

R.O.A.D. == == > (Route One Alternative Decisions)

P.O. Box 390, Newcastle, ME 04553 www.wiscasset-road.org

31 December 2010

RE: Public Comment on Maine Dept. of Transportation
Wiscasset Route 1 Traffic Congestion Reduction Project

Gerry Audibert
Maine Dept. of Transportation
Augusta, Maine

Dear Gerry,

In this letter, sent by email, R.O.A.D. (Route One Alternative Decisions) responds to the MaineDOT request for comments following the 15 December 2010 meeting of the Wiscasset Route 1 Task Force. In a separate email, R.O.A.D.'s treasurer, Dan Sortwell, will write to you about projections for Route 1 traffic and travel demand models.

Incorporated by reference and attached to this email are:

1. R.O.A.D. 6 October 2010 letter to MaineDOT Commissioner David Cole
2. MaineDOT, Gerry Audibert, 9 November 2010 response to that letter.
3. R.O.A.D. 2 December 2010 letter to MaineDOT Commissioner David Cole.
4. MaineDOT handout at 15 December Task Force meeting: "Summary of Non-Bypass Improvements Considered."
5. Attachment to 3 December MaineDOT email to Task Force members with "study synopsis."
6. R.O.A.D. Graph with comparison of MaineDOT traffic estimates and actual MaineDOT traffic data at Davey Bridge.
7. R.O.A.D. Letter to the Editor, Times Record, 28 December 2010, "Let's explore alternatives to by-pass."

Since the MaineDOT renewed its efforts to reduce the seasonal vehicle congestion in Wiscasset, it has focused on determining the best and LEDPA By-pass routes, instead of focusing on the most cost-effective methods of traffic management and traffic reduction. Each By-pass route would reduce congestion by 100% and cost approximately \$100 million. After the discovery of an eagle nest on Davis Island, that search for the optimal By-pass continues, much like the search for the Holy Grail.

Despite the focus on by-passes, MaineDOT has sought to find and implement changes to reduce the causes of congestion in downtown Wiscasset. While those efforts didn't achieve the "project need," by themselves, they did have some success. Of those changes considered and attempted, two stand out: the use of a vehicle control officer and the realignment of parking and crosswalks. What was missing from the discussion of alternatives was a cost/benefit analysis, with the benefits measured as a percentage of the "project need." A proposed outline of such an analysis of several "ICR" alternatives is presented on page 6 of the attached R.O.A.D. 2 December 2010 letter to Commissioner Cole.

MaineDOT has stated that it will soon be submitting its recommendations to the new Governor to request guidance for the Wiscasset Project, among several other transportation needs and initiatives. R.O.A.D. requests that the MaineDOT include in those recommendations the alternatives within the "ICR" option for "Improve the Current Route." Also, R.O.A.D. requests that those recommendations to the Governor be made public by posting them on the MaineDOT website, and sending them to the Wiscasset Task Force and other

stakeholders. Unlike the specific and numbered By-pass routes, the "ICR" option is a menu of alternatives, each of which can be implemented and measured independently, depending upon the cost/benefit ratio and political acceptability. A template for measuring the costs and benefits of "ICR" alternatives is contained at page 14 of the attached 6 October R.O.A.D. letter to Commissioner Cole.

We agree with the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Assn's statement about N2a in its 9 December 2010 letter to MaineDOT, but we apply that statement to all of the proposed by-pass routes: *"\$100 million is an unconscionable amount to pay in the midst of the current deficit-dominated financial landscape for a route with severe negative environmental impacts and limited traffic benefits...."*

Most of the "ICR" alternatives were considered individually by the Wiscasset Route 1 Task Force, and given the unfortunate and doomed label, "No Build," but a disciplined cost/benefit analysis, and an estimate of the congestion reduction was missing. Also missing were examinations of different combinations of alternatives.

In the materials sent to the Task Force prior to the 15 December was the attached "Study Synopsis," which contained the new measurements of congestion, in terms of hours per year with traffic moving at 25 mph or slower past two radar/webcam stations. These measurements were made possible by the requested and well-received MaineDOT installation of webcams and radar at the Birch Point Road intersection with Route 1 in Wiscasset and at the Route 1/Route 27 intersection in Edgecomb. Thank you for those installations, as real data are critical to the management of Wiscasset's traffic congestion. Given that the measurements in 2009 and 2010 were 110 hours at Birch Point Road, northbound, and 90 hours at Edgecomb 1/27 southbound, the measurements are averaged and referenced herein as "100 hours." This measurement allows the benefits of "ICR" alternatives, or combination of alternatives, to be measured annually as a function of the 100 hours annual congestion in the 2009-2010 period. Reducing that particular measurement to zero is the goal of R.O.A.D. and the "ICR" menu options. It is stated as the goal with the understanding that even at zero congestion as measured here, there will still be traffic flowing at less than the speed limits, and thus some level of congestion. However, at that zero level, the congestion can be said to be "acceptable," just as some weekend congestion at Cape Cod is "acceptable." As noted in the 6 October letter to Commissioner Cole, the proper and most efficient goal in a seasonally congested area is to manage the congestion and not to spend the additional costs to reduce it totally.

The "ICR" alternatives are presented below in the sequence utilized by MaineDOT in the D.E.I.S. The R.O.A.D. estimates of congestion reduction are in terms of hours AND percent, as they are the same. Please provide MaineDOT's own cost/benefit analyses, including an estimate of congestion reduction for all the proposed alternatives. Some of the alternatives were discussed before and presented in the DEIS. For those which were not previously presented in the D.E.I.S. or were not fully analyzed as proposed here, please prepare amendments to the D.E.I.S., and/or include the new analyses in the final Environmental Impact Statement.

In the list below, R.O.A.D. estimates the Costs and Benefits, but we lack the expertise of MaineDOT and other experts, and look to you to provide more precise numbers.

We request that MaineDOT give its own estimates of the allocation, with percentages, of the causes of the vehicle congestion in Wiscasset, such as Pedestrians crossing, vehicles turning and crossing. By knowing the allocation of responsibility for the congestion, the focus of "ICR" alternatives can be focused on those causes. See the attached R.O.A.D. letter to the Editor of the Times Record of 28 December 2010. In the attached MaineDOT handout at the 15 December 2010 Task Force meeting, "Summary of Non-by-pass Improvements Considered," there was a new measurement graph, "Downtown Activity and Route 1 Capacity." That graph presented an analysis of "crossing pedestrians" and "turning vehicles." This is excellent information, but it

needs to be supported by time-lapse photography, converted into videos, as recommended in R.O.A.D.'s 2 December 2010 letter to Commissioner Cole. What hour of each day does the graph represent? Or what hours are averaged? If the graph is correct, for example, that there are 500 "vehicle turns" and 200 "pedestrian crossings" in the month of August, then the challenge is to reduce those numbers with "smart" techniques and common sense. Please note that 500 "vehicle turns" per hour is almost one every seven seconds.

The goal of most of the Alternatives proposed below is to reduce the interference with the flow of traffic by pedestrians and turning and crossing vehicles. As proposed in the R.O.A.D. letter to Commissioner Cole of 6 October, the use of time-lapse videos would assist the understanding of this interference. The clearest, and most easily photographed, example, of such interference occurs when traffic must stop to accommodate a pedestrian or turning or crossing vehicle.

<u>Alternative</u>	<u>Costs</u>	<u>Benefits and comments, including estimated congestion reduction, which is given as hours, but also could be a percent.</u>
<u>Pedestrian Control</u>		
Vehicle Control Officer at Water St/Route 1	\$15,000 per season (20 hrs./week, 13 weeks)	Reduce congestion 10 hours
Vehicle Control Officer Federal/Middle St/Rte 1	\$15,000 per season (20 hrs./week, 13 weeks)	Reduce congestion <5 hours
Realign customer waiting line at Red's Eats along Water St. instead of Route 1 <i>(Red's Eats' effect on congestion not considered by MDOT or Task Force.)</i>	minimal	Reduce congestion <5 hours
Relocate Red's Eats building to rear Northeast corner of its lot.	\$15,000	Reduce congestion <5 hours
Relocate Red's Eats to adjacent Wiscasset Hdwe lot.	\$200,000	Reduce congestion 10 hours Cost estimate is gov't costs as move and purchase would be public/private venture.
Pedestrian Bridge between Water St. and Railroad (OR)	\$300,000 change in scenic view	Reduce congestion 20 hours w/o officer Reduce congestion 30 hours with officer
Pedestrian tunnel between Water St. and Railroad	\$1,500,000	Reduce congestion 20 hours w/o officer Reduce congestion 30 hours with officer

Parking Control

Modify Main St. parking to parallel parking to eliminate blockage to traffic when entering or leaving. Costs are for additional off-Route 1 parking spaces downtown with ratio of two new spaces per each lost space.

Reduce congestion 5 hours. Loss of each space would be compensated with creation of two new off-street parking spaces.

New spaces at:

Railroad Ave. Project.	\$1,000,000
C.E.I. two level parking	\$ 400,000
Other additional off-street pkg.	\$ 100,000

Provide incentives to downtown business employees and business customers to use off-Route 1 parking during summer.

minimal

Reduce congestion <5 hours

Establish time limits for the parallel parking spaces on Route 1

revenue =
cost

Reduce congestion <5 hours

Provide incentives to downtown business employees and business customers to use Wiscasset Middle School parking lot during summer.

minimal

Reduce congestion <5 hours

Create one-way traffic on some streets to create parking spaces.

minimal

Reduce congestion <5 hours

Through Traffic Control

(See Vehicle Control Officer above)

Link the W.T.S. system to 511

Reduce congestion <5 hours

Increase info on I-295 sign to include message: "Consider Alternate Routes." or other words to encourage the use of other routes.

minimal

Reduce congestion <5 hours
Loss of business to local businesses would be minimal, as this is for "through traffic."

Turn on I-295 sign sooner in congestion cycle

minimal

Reduce congestion <5 hours

Depress Route 1, perhaps at Federal Street, or Summer St. with bridge over Route 1 to permit cross-town vehicle and pedestrian crossing. Also called cut-and-cover tunnel.

Several \$million

Reduce congestion 10 hours
Historic appearance of town could be enhanced with proper design with green spaces.

Local Traffic Controls

(Cut-and-cover tunnel/bridge at Federal Street. See above)

(See one-way streets option, above, at Parking Controls)

Other measures, to assist all the above

Continue to encourage Town of Wiscasset to join Gateway 1 process and implement Access Mgmt.

uncertain

Reduce congestion <5 hours

Install permanent traffic counter at Davey Bridge

minimal

no direct effect, but would assist monitoring and measurements. (The attached graph, using triennial estimates, shows a decline in traffic at Davey Bridge since 2000.)

R.O.A.D. estimates, from the 'ICR' alternatives above, that a 50%, or 50 hours, reduction of traffic congestion could be achieved with a \$1-5 million investment. That compares to \$100 million for a 100% reduction with a by-pass. The largest item in that expenditure would be the pedestrian bridge or a more expensive alternative, a tunnel. (The pedestrian tunnel in Woolwich, underneath four lanes of Route 1, reportedly cost \$1.2 million in 2000.) While these measures are being implemented, it's very important to continue the consistent webcam and radar measurements at Birch Point Road and the Route 1/27 intersection in Edgcomb. To measure progress, there must be consistent data measurements.

Please note that a pedestrian bridge can enhance the appearance of Wiscasset. Why not build it of Maine's newest miracle material, composites? Why cannot such a bridge be designed to be as beautiful as the Gateway Arch at St. Louis, Missouri? It's been said that Wiscasset is the "prettiest village in Maine." Why not construct the prettiest pedestrian bridge in the country, instead of another asphalt by-pass?

R.O.A.D. understands that the estimates above are our estimates, but MaineDOT is the expert in such matters. Please prepare your own estimates of the costs and benefits, including estimated reduction in congestion, of the above alternatives. Also, please prepare an analysis of the causes, with percentages, of Wiscasset's seasonal traffic congestion. Together with such estimates, it's imperative that MaineDOT's estimates of future traffic growth be as accurate and consistent as possible. The by-pass has been justified, in part, by projections of continuous rapid traffic growth with no acknowledgement that traffic has actually declined at Davey Bridge since 2000, according to MaineDOT's data, as presented in the attached graph.

Another undefined term is "project need," as it was used in MaineDOT documents and at the 15 December 2010 Task Force meeting. Now that MaineDOT has given a definition of the congestion as the hours per year of traffic at 25 mph or less passing two webcam/radar points, we now can measure progress against that measurement. What hasn't been defined in terms of the new measurement is the reduction required to meet the "project need." In metropolitan areas and in other seasonally congested areas, such as Cape Cod, a certain level of congestion is accepted because the cost of eliminating congestion 100% is found to be too expensive. Similarly, a by-pass would achieve 100% reduction, and it, too, would be too expensive in dollars and human loss. As MaineDOT goes forward with its proposals, please define the "accepted level of service" or "project need" in terms of the new measurement of congestion. Are 10 or 20 or more hours a year of summer congestion, as measured at the two references webcam/radar stations, acceptable?

Several of the alternatives presented above were considered by MaineDOT and by the Task Force, but each of them was considered alone and found not to meet the "project need." They were not considered together, and there was no plan and no funding proposed for the downtown Wiscasset portion of "No Build." The alternatives above address the causes of the seasonal Wiscasset congestion.

In addition to attaching and incorporating by reference previous letters to MaineDOT, we emphasize the importance of MaineDOT clarifying the question of vehicle capacity of a single lane of highway as a function of speed. We have found references to relevant studies which suggest that the vehicle capacity of a highway peaks in the range of 25-35 mph. It's very important for a realistic understanding of the Wiscasset options to know how these studies relate to Route 1 traffic in Wiscasset. If the peak capacity of a single lane is in the range of 25-35 mph, then the downtown Wiscasset speed limits and the curve in Route 1 at the Lincoln County Courthouse are nearly eliminated as causes of the Route 1 vehicle congestion.

In summary, the requests to MaineDOT in this letter are presented below:

- Issue a specific and quantitative statement of the "project need" and the "accepted level of service" for the project.
- Issue a specific statement of MaineDOT's analysis of the relationship between speed and optimum hourly vehicle capacity of each lane of Route 1 in Wiscasset.
- Perform day-long time-lapse photography of the downtown traffic for at least 3 days a month for each of the four summer months, or order to obtain a precise understanding of the causes of Wiscasset's traffic congestion.
- Analyze and issue a report of the causes, with percentages of causation, of Wiscasset's traffic congestion.
- Analyze and issue a report of the costs and benefits(including congestion reduction percentage) of "ICR" menu options.
- Incorporate such analyses and reports into amendments to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for this project.
- Make public the upcoming recommendations MaineDOT will be making to Governor LePage regarding the Wiscasset Route 1 congestion reduction project.
- Include in those recommendations the analysis of the "ICR" menu options.
- Include the MaineDOT analysis of the "ICR" menu options in future submissions to the Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Highway Administration, especially in the request to ACOE for LEDPA certification.

When these analyses and reports are completed, R.O.A.D., and the residents and taxpayers of Maine and the Mid-Coast area, will welcome a change in the MaineDOT strategy to reduce traffic congestion on Route 1 in Wiscasset by endorsing and implementing "ICR" alternatives.

Finally, the "ICR" option will have a constantly evolving menu of alternatives. It's very important for the successful implementation of "ICR" that a standing working group be created to continue to work for congestion reduction by the means proposed above and others. The traffic congestion needs to be reduced and managed at a reasonable cost.

Sincerely,



Morrison Bonpasse, Co-Chair

Frank Risell, Co-Chair

Dan Sortwell, Treasurer

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