

MDOT proposes traffic officers to help control summer traffic

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Staff Reporter

Wiscasset selectmen decided to work with Maine Department of Transportation Study Manager Gerry Audibert to reduce traffic delays on Route 1 in Wiscasset.

One of the proposals by Audibert is to hire two uniformed police officers to do traffic control this summer on Main Street.

MDOT is proposing to share with the town of Wiscasset the cost to retain uniformed traffic officers to reduce traffic delays through the village by better managing pedestrian crossings, from July through September.

The estimated cost of two officers, according to Audibert, is \$14,340. E. Davies Allan from Westport Island will donate \$2,000 to Wiscasset's share. The town would pay \$5,170 and MDOT would contribute \$7,170.

"If we agree to do this, we will know for sure if a traffic officer would make a difference in the traffic flow," Audibert said.

MDOT will conduct two traffic counts at Davey Bridge this summer. Both counts would be conducted over a 12-hour period on a busy Friday afternoon between mid-July and mid-August. One count would be conducted without the presence of the uniformed traffic control officers and the other traffic count would be done when the officers are present.

Audibert said by conducting the counts in both directions they would be able to demonstrate whether or not the traffic control officers can effectively reduce traffic delays.

Wiscasset Police Lieutenant John Allen told the board in his opinion he didn't believe it would make a difference in the traffic flow with the two officers directing traffic. He also made it very clear the officers would need to be trained in traffic control. "You couldn't have a high school student out there," he said. Allen also pointed out standing in the middle of all that traffic is very dangerous.

"A person couldn't stand out there all day, it gets very hot, they would need to be relieved," Allen said. "Where are you going to get two trained police officers to work for a few weeks in the summer?" Allen asked.

Morrison Bonpasse, Chairman of the Route One Alternative Decisions (ROAD) suggested doing away with

or a tunnel to cross Main Street. Bonpasse suggested contacting the Sheriff's Department to help with the traffic control. "This is not just a Wiscasset problem, it is county problem."

Audibert told him that Wiscasset is an historical village and did not believe MDOT would ever build a bridge over Main Street or a tunnel because it would take away from the beauty of the town.

Former Selectman William Curtis recommended a temporary divider be erected down the middle of Main Street to prevent jaywalking, along with a police officer at the intersections of Middle and Main streets, on Saturday between the hours of 10 a.m. and 12 noon at the Post Office.

Selectman Judy Colby agreed with Curtis to have a police officer at the Post Office during those hours because that is when most people go to the Post office.

Selectman Pam Dunning asked if the traffic officers were a short-term fix or a long-term fix to replace the bypass.

Audibert said this proposal had nothing to do with the bypass. "As you know there has been no decision made regarding the bypass. Regardless, it would be 10 years anyway before you would see a bypass, so this could be a short-term fix or even a long-term fix," he said.

There was a discussion among the selectmen that perhaps the two traffic officers could be tested for a short period of time to see if it did help with the traffic flow.

Lieutenant Allan said, if it is going to be just a test why not use the officers we have instead of hiring two officers before you know whether it will work or not. That suggestion appeared to be agreeable to the selectmen.

However, the selectmen made no decision as to the number of hours the officers would work, or if they were going to accept MDOT's proposal. What they did reach a consensus on was to work with MDOT and come up with some resolution that will help the flow of traffic through town.

Audibert told the board before they made any decision he would like to involve the newly formed Chamber of Commerce, and the business people on Main Street to participate in the discussion. The selectmen agreed