are looked at, that much has changed in the years since they were last assessed, which will need to be taken into consideration. New Business Carol: Those of you who got my email today know there is a request to add an organization called R.O.A.D. to the Task Force. Morrison Bonpasse and Frank Risell are the co-chairs. They came to most of meetings. I have provided you with the email request that includes my questions regarding who they represent, if they are an established organization, what new point of view they would represent. This would be a MaineDOT decision, but they would like feedback from the Task Force regarding if they think this group would be helpful. A Task Force member asked if we need more people, expressing the opinion that the group is already very large. Another Task Force member indicated that he favored including the group, because their position of no-build is under-represented. A Task Force member said that, on the other hand, most of us have been here from beginning, and that position has never been under-represented. She would worry about the next group and next group who would ask. She suggested providing R.O.A.D. with e-mail from meetings. Another Task Force member indicated that ROAD is not a 501c3, as all the other organizations are, who also represent many more people. She mentioned that there are other similar organizations (SERC) that opted not to be part of the Task Force because they felt the organizations represented were sufficient. A Task Force member said they can come to meetings, make comments, the meetings are open. We have to draw a line. It was noted. that ROAD can also work through their town representatives. Carol: Anyone else? Art: No. {Arthur was stating his position on the addition of R.O.A.D.} Amanda: What are we supposed to accomplish by looking at these letters? Carol: Lets take the first topic that’s been separated out. Traffic diversion is clearly an issue. MaineDOT’s role will be to explain to the group how the analysis was reached, and you as group will respond. Amanda: Are we supposed to be amateur engineers? Carol: No. But the DEIS is a technical document, and in some cases the message is not clear to the public. The DOT needs your help to clarify and help tell them what to do: is the information just unclear, or is it inadequate? If it doesn’t make the case clearly, what information is needed to make it clear? For example, the DOT believes that the no-build option does not meet the need. The information in the DEIS is not compelling enough for the public to believe this. Your job is to ask “why” if you don’t understand or accept the information. A Task Force member asked if DOT is looking for the Task Force’s reaction to the public reaction. Dale replied “yes”. Arthur: Is the Dept of the Environment available to explain their comments? I have some questions. Do they do that? Dale: We could do that for you. We can bring our environmental staff in, who are professionals in this, to answer your questions. Carol: Anything else? Don: To what extent and how many of the commenters will receive individual responses from the department? If any? What are the criteria? Ed: Comments that are substantive – that offer more than a simple opinion, such as those in Categories A and B, will be answered in the final EIS. Dale: We are looking at sending a

card to those who commented, with information about the Task Force and web site so they can follow this process. The meeting ended at 8:10 pm.