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## **Midcoast Bypass Task Force Meeting Minutes, October 29, 2008**

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## Minutes of October 29, 2008 Midcoast Bypass Task Force Meeting

Midcoast Bypass Task Force Meeting October 29, 2008; 6:30-8:30 pm Lincoln County Communications Conference Room Attending: David King Sr., Woolwich; Bob Faunce, Lincoln County; Tom Eichler, Sheepscot Valley Conservation Assn; Don Jones, Wiscasset; Doug Baston, Alna; Pat Hudson, Newcastle; Jo Cameron, Edgecomb; Amanda Russell, Edgecomb; Don Hudson, Chewonki Foundation; Norma Dreyfus, Friends of Coastal Preservation; Gerry Audibert, MaineDOT; Ed Hanscom, MaineDOT; Peter Kleskovic, FHWA; Jeff McEwen, FHWA; Carol Morris, Morris Communications. The meeting began at 6:33 pm. Updates Carol Morris opened the meeting and asked Gerry Audibert to review recent updates, stating that the focus at this meeting would be the interim solutions to alleviate Wiscasset downtown traffic until the time a bypass could be built. Gerry stated that since the last meeting he had met offline with Wiscasset town representatives to discuss Wiscasset's safety and other concerns with Route 218 and had also met with Alna and Newcastle representatives on the same issues. He said that no decisions were made and a meeting report detailing discussion points would be distributed to the Task Force prior to the next meeting, at which time, potential Rte. 218 solutions will be discussed. Gerry and other members of MaineDOT also met on Oct. 27 with several property owners to hear their concerns with the tentatively preferred bypass route. Carol then described the Downtown Interim Measures document, which had been emailed earlier to Task Force members, stating that the document represents every concern on this topic brought forward during the public comment period. She noted that this meeting would be the final opportunity to address these concerns. Pedestrian Control Gerry reported that the Maine Historic Preservation Commission has ruled that they will not approve the underpass design submitted by MaineDOT because of its visual impact on the historic downtown. This is primarily due to the length and location of the handicap access ramps on Main Street. They had previously stated they would not approve any overpass design, also due to visual impacts. Gerry also reported that hardware is being installed for the new traffic counter, and information will begin to be collected soon. Gerry stated that MaineDOT supports a pilot program to test the effectiveness of a crossing guard. Ed described manual counting methods used in 2001 and explained that a crossing guard trial would be supported by manual counting to fine tune information gathered. Pat Hudson noted that any crossing guard should be properly trained to keep traffic moving, as that was not their role in the past. Doug Baston noted that the crossing guards used previously were very young. Don Jones noted that some did a good job. Carol stated that the goal of crossing guards would be to keep traffic moving and manage pedestrian crossings. Gerry added that there must be clear definition of role, responsibilities and funding source. Gerry stated that MaineDOT may be able to fund it on a trial basis but that local traffic control could not come under MaineDOT on a longer-term basis. Pat asked whether the idea of a crosswalk under the Davey Bridge was still in play. Bob described a proposal he has prepared to look at building a bike/pedestrian path and a pedestrian walkway on the waterfront from the town dock to where the train station used to be. Bob reported that he had a preliminary discussion with DEP on the crosswalk, and that they were not initially enthusiastic, but that it was still early and not enough information is available. The Task Force agreed that MaineDOT will pursue a crossing guards pilot program for next summer. Gerry reported that an examination of the effects of using a traffic signal to manage pedestrians showed that they would delay vehicular traffic overall. He said a signal would make it easier for pedestrians to get across the street, as well as for vehicles to turn onto Main St. from side streets. Pat asked why Camden, for example, has been successful with signals - they have a stop sign. Ed stated that Wiscasset has more traffic and said he would send the Task Force comparative data. (See below.) Requested Traffic Data: Below are approximate Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes for Route 1 on the downtown Main Streets of three Midcoast towns: Wiscasset - Main Street east of Gardiner Road: 18,000 Camden - Main Street north of Bayview Street: 12,000 Thomaston - Main Street east of Beechwood Street: 13,000 There was discussion of the effectiveness of using a police officer rather than a signal. . Don asked Ed if he agreed that the downtown trial in Wiscasset showed that traffic signals at Middle and Water provided some benefits as far as pedestrians crossings and ability of side street traffic to exit, but the signals did not increase Route 1 vehicular capacity which was the purpose of the trial. Ed agreed, and Don added that the one-way streets that were part of the trial were not popular in Wiscasset. Amanda Russell stated that it makes sense to try a police officer prior to installing a signal. Local Traffic Control Ed reviewed his technical analysis of traffic signal options at the junction of Route 1 with Route 27 as well as the roundabout option, noting that all affected land (i.e., land that would need to be taken) would be public land. Jeff McEwen explained the difference between a rotary and a roundabout: rotaries are larger and roundabouts are significantly safer, as roundabouts, being smaller, do not allow for increase in speed. They also eliminate left turns, which eliminates cut-off conflicts that often cause crashes. Gerry noted that another advantage to roundabouts is that there is no signal stopping traffic; they are controlled by "Yield" signs. Doug asked which option is typically recommended by MaineDOT and Federal Highway. Jeff noted that there are several considerations under which a recommendation is made: traffic flow, safety issues and cost. In response to a question by Pat about how a traffic light is timed, Ed explained intersection phases and how they constitute an intersection's cycle. He stated that the Route 27 phase could be as little as 20 seconds and explained how most intersections have detectors that notice waiting vehicles, so that the rest of the time the signal would be green for Route 1. The split might average 25%/75% Route 27/Route 1, but it would vary based on sensors/detectors. A typical cycle length would be about 60 seconds. Jo asked whether it is preferable to come to a full stop and wait, or do a "slow creep" both from a driver's perspective and from a safety perspective. Ed said it depends, and noted that the intersection currently meets Maine's definition of a high-crash location: more than eight crashes within a 3-year period. Ed stated that the intersection has had nine crashes within a 3-year period, and most are caused by left turns. He said that both the signal and the roundabout would provide more opportunity for vehicles to get through the intersection safely: a signal would reduce crashes by 25%; a roundabout by 60%. Bob asked how a roundabout could be a good solution for a situation in which traffic is backed up, as some years ago he was told that roundabouts fail in such a situation. Ed explained that the roundabout would improve wait times for Route 27 traffic and improve safety overall. It would not improve traffic flow for Route 1. Ed reviewed the benefit-to-cost analysis results, noting that safety benefits are measured with dollar amounts assigned to crashes in which no one is hurt ("fender bender"), crashes in which someone complains of injury, crashes in which someone sustains a minor injury, crashes in which someone sustains a significant injury, and crashes in which someone is killed. He stated that most crashes at this intersection are "fender benders." Ed also noted that mobility benefits are calculated at \$12 per vehicle hour. Bob asked whether Route 1 southbound could be separated into two southbound lanes, including a lane dedicated to right turns onto Route 27, because people waiting to turn from Route 27 onto Route 1 northbound cannot determine whether southbound traffic is through traffic or traffic turning onto Route 27, which delays Route 27 traffic by preventing vehicles from turning left. He asked whether the impact of such a solution could be modeled. Ed stated that the Route 1 southbound right-turn lane with an unsignalized scenario could be modeled and might help. Doug noted that this seems like the lowest-cost option. Don noted that, if mobility were the only criterion, then it seems obvious even without the study that the loss of mobility on Route 1 will outweigh the improvement of mobility on Route 27, due to the higher volume of traffic on Route 1. Gerry explained that MaineDOT looks at safety and mobility, and they fund safety projects if the safety benefit is twice the cost. Thus, unfortunately, this intersection does not meet the guidelines for safety projects. Jeff noted that engineering judgment enters into decisions as well, explaining that dollar value is not the only basis for decisions. He added that longer delays encourage drivers to take chances they should not take, resulting in more crashes. Gerry offered to provide current crash data to the task force. Jo asked whether most crashes occur on the Route 1 pathway. Ed stated that some occur on the Route 1 pathway, and some occur on the Route 27 approach. Don Hudson expressed support for a stepped approach to making changes to the intersection. Carol asked the Task Force whether that seemed to be a reasonable approach, and there was general agreement. Amanda asked whether crossing guards would be redundant with signals. Ed explained that the farther from the signal, the more traffic spreads out. MaineDOT concluded that the

analysis shows that it is not cost-effective to use either signals or a roundabout at this intersection but will examine the unsignalized right-turn lane option and report back. Parking Control Gerry reviewed parking changes made several years ago, in which some (14) spaces were eliminated, and parking went from 90 degrees to 60 degrees. He noted that Wiscasset retail merchants are strongly opposed to additional changes at this time. Wiscasset is working on a plan to add additional parking in the waterfront area. Real-time Travel Delay Information Gerry reviewed the pilot project and stated that the system worked well. The project was operational from Aug. 28 (Thursday before Labor Day weekend) through Oct. 15. The sign was activated 3 times: Aug. 28 for about two hours, Aug. 29 for three hours due to the Rte. 27 paving project, and September 16 for 1 hour and 40 minutes. He will be producing a report for the group in a few weeks. Gerry noted that the CMS project located on Route 1 near the intersection with Route 27 intersection in Edgecomb is under construction but may be delayed until next Spring. The sign is self-contained and consists of a vehicle presence sensor which activates a warning sign about 1,500 feet north of the top of the hill. The sign will warn Route 1 travelers of slow or stopped traffic on Route 1 beyond the large hill and curve at Cross and Cochran Roads. Gerry also described planned locations of the permanent traffic counting station and two permanent web cam with radar installations. The traffic counter and web cams are being installed now and will be operational by the end of the month. The cams will signal the activation of the Changeable Message Sign (CMS) on I-295 at the Brunswick exit beginning next spring. The camera images will be posted to the MaineDOT website and delay information will be passed on to the [www.511maine.gov](http://www.511maine.gov) road conditions web site as well. He noted that there is no plan to divert traffic to alternate routes, as there are none within close proximity: the system is informational only. Gerry also mentioned that one or more CMS signs may be considered to alert Route 1 southbound traffic north of Edgecomb, but there are no good alternate routes available nearby. Doug expressed concern about where signs would be located, as traffic could end up on secondary roads. Gerry stated that over the winter MaineDOT will be talking with area communities about possible locations if more signs are considered. Carol asked whether the Task Force would want signs directing traffic on I-295 to use Exit 113 and Rte. 3 if they are headed Belfast or east. Dave King stated that the Bath-Brunswick Chamber of Commerce would be opposed to any such signage. Don stated that the Wiscasset Transportation Committee had supported such signs for years, but that MaineDOT and Bruce Ibarguen, state traffic engineer, has opposed them. Norma stated that it is the Task Force's duty to decide and state whether it is a good idea. Bob made a motion that the Task Force support such signage. The motion was passed. MaineDOT will work with communities and businesses to discuss putting this into effect, based on the Task Force recommendation. Carol briefly reviewed the remaining recommendations. Most were either not feasible due to Maine Historic Preservation Commission issues or not considered useful by the Task Force and MaineDOT. However, several suggestions were made in terms of increasing ridesharing or car-pooling, and Carol indicated that there is an existing Maine program - GoMaine - that administers ride share opportunities for Maine commuters. She asked whether there would be local interest in a "Go Maine" ride-share program and a park & ride lot. Task Force members agreed; Carol will make sure the appropriate contacts are made with communities. Tom Eichlar asked about the status of the pedestrian underpass (he had arrived late due to a pertinent phone call), wondering whether it is possible to get a waiver on the ADA disability requirements. He said that he asked the Federal Highway Commission and the Civil Rights Commission and was given the name of Lisa McVey, whom he asked whether it would be possible to get a waiver. Tom said that she told him about a "technical infeasibility option" and described the complex process of qualifying. Gerry described how Bob's project will look at waterfront and pedestrian issues, which will include a feasibility study for crossing. Gerry noted that it would be difficult to construct a stairway without narrowing Main Street and raising Maine Historic Preservation issues, and that the waterfront may be a more suitable location. Carol added that the pilot on pedestrian crossing could be used as a basis for decisions going forward. Jeff noted that the "technically infeasible" category does not consider cost, and that he has not seen any projects that were determined to be "technically infeasible regardless of cost." Tom offered to pursue this issue. Pat asked where the crossing guard would be stationed so that pedestrians would not walk to the next crosswalk. Carol noted that the pilot could include signage, such as "No jaywalking." Dave stated that human nature leads people to dart through traffic to avoid walking an additional 50 feet. Carol stated that the next meeting will focus on the Route 218 interchange and will also look at ways to move trucks through the area other than using Federal Street onto Rte. 1. She noted that these discussions could include only interested members rather than the entire task force if they so desired. Doug stated that Alna will not support an interchange on Route 218. Pat expressed concerns about which service roads might be used by trucks instead of Federal Street. Doug stated that earlier he took the opportunity to reach a fragile consensus, but that he could potentially withdraw Alna's agreement based on what happens with the Rte. 218 decision. Carol concluded that the Rte. 218 discussion must take place at the Task force level and after some discussion of a possible date, indicated she would email possible dates out to the Task Force to find the most convenient time. Task Force members indicated that they would like to meet as soon as possible. (NOTE: Due to other priorities on this project, MaineDOT will not be prepared for this meeting until later in November. Based on members' availability, the meeting has subsequently been scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 9, 6:30 - 8:30, location TBD.) Don recommended that the Task Force hear directly from Wiscasset's safety people. Gerry said he has represented their concerns in meeting notes. Carol suggested that Don review and amend Gerry's notes as necessary. Don noted that a written document is not as compelling as hearing directly from people. Bob requested additional information on designating or redesignating roads as truck routes, and Gerry agreed to provide this information prior to the next meeting. The meeting ended at 8:34 pm.