Transportation
Land Development
Environmental
Services

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Meeting Notes

Attendees: Chris Cross, ATF Chairman, Newington
Sandy Hislop, Newington
Steve Wells, COAST
Brian Mazerski, OSP/Coastal Program
Jack Newick,
Tom Fargo, SRPC
Bruce Woodruff, Dover
Bill O'Donnell, FHWA
Peter Wellenberger, NHF&G
Chris Waszczuk, NHDOT
Mike Dugas, NHDOT
Marc Laurin, NHDOT
Frank O'Callaghan, VHB
Tim Roache, SRPC
Jim Garvin, SHPO
Linda Wilson, SHPO
Members of the Public

Date/Time: January 28, 2004 / 6:30 PM

Project No.: 51425

Place: Dover City Hall

Re: ATF Meeting No. 4

Notes taken by: Frank O'Callaghan

Chris Cross, ATF Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. In his opening remarks, he reminded all in attendance that it was the role and responsibility of the Advisory Task Force (ATF) to provide a conduit for community impact and feedback on the project; the ATF meets quarterly, or as needed. Chris encouraged the public in attendance to share their ideas of improving the Turnpike with the ATF. He stressed the importance of the Spaulding Turnpike to the Seacoast region, and thus, the importance of the current study of Turnpike improvements. Chris then asked the ATF members to introduce themselves. Following the self introductions, Chris encouraged the public to not be bashful in suggesting ideas or asking questions. He made note of the project website, www.newington-dover.com, which hosts a wealth of project related information and is another means of submitting comments on the project.

Chris then asked ATF members if they had any comments on the draft minutes of the October 29, 2003 ATF meeting. There being no comments, a motion was made and unanimously passed to accept the October 29, 2003 ATF meeting minutes.

Chris Waszczuk then updated the ATF on the status of the Scoping Report. He apologized that he was unable to distribute copies this evening to the ATF as previously scheduled. He explained that final calibration of the travel demand model by the RPC and consultants has taken longer

than expected, and that future traffic projections were available just this week. As such, allowing for analysis and documentation, the Scoping Report will be available in February, 2004. Tom Fargo inquired as to the distribution of the report. Chris responded that the copies would be distributed to each ATF member, and that the report would be posted on the project website. He added that copies would also be provided to resource agencies, municipal offices and public libraries.

Frank O'Callaghan then briefly outlined the contents of the Scoping Report including project purpose and need, the range of conceptual alternatives (TSM, TDM and infrastructure upgrade alternatives in addition to the No-Build condition), a summary of resource inventories which may be affected by the project, and study area issues and constraints.

Bill O'Donnell confirmed that distribution of the Scoping Report would include local officials, public libraries and Town/City Halls.

Chris Waszczuk then explained that due to the inclement weather conditions in New York City, Gary Kassof, Bridge Project Administrator, First Coast Guard District, was not available to attend this evening's ATF meeting, as previously scheduled. Chris then referred to correspondence (e-mail) from Gary that would shed light on the USCG's perspective and concerns. The USCG is responsible for oversight of bridges that traverse navigable waters of the US; he made reference to the USCG permit and amendments associated with the Little Bay Bridges, and specifically to Condition 4 of the 1982 amended permit which calls for the removal of the General Sullivan Bridge (GSB) since it was no longer in use. Such removal of bridges – whose use has been discontinued – is general policy given the potential threat to navigation. If the bridge – in this case, the General Sullivan Bridge – is proposed to be used, it is subject to the USCG's bridge permitting and public review process, along with the proposal to rehabilitate or replace the Little Bay Bridges. In this regard, the USCG acknowledges the FHWA as the lead federal agency with primary environmental review responsibility, and has accepted the cooperating agency invitation from the FHWA. In the USCG's opinion, unless the bridges (Little Bay and General Sullivan) are replaced, the vertical clearances (VC) are set. The USCG is also concerned with maintaining the current depth of channel. Gary's correspondence indicated that he would be willing to reschedule his attendance for a future ATF meeting.

Tom Fargo asked if the maintenance of the current vertical clearance was USCG policy or a requirement. Chris Waszczuk responded that if the bridges are rehabilitated, the VC in essence is set. If the bridges are replaced, the VC requirement would be revisited. In Chris' opinion, if the current VC is maintained, the USCG permitting should not be problematic.

Chris Waszczuk initiated a discussion of vertical clearance issues. Bruce Woodruff offered that maintaining the VC may restrict the feasibility of some of the bridge alternatives (e.g. double-decking); Tom Fargo offered that the VC affects the grade and related driver safe stopping sight distance on the bridges. Sandy Hislop stated that the marina business is contingent on maintaining the current VC and that many boats, such as the Thomas Leighton, traverse the channel on a daily basis and can just barely pass under the bridges at high tide. Current boaters are accustomed to the VC. Jack Newick concurred, stating that lowering of the VC would be a major impediment to many, including lobstermen. Chris Waszczuk asked if there was any data available on the type and frequency of boat traffic and their respective clearance requirements. Sandy stated that some data is available and he would collect and submit it. Bruce Woodruff offered that VC issues are important since every foot of clearance could affect the bridge and transportation alternatives vis-à-vis grade and profile.

In the spirit of brainstorming, Chris Cross asked if there was any possibility of relocating marina operations. Sandy responded that the permitting process for a new marina is next to impossible.

He also mentioned that the UNH marine laboratory operates large boats that require the current VC, in addition to a dozen or more boats moored at Adams Point.

Chris Cross asked if the USCG also has concerns about the depth of channel. [According to Gary Kassof's e-mail, the USCG is interested in channel depths and the ability for the channel depth to be self-maintained. It is the USCG's responsibility to ensure that any bridge alternative does not preclude future use of the waterway.] Jack Newick suggested that bedrock was close to the channel's surface. Chris Waszczuk referred to a bridge plan and confirmed that bedrock was located just below the surface. Such conditions would make tunneling (as was suggested at a previous Public Information meeting) very expensive; vertical clearance requirements would make the concept of placing a tunnel on the surface (and thus avoiding the tunneling) infeasible given the depth of structure (25'±).

Chris Cross asked if there were any other thoughts on the General Sullivan Bridge or vertical clearance. Bruce Woodruff asked if the Scoping Report would include cost estimates on the rehabilitation alternatives such as pedestrian/bicycle only, pedestrian/bicycle and transit, and local traffic including transit and pedestrian/bicycle. Chris Waszczuk responded that cost estimates would be included in the Phase 2 Rationale Report, not in the Scoping Report. He stated that updated cost estimates are currently being developed and that the costs appear to be relatively close in comparison of the different uses. This was due in large part to the deteriorated condition of the bridge and the cost of painting. Updated costs will be crucial to the cost-benefit analysis of alternatives. Tom Fargo asked if a no-action (i.e. leave the General Sullivan Bridge in its current condition) alternative was being considered. Chris Waszczuk replied that the project will address some action --either reuse in some fashion or removal. Costs of removal will include disposal.

Chris Cross asked if there were any questions or comments from the public. Brian Mazerski from the New Hampshire Coastal Program stated that a 1-3 foot rise in sea level due to global warming in the next hundred years is projected and would be relevant to the discussion of vertical clearance.

Jim Garvin, State Architectural Historian, representing the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), then distributed a handout summarizing the historical significance of the General Sullivan Bridge (GSB). [Handout attached]. He noted the uniqueness of the GSB's design that was a monument to structural design of the era (1935) and which also reflected the form of a celebrated wooden span of 1794 that had stood nearby; construction was the largest public works project in New Hampshire in 1935; the bridge significantly altered travel patterns that restored the Turnpike to its full use; that the federal War Department required the 53-foot vertical clearance (at low tide); and that the Level I historical significance assigned to the bridge merits total preservation *in-situ*. He stated that SHPO will argue for preservation through the environmental review process. He noted that the USCG's permitting process may be different from the customary Section 106 process.

Chris Cross noted that the historic nature of the bridge adds to the uniqueness of the bridge's location, but at the same time, the transportation solution is location specific given the narrowness of the existing crossing. The question is whether we rehabilitate the existing bridge or replace it with a new bridge and its own uniqueness. Bruce Woodruff reiterated the importance of updating cost estimates so that a cost/benefit analysis can be conducted to assist in the decision-making process. Tom Fargo asked if the cost estimates would include maintenance. Chris Waszczuk responded that cost estimates would reflect maintenance/life cycle costs.

Following the discussion on re-use alternatives and cost estimates for the GSB, Chris Cross initiated a discussion of TSM actions that might be feasible in the immediate or short term time

frame to improve traffic flow efficiency or safety in the study area, other than the Interim Safety Plan for Exit 4 in Newington scheduled for 2005 implementation. Frank O'Callaghan then reviewed several ideas that resulted from brainstorming with NHDOT staff, and suggestions from others. The TSM ideas included:

> Extending the NB, Exit 6 deceleration lane to the US 4 westbound loop ramp by approximately 400' to prevent PM peak hour exiting traffic from backing up into the NB through traffic. This could be done within the existing shoulder area without affecting the bridge abutments.
>
> Merging the 2-lane SB on-ramp at Exit 6 to a single lane prior to the merge with the main line to improve the AM peak hour main line weaving condition prior to the Little Bay Bridges.
>
> Assuming implementation of the Newington Interim Safety Plan, extending the SB Exit 3 deceleration lane to Woodbury Avenue.
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> Assuming implementation of the Newington Interim Safety Plan, development of an auxiliary NB lane between the Exit 3 (Woodbury Avenue) on-ramp and the Exit 4 (River Road) off-ramp.
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> Ramp closures or metering during the PM peak hour condition at Exits 2, 3 and 4 to improve NB traffic flow. Traffic which currently enters the Turnpike at these locations would either be metered or re-routed to Exit 1 via Woodbury Avenue and Gosling Road.
>
> Closure of the entrance to River Road from Woodbury Avenue, in conjunction with closure of the NB Exit 4 on-ramp and construction of a new on-ramp for industrial related traffic in the vicinity of Patterson Lane and the existing Woodbury Avenue/River Road intersection.

Chris Waszczuk stated that these ideas were preliminary in nature and that they needed further assessment and cost analysis to deem level of feasibility. There was general consensus that the Exit 6, NB, extension of the US 4, WB deceleration lane had merit. Bill O'Donnell asked if there was adequate shoulder width adjacent to the bridge abutments, and Frank confirmed that there was.

Tom Fargo and Jack Newick added that there may be a need for better signage at Exit 6, NB since some drivers mistakenly take the Dover Point Road, EB exit, when desiring to connect with either US 4, WB or Boston Harbor Road. This results in U-Turns occurring at the EB Dover Point Road ramp terminal area, a dangerous situation. Signage approaching the NB Exit 6 will be reviewed.

While Bruce Woodruff, Chris Cross and a number of the public also supported the southbound, Exit 6 concept to improve the merge and traffic weaving condition prior to the Little Bay Bridges, Tom Fargo questioned the operational impact on the SB ramp where AM peak hour traffic can queue back to the Spur Road traffic signal. Frank responded that the capacity of the ramp would not be reduced, but that the merge with the mainline Turnpike would be improved.

Other discussion at Exit 6 included the possibility of ramp metering, doubling-up the Exit 6 WB/US 4 ramp, and converting Dover Point Road to 2-way flow over the Turnpike. With respect to ramp metering, the traffic signal at Spur Road, and potentially new signals at the River Road/Exit 4 interchange could be timed to meter on-ramp volumes. Traffic delay and queuing on the local roads will increase. A double loop ramp for WB, US 4 traffic, and the possibility of converting Dover Point Road (over the Turnpike) to two-way traffic will be contingent on the width of the overpass and a traffic operations analysis. These ideas are more long-term

permanent solutions and not relatively low-cost TSM measures. A resident in attendance suggested adding a one-lane Bailey-type bridge to immediately add Turnpike capacity that is needed from Exit 6 (US 4) to I-95. He also questioned when the project's construction was scheduled to begin. Chris Waszczuk responded that the use of a very long (1,500'+) temporary bridge would be very expensive and beyond the scope and funding of a short-term solution. Increasing capacity at the bridges is viewed as more of a permanent and long-term solution. Construction of the project could begin as early as 2008 if funding becomes available sooner than currently programmed for 2010.

With respect to PM peak hour traffic flow, Frank described a suggestion by a State Representative to restrict NB access to the Turnpike at Exits 2, 3 (Woodbury Avenue) and 4 (River Road), and reroute traffic along Woodbury Avenue and Gosling Road to Exit 1. In this manner, Exit 1 would meter the entering traffic and NB traffic flow would be uninterrupted as it approaches the Little Bay Bridges. Frank indicated that preliminary assessment of this idea under existing 2003 PM peak hour traffic conditions resulted in failed traffic operations (LOS 'F') at Exit 1 due to the increase in traffic. He further stated that traffic operations at the Gosling Road/Woodbury Avenue intersection and at the other signalized intersections along Woodbury Avenue, north of Gosling Road, would also be problematic, not to mention the management of peak hour restrictions at Exits 2, 3 and 4, and the anticipated problems associated with traffic attempting to avoid the resulting congestion on Woodbury Avenue and Gosling Road by short-cutting to Exit 1 through the Malls.

Sandy Hislop observed that the closing of the Exit 4/River Road on-ramp was inconsistent with the Newington Interim Safety Plan. Jack Newick concurred stating that re-routing industrial related truck traffic to Exit 1 was a poor idea. There was a general consensus that the idea of re-routing on-ramp traffic from Exits 2, 3 and 4 to Exit 1 was counter-productive. Tom Fargo raised the question of dropping the third NB lane on the Turnpike between Exits 2 and 3 from the inside (median side), which is currently done today, versus dropping the lane on the outside or to the driver's right side. Bill O'Donnell responded that dropping the lane on the inside, or on the driver's left side, is common practice and avoids driver confusion at interchange areas where Exit Only lanes may exist. A member of the public identified the Exit 4, SB weave area between the on-ramp from River Road and Nimble Hill Road as a very dangerous location. Chris Waszczuk responded that the Newington Interim Safety Plan, scheduled for 2005 construction, addressed that very situation. Frank also noted that implementation of the Interim Safety Plan would allow an extension of the SB deceleration lane to Woodbury Avenue. [It was noted that the Exit 4N median turnarounds would remain gated, and available for traffic use only as part of an incident management event.]

Chris Cross then suggested that while the re-routing of NB Exit 4 traffic to Exit 1 may be infeasible, perhaps a re-routing of such traffic to a new on-ramp from Shattuck Way in the vicinity of Patterson Lane to a merge with the Exit 3 on-ramp from Woodbury Avenue would be more practical. It would remove the turbulence of merging traffic at Exit 4 which is very close to the Little Bay Bridges, discourage NH 33 traffic that cuts through Newington via Nimble Hill Road to head north on the Turnpike, and discourage Woodbury Avenue traffic that currently diverts to Shattuck Way/River Road via Old Dover Road and Avery Road to jump ahead of queued or slow moving traffic on the Turnpike. Frank indicated that this concept was being evaluated in conjunction with the development of an auxiliary lane between the Exit 3 on-ramp and the Exit 4 off-ramp. In response to Bruce Woodruff, Chris Cross responded that the new on-ramp concept has not been discussed with area businesses. Chris Waszczuk added that the costs and benefits of this concept, and others, need to be evaluated further; he also noted that right-of-way acquisition vis-à-vis the location of the proposed new ramp could delay implementation and add to the total cost (R.O.W. and construction) which could deem the proposal infeasible from a short-term, TSM implementation perspective.

Frank then briefly described the Park and Ride site at Exit 9 that the City of Dover has suggested as part of the overall TDM-related project alternatives. This 3.4 acre site would be accessed from Indian Brook Drive and abuts residential property (Wilbrod Avenue) on the east and a privately-owned 3 acre undeveloped lot of land to the west. The land is City-owned (originally conceived as a possible fire station location) and is the recommended site of a study of potential park and ride sites by City planning staff. The land is zoned residential which does not preclude the park and ride use. Bruce offered that when the Wilbrod Avenue residential area was developed, residents were made aware of the potential future non-residential uses of this site. Preliminary concepts developed by the City would accommodate over 300 cars. If realized, the site would be serviced by COAST's new 2004 downtown loop service [providing connection to the Downeaster rail service], and probably by COAST's planned express bus service between Rochester and Portsmouth scheduled for 2006. Frank noted that intuitively, the site appears to be feasible; potential demand for such service at this location, and other locations such as Rochester, would be determined when the regional travel demand model is finally calibrated. Frank added that the NW quadrant of the Exit 9 interchange could also be considered a potential park and ride site, to which Tom Fargo replied that the NW quadrant area contains substantial wetlands. Bill O'Donnell asked if COAST currently services the Liberty Mutual complex located to the west of the proposed park and ride site at the Indian Brook Drive/Sixth Street intersection. Steve Wells stated that service is not currently provided, but could be considered. Bill noted that, in general, park and ride sites are more successful when serviced by transit, and since Liberty Mutual is nearby and such a large employer, it may make sense to consider extending service from the Park and Ride site to Liberty Mutual. Steve agreed in principle, but noted that the potential impact of intermediate stops on express bus travel times and schedules would need to be reviewed.

Following the park and ride discussion, Chris Cross initiated a brief discussion on a long-term vision for the study area. He noted that the study area will always be a major transportation corridor, and that while many Seacoast residents are currently calling for immediate action, some fail to recognize the need for taking a long-term perspective. The seacoast region and the Spaulding Turnpike/NH 16 corridor will continue to grow. Given limited financial resources, and the need for a long-term transportation solution to be affordable, what is the priority? Enhanced parkland, a signature bridge, increased mobility, relocation of residents and businesses, sound barriers? Planning must look beyond the affordability and timeframe (design life of improvements) of the project. Jack Newick offered that trying to plan for 50 to 100 years in the future will be extremely problematic and difficult to predict. With respect to the project at hand, anything less than a 4-lane bridge in each direction will be obsolete on opening day. Bruce Woodruff commented that people continue to move north (affordable housing) while major employment growth is to the south of the corridor. Unfortunately, the Tradeport's land development plan does not include housing. Bruce also suggested that bridge alternatives should be able to accommodate future light rail service in 50 or more years. Chris Waszczuk noted that a rail link along an existing rail corridor to Pease may be more feasible vis-à-vis affordability, than a new rail service across the bridges.

Tom Fargo stated that east-west connectivity is important, and that the Turnpike presents a barrier to this linkage. He suggested extending the approaches to the bridges to provide grade separated (Turnpike over local connection) connections, and substituting columns for retaining walls. This would provide open space and urban design options to expand the Hilton Park area. Tim Roache commented potential investment in TDM strategies combined with employer-based programs (such as flexible work hours, ride-sharing and employee transit support) will extend the life of infrastructure improvements. Bill O'Donnell stated that a 20-year design life is traditional planning, but looking out 30-40 years, to the extent possible, makes sense. Chris Cross suggested that the nature and scale of the project, its benefits and costs may need to be considered as phases of a longer term solution. Bill O'Donnell questioned whether or not the state had the

financial resources to return to the Seacoast region in the future, if the current project was viewed as the initial phase of a multi-stage improvement program. Chris Waszczuk concluded the visioning discussion by noting the State's need and responsibility to be prudent with its investments. NHDOT will look closely at preserving the current investment in study area infrastructure (e.g. bridge rehabilitation versus bridge replacement). The recommended improvement plan and program based on 2025 travel demands will not be obsolete on opening day. Such design may accommodate future needs, through right-of-way acquisition and support of TDM alternatives.

Before adjourning the meeting, Frank O'Callaghan very briefly described the long term improvement concepts developed as part of the 2000 Feasibility Study of Spaulding Turnpike Improvements. He briefly described the advantages and disadvantages of each of the nine (9) alternatives, and advised that the purpose of reviewing these preliminary concepts was to stimulate thinking about concepts in general and the manner in which we will evaluate the concepts. Frank also noted that the summary table of alternatives in the Feasibility Report which contained 11 characteristics of alternatives for comparison purposes, has been expanded to approximately 30 characteristics ranging from cost and wetland impacts to property impacts, bridge characteristics, and transportation system efficiency. Following Frank's presentation, Tom Fargo suggested three (3) themes: separate through Turnpike traffic from local traffic; the need and importance of E-W cross Turnpike connectivity for local motorized and non-motorized traffic; and keep concepts and traffic movements as simple as possible. Specific comments included the need for E-W connectivity in Dover by either raising the Turnpike or flying over the Turnpike with a local connector, and maintaining the limited access to the Turnpike. In Newington, Tom noted that local traffic should be served by collector/distributor roadways, and that there should be different expectations for different types of traffic, i.e. local traffic should be expected to operate at slower speeds, and encounter traffic signals or other traffic controls as opposed to through traffic on the Turnpike.

Bruce Woodruff asked if VHB had modeled the feasibility concepts from a traffic and operations perspective. Frank replied that the concepts had been analyzed from a capacity perspective under future 2020 traffic volume conditions, but had not been modeled. Bruce offered that less efficient traffic operation might be an acceptable trade-off with respect to comparing the potential property impacts of the two Dover alternatives. After some discussion on the nature and feasibility of the conceptual improvement alternatives, it was agreed that VHB would model Alternatives 1 and 2 in Dover, and Alternatives 6 and 7 in Newington. These alternatives and modifications to these alternatives would be the subject of an ATF working session scheduled for 6:30 PM, Wednesday, March 31, 2004, at Newington Town Hall.

Before adjourning the meeting, it was also decided to re-invite Gary Kassof, from the USCG to the April 28, 2004 ATF meeting to review the channel navigation and permitting issues.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 PM.