

2 December 2010

RE: Response to 9 November 2010 MDOT letter  
from Gerry Audibert re: Wiscasset By-Pass, and  
new opportunity to Improve the Existing Route  
Route 1 in Wiscasset.

David Cole, Commissioner  
Maine Dept. of Transportation  
16 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0016

Dear Mr. Cole:

Thank you for Mr. Gerry Audibert's 9 November response to our letter to you of 6 October 2010. This letter responds to his letter, and then addresses the opportunity presented by the recent decision to abandon Route N8C.

1. Traffic Control Officer. The R.O.A.D. organization acknowledges the MDOT offer to "consider offering to the Town of Wiscasset partial funding and monitoring for one season for a traffic control officer to manage pedestrian crossings in Wiscasset Village." We will try to assist MDOT and the Town of Wiscasset to ensure that a plan is in place, well before the summer of 2011, for the selection, funding and chartering of such a traffic control officer. The priority for that officer should be to improve the flow of traffic.
2. Traffic Counter on Davey Bridge. Thank you for agreeing to consider installing a traffic counter on Davey Bridge. Mr. Audibert mentioned the existing permanent traffic counters near Wiscasset Ford and in Newcastle. Can you please send us, or otherwise make available, traffic data from those counters?
3. Wiscasset Transportation Information System (WTIS) and 511. Thank you for agreeing that the Route 295 sign regarding Wiscasset traffic can be turned on sooner in the cycle of congestion. We hope that MDOT will keep a public record of the times and dates that the sign is illuminated in the coming years, so its utility can be maximized. The connection to the 511 system is also welcome.
4. Uncertainty about Causes of Wiscasset Congestion, and need for Time-Lapse Photography. At its public meeting on 9 November, R.O.A.D. became more aware that the

public, and even officials who have worked for a long time on the issue of traffic congestion in Wiscasset, have insufficient understanding of the causes of that congestion. It was suggested at the meeting, for example, that the curve in Route 1 at the Lincoln County Courthouse was a significant source of the congestion and that the pedestrians crossing in the Water Street area caused about "5 percent" of the congestion.

We estimate that the pedestrians crossing Route 1 in the Water Street area cause 50% or more of the congestion, but such an estimate is not a substitute for hard data. What is needed are time-lapse videos of the downtown area for several days a month for every month of the year, but particularly in the summer. Does MDOT have this capability and would MDOT be willing to create such videos? With snapshots taken every two seconds, a twelve hour day could be compressed into a 15 minute video. In the event that MDOT is not able to prepare time-lapse videos, R.O.A.D. is currently planning to create them. Enclosed is a draft one-page worksheet for analyzing the causes of downtown Wiscasset congestion. In all the documentation of the Wiscasset congestion problem, we have not found a clear estimate by MDOT of the causes of that congestion, including approximate allocations of responsibility. If such an estimate does not yet exist, can you please prepare one, perhaps with a range of percentages of responsibility allocated to each cause?

5. Congestion Causes and Highway Capacity. Recently, R.O.A.D. learned of studies which report that the capacity of a single lane of road reaches its maximum with vehicle speeds within the range of 25-35 mph. At higher speeds, more space is required between vehicles, which negates the capacity-enhancing effect of those higher speeds. If these studies are correct, then the widely-held assumption that the 25 mph speed limit in downtown Wiscasset is a contributing cause of the congestion is incorrect. Similarly, as vehicles can safely and comfortably navigate the curve in Route 1 at the courthouse at a speed of 35 mph, and as police usually begin enforcing speed limits at speeds 10 mph over a posted limit, that curve is also not a contributing factor to the downtown congestion.

R.O.A.D. has also become aware of a significant volume, the "Highway Capacity Manual." Can you please tell if MDOT is using that manual, and, if so, what annual version? Does that version have graphs or other information about the maximum vehicle capacity of single lanes of road, by speed levels? If not, are you aware of studies which present that information?

6. Acceptable Level of Service. Gerry Audibert referenced an "acceptable Level of Service" in his 9 November letter. Can you tell us where this is defined in the extensive Wiscasset By-Pass documentation? More specifically, can you tell us what the acceptable Levels of Service are for Route 1 in the Wiscasset area, and all along the Midcoast, "Gateway 1" corridor? R.O.A.D.'s goal is to improve the flow of traffic through Wiscasset at an "Accepted Level of Service" rate. Again, we believe that can be achieved by improving the current route at far less cost and environmental damage than would occur with a long, three-mile-plus By-Pass.

Gerry also wrote that "We have already seen that congestion occurs nearly every day northbound and/or southbound from the Traveler Information System, and we expect it to get worse over time." This statement returns us to the question of how much congestion is acceptable, and even how much occurs, hence the need for time-lapse videos. Further, it shows the continued need for reliable data about traffic in the Wiscasset area. According to previous MDOT reports, as captured on the enclosed graph, the volume of traffic, as measured by AADT, has declined gradually since 2000. Future reliable data from MDOT will be welcomed.

7. Temporary Pedestrian Bridge. As noted previously, R.O.A.D. does not believe that MDOT pursued sufficiently the proposals to build a tunnel or bridge across Route 1. The initial concerns about maintaining the historic character of Wiscasset and for handicapped access could have been negotiated and alleviated. Setting that long term question aside, we propose here that MDOT install a temporary pedestrian bridge in the Railroad Ave/Water Street area. Does MDOT already have a suitable bridge available? Does the Maine Army National Guard? If not, it's been estimated that such a bridge could be constructed for approximately \$100,000. Even if a by-pass is to be built, it's been understood that construction would not be completed for more than 10 years. If such a temporary bridge reduced the Wiscasset congestion by 50%, or even less, this would make a temporary bridge a good investment, at an amortized projected cost of \$10,000 per year.

We are confident that waivers of historical compatibility and handicapped access considerations could be negotiated for such a temporary pedestrian bridge, given its expected short life span.

8. Restatement of R.O.A.D. position on proposed four phases of By-Pass. R.O.A.D. supports the construction of an improved Route 1/Route 27 interchange in Edgecomb, but it opposes the other three proposed phases. The justification for a "connector" between Routes 27 and 218 in Wiscasset, in view of recent reports of the underfunding of existing roads and bridges in Maine, seems extremely weak. Our opposition to Phases 3 and 4, the by-pass itself, is clear.

9. Cancellation of Route N8C - Opportunity to Improve the Current Route 1. The recent decision to abandon Route N8C provides a welcome opportunity to Improve the Current Route 1. In our letter of 6 October 2010, we asked MDOT to propose plans for Improving the Current route with several levels of funding, comparable to what is anticipated to be spent on the canceled By-Pass route. We hope that such plans will be prepared so that the Army Corps of Engineers, the FHA and the people of Maine will be fully able to compare the costs and benefits, and potential environmental damage, of Improving the Route to those of any future proposed By-Pass route.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and in the long term solution to the Wiscasset congestion problem.

Sincerely yours,



Morrison Bonpasse  
Co-Chair



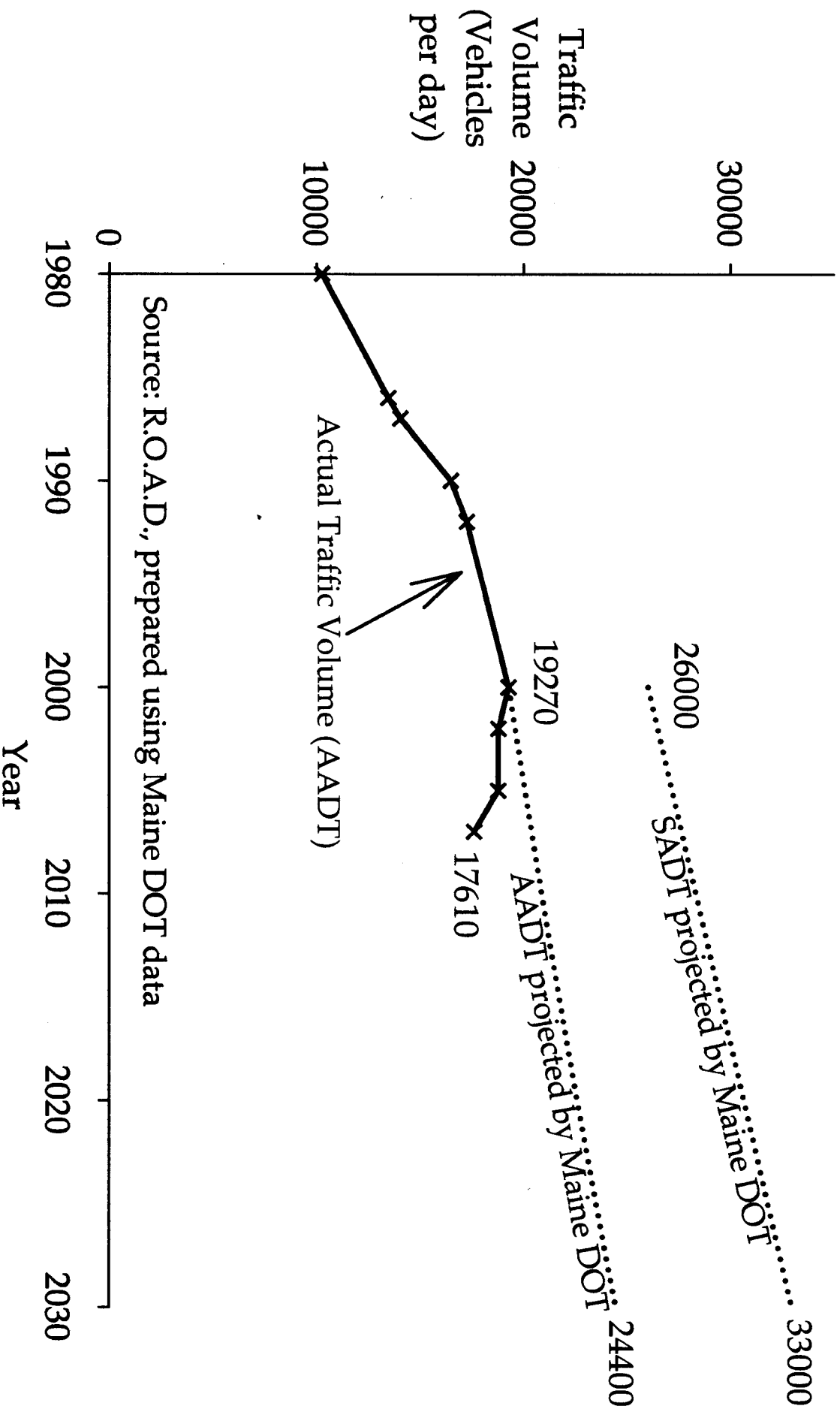
Frank Risell  
Co-Chair

CC: Gerry Audibert, MDOT Wiscasset Study Manager  
Jay Clement, District Engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
675 Western Avenue #3, Manchester, ME 04351  
David Trahan, State Senator  
Les Fossel, State Representative  
Town of Wiscasset Selectboard  
Town of Wiscasset Transportation Committee  
Laurie Smith, Town Manager, Wiscasset

Enclosures:

R.O.A.D. worksheet for determining the causes of Wiscasset congestion.  
Graph showing actual traffic volume in Wiscasset over time, compared to projections.

# Actual vs. Projected Traffic Volume, Davey Bridge



**R.O.A.D. Statement Regarding the Causes of Route 1 Congestion in Wiscasset.**

1. The Wiscasset traffic congestion occurs almost entirely because of obstructions to the clear flow-through of traffic between Davey Bridge and Federal Street, a distance of about 100 yards.
2. The estimates of the causes, their frequency, and their allocation of responsibility for the congestion are:

	<u>Occurrences</u>	<u>Percent Cause</u>
	<u>Per Hour</u>	<u>of Congestion</u>
<u>Both Directions</u>		<u>(estimate)</u>
Pedestrians crossing Route 1		50%
Vehicles crossing Route 1		20%
Other		
<u>Northbound</u>		30%
Vehicles turning right, Northbound onto Federal St., Middle St., Water St., RR Ave.		
Vehicles turning left, Northbound onto Federal St., Middle St., Water St., RR Ave.		
Vehicles parking		
Vehicle exiting parking		
Other (watching Red's Eats - more in Summer) .....		
<u>Southbound</u>		30%
Vehicles turning right, Southbound onto RR Ave. Water St., Middle St, Federal St.		
Vehicles turning left, Southbound onto RR Ave. Water St., Middle St, Fort Hill St.		
Vehicles parking		
Vehicle exiting parking		
Other (watching Red's Eats - more in Summer).....		
Totals		100%

3. **SPEED LIMITS.** The speed limit of 25 mph in downtown Wiscasset is not a factor which causes congestion, and congestion is only a day-time problem. It would only be a factor if there was no interference (#2 above) with traffic within the Davey Bridge-Federal St. Zone and there is never congestion when there is no interference. Realistically, cars usually go about 10 mph over the speed limit, so 35 mph is the upper "legal limit" and 35 mph is close to the optimal lane capacity speed.

4. **CURVE IN ROUTE 1.** The curve in Route 1 at the Courthouse is not a factor causing traffic congestion. See above discussion re: speed. Even if the speed limit were increased to 35 mph, with max flow in the 25-45 mph range, vehicles can comfortably, easily and safely navigate that curve.