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Martha's Vineyard Commission Land Use Planning Committee

Notes of the Meeting of October 3, 2011

Held in the Stone Building, New York Avenue, Oak Bluffs. 5:30 p.m.

Documents referred to during the meeting

- LUPC Agenda of October 3, 2011
- OB Roundabout (DRI 633) Possible Conditions for Consideration
- GPI/Mass DOT Responses to MVC Questions
- Draft Public Hearing Minutes of September 26, 2011
- Historic (1991-2011) Traffic Counts at Blinker and Triangle
- New Correspondence Received September 26 – October 3, 2011
 - The new correspondence were from Nikki Patton (handed in at 9/22 Public Hearing with spreadsheets of a model of her projections); Pat Johnson; Peggy McGrath, Sara Crafts (with 63 signatures against), Sandra Lippens (3), Deborah Dean, Virginia Coutinho, Richard Coutinho, Thomas Newton, Arlan Wise, Tim Atwell, Nancy Huntington, and George Fisher

1. Roundabout – Post Public Hearing Review

Applicant: Oak Bluffs Board of Selectmen; Massachusetts Dept. of Transportation

Project Location: Intersection of Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road with Barnes Road. Commonly known as the "Blinker Light"

Proposal: To convert a four-way stop into a roundabout.

Purpose: To review the project, discuss possible conditions and decide whether or not to make a recommendation to the full Commission to deny, approve, or approve with conditions.

MVC Commissioners Present: Doug Sederholm (Chair); Chris Murphy; Linda Sibley; Fred Hancock; Ned Orleans; Camille Rose; Brian Smith; Christina Brown; John Breckenridge; Kathy Newman and Holly Stephenson.

MVC Staff Present: Mark London, Paul Foley, Bill Veno and Mike Mauro.

For the Applicant: None

Public: Sara Crafts (OB); Richard Knabel (WT); Nancy Huntington (WT); Peter Brannen (MV Gazette); Janet Bank (WT); Robert Day (WT); Barbara Day (WT).

Introduction

- Doug Sederholm:
 - Noted that there were 11 Commissioners present but said that though there was a quorum of the Commission the recommendations of the LUPC were not binding on the full Commission and that individual Commissioners might change their opinions in light of the deliberations with the full Commission;
 - Noted the new documents that comprised the rest of the public record (see "Documents referred to" above);

- Noted that projects like this are based not just on current needs but on a planning horizon of 20 years.
- Suggested that the discussion be organized around the following key issues:
 - Traffic Congestion – at the subject intersection and at the problem intersections at the ends of the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road;
 - Safety – for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians;
 - Island Character and Aesthetics;
 - Bus Stops – whether they are necessary versus increased impact on rural character;
 - Functional Design and Size – whether trucks and other large vehicles can maneuver around it.

Traffic Flow/ Congestion

- Doug Sederholm said that some people had made comments that by improving the traffic flow at this intersection would compound issues at other problem intersections. The response from Tom Currier of MassDOT and John Diaz of GPI Engineering was that any impact from improving this would intersection would be negligible down the road.
- Fred Hancock said that he believed that the roundabout would decrease overall congestion time and would not negatively impact the Triangle in Edgartown or other intersections.
- Brian Smith did not agree and felt that cars not coming from the dominant direction will have few gaps with which to jump in. He felt that the constant flow of the roundabout at busy times would limit access from Barnes Road.
- Fred Hancock disagreed, saying that vehicles coming from all directions have equal access in a roundabout.
- Chris Murphy said that gaps are created when cars turn off at different exits. It would act like the stop sign at the Triangle where Beach Road meets Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. When there is constant flow it effectively becomes a Yield sign and people take turns. The same thing will happen with the roundabout. This is a safety measure.
- Doug Sederholm the project has been presented as both reducing congestion and improving safety.
- Ned Orleans noted that with improvement of traffic flow that would mean that there would be less cars idling and polluting that area. Camille Rose disagreed and said that the pollution that is displaced from this intersection will just end up at the ends.
- Christina Brown asked if we had numbers for how many times over the course of the summer that the traffic backs up to NSTAR. Mike Mauro answered no.
- Doug Sederholm quoted the August 26, 2011 memo from John Diaz of GPI on page of 3 of 6 where it lists the average wait times at the Blinker during the summer peak hour as between 2 and 3 minutes. It says that installing the roundabout and improving the traffic flow will, with attrition over five miles, lead to one additional car every 12 minutes at the end compared to what is already there. He noted that Nikki Patton had spoken at the public hearing and handed in her own calculations that estimated that there would be significantly more additional traffic at the intersections at either end of Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road.
- Chris Murphy said that the Triangle and Look Street are already problem intersections that should be reviewed and improved as well. We should not tie this solution into those existing problems.
- Mike Mauro distributed historic traffic volumes that represent the highest volume of the week when that location was surveyed in the years noted.

- Linda Sibley said that if the roundabout makes the intersection more user-friendly, some drivers presently using Beach Road or other roads choose to use the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road, but that doesn't mean there would be additional traffic problems at the ends.
- Doug Sederholm said that if you change part of the puzzle the other parts will adjust.
- Linda Sibley thinks that fundamentally, the roundabout is a good solution for this intersection. It is a low-tech solution. She was swayed by the assurances of Dan Greenbaum, a traffic engineer of world renown who is very concerned about preservation of Vineyard road character, who stated that the roundabout would be a good safety and congestion improvement that have little impact on other intersections. This is a good, low-tech solution. However she has some serious problems with how the design has evolved, mainly the addition of the bus stops.
- Holly Stephenson said she does not think that improving the situation at this location will create or increase a problem elsewhere. Why should Oak Bluffs not try and fix their problem because there are problems at the ends of the road? Tisbury is working on the connector roads that should alleviate congestion at that end of the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road. It would be desirable that Edgartown look at the Triangle and try and improve it. Oak Bluffs shouldn't be asked to purposefully keep the intersection in bad shape because of possible impacts at the ends.
- Camille Rose felt that the problems at the ends of the Ed-VH Road are caused because there is nowhere for traffic to go; people are looking for parking spaces.
- Paul Foley clarified that according to MVC turning movement counts performed in 2005, 56% of the vehicles travelling east through the "Blinker" were heading towards Edgartown at the a.m. peak and 46% at the p.m. peak. Splitting the difference that means that about half of all vehicles going east from Vineyard Haven continue east after the intersection. We do not know exactly how many of those eastbound vehicles who have already gone through the Blinker go all the way to the Triangle in Edgartown. If, for example, half of those eastbound are turning off before the Triangle then only 25% of the total traffic heading east from Vineyard Haven through the Blinker is headed to the Triangle. Therefore we estimate that off all the cars going from Vineyard Haven to the Blinker somewhere between 20-35% of them are going all the way to the Triangle.

Vehicular Safety

- Kathy Newman noted that it seems that everyone has a different idea about what the rules are at a 4-way stop. If everyone followed the same rule it would be safe, but people do not. She thinks the structure of the roundabout forces compliance. The project engineers said the roundabout is safer because it creates just 8 conflict points as opposed to a 4-way stop which has 32 conflict points.
- Brian Smith said he does not think the roundabout would be safe. He had read that memo and looked deeper into it by looking at the 2007 NHCRP Report cited in the memo, which concludes that the 4-way stop is the safest. He said that the roundabout may only have 8 conflict points but it is at 20 miles per hour (mph) whereas the 4-way stop has more conflict points but at a slower speed, 5-10 mph.
- Doug Sederholm quoted the September 26 memo from John Diaz of GPI which says that the 2007 study did not have statistically valid conclusions about the difference between a 4-way stop and a roundabout [based on studies of conversions of one to the other] but has a methodology for projecting accident rates [based on average accident rates for each type of intersection] which projects that a roundabout should have 18% fewer overall accidents and 60% fewer accidents with injuries. That translates into significantly fewer people getting injured over the course of 20 years. So the main advantages of a roundabout over a 4-way stop are that it improves flow and has fewer accidents with injuries.

- Brian Smith added that there was a study in France that showed 16% more accidents with a roundabout. If there is an accident with two cars going 20 mph, the total speed is 40 mph. Fred Hancock countered that they would not both be going 20 mph head on because both are going the same direction.
- Linda Sibley said that either the 4-way or the roundabout should work if everyone follows the rules, but the really serious accidents happen when someone doesn't stop at all. A friend told her recently of being stopped at the Blinker intersection as were cars in two other directions when a woman talking on a cellphone came right through without stopping at 35 mph. That is a potential fatal accident. She is convinced by the argument that was made that "you can run a traffic light or a stop sign but not a roundabout".
- Fred Hancock noted that one of the problems with this intersection as a 4-way stop is that it is so large and the cars are so far away from each other so it is difficult for drivers to make eye contact and clarify who has the right of way. He was very happy when this went from a 2-way to a 4-way but that was the temporary solution. He noted that the Island Plan says that the roundabout is the recommended solution for this intersection.
- Camille Rose said she would like to hear a discussion of Trip Barnes video, and the potential impact of a truck having difficulty maneuvering on safety.
- Chris Murphy said that all Trip Barnes demonstrated was that an 18-wheel truck might not be able to execute a U-turn within the intersection; however, this is not possible with the existing stop signs. The area and positioning that he used were not correct. The roundabout is designed to accommodate the largest truck. Bill Veno said that it was his understanding that the proposed roundabout design would actually allow the largest vehicle to do a u-turn within the intersection.
- Doug Sederholm agreed stating that the demonstration did not represent what the roundabout would be. People are skeptical but there are 3500 roundabouts in the United States and you have to believe that the engineers would not design something that would not work for the trucks and buses that will be using it.
- Christina Brown said that there is a roundabout near her daughter's house in Montpelier, Vermont. At first, the central island was full of flowers but the truckers kept running over them so it now has a paved apron similar to the design proposed for the Blinker.
- Camille Rose asked what happens if a truck has a tough time getting around them what happens when there is a truck having a problem and then an emergency vehicle has to get through. Brian Smith with a 4-way stop, if a truck breaks down in the middle of the intersection, cars could go around it.
- Paul Foley noted that it had been suggested at the public hearing that a demonstration could be set up with cones in a large parking lot and that physically demonstrate whether large trucks can maneuver around the proposed roundabout at the size it is designed.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety

- Holly Stephenson said that the fact that people don't always follow the rules at a stop sign makes the traffic flows better, but it makes it more dangerous. She is convinced the roundabout will be safer for cars but she is not so sure about bicycles. She thinks the crossing for the Shared Use Path (SUP) should probably be set farther away. All it takes is two cars going in that direction to back up traffic into the roundabout. She likes the roundabout but thinks the bicyclist and pedestrian crossing is a legitimate problem.
- Doug Sederholm said that for those "bicycle sharks" that ride in traffic, there could be a problem that if they ride on the outside of a lane of the roundabout and want continue in the circle when a

vehicle tries to exit in front of them. Mopeds could also be a problem. Bill Veno said that this is why cyclists and mopeds in a roundabout are advised to “take the lane”, so that cars would be behind them, not next to them. The roundabout is designed to be a single lane, whether for cars, mopeds or bikes. The mopeds and “bike sharks” would be travelling at 15 to 20 mph, the same speed as cars.

- Linda Sibley added that there are a number of bicyclists who simply will not use the SUP. They have a legal right to the road and they will be in traffic
- Camille Rose noted that today there is a bike path with a crosswalk; cars are supposed to stop now and they usually do.
- Brian Smith thought that the SUP crossing creates another conflict point that has not been considered. Cars stopping for pedestrians can easily back up into the roundabout. The 2007 NHRCP Report also notes that in England, bicyclists had an issue with roundabouts.
- Paul Foley noted that staff had prepared a document with possible conditions for consideration that made some suggestions about a raised speed table and adjusting the location of the SUP crosswalk.

Island Character/ Aesthetics and Bus Stops

- Linda Sibley said we can debate whether gravel is hardscape or not but she thinks that overall the whole intersection has become much larger with the addition of the bus stops. It becomes a less low-tech solution. The addition of the bus stops and additional sidewalks to accommodate them increase the hardscape dramatically. Does this mean all of our rural roads are going to be filled with bus stops? If so then they won't be rural roads anymore. This would be a major change to the Vineyard and there should be an Island-wide discussion about whether it is preferable to have formal bus pull-offs or whether it is better to wait a few seconds while a bus stops in the travel lane. She would prefer the latter. Otherwise we are going to end up paving the whole Island to accommodate bus stops everywhere the VTA wants one. This was not discussed in the Island Plan.
- John Breckenridge said that currently the buses stop informally on the side of the road. With these bus stops it would become a formal stop. When you add lighting for the intersection and the bus stops, the roundabout will become very visible. He too is concerned with how large this has become.
- Holly Stephenson thinks that this is not a particularly rural road anymore. It is not an 18th century rural road. We have trucks now and school buses that need to be accommodated. In Tisbury now we have a huge fire station because the trucks they bought would not fit into the old one. Now they want to cut all kinds of trees because these huge trucks can't get down every lane. If we really want to protect Island character, maybe we would not allow the really big trucks, though there would probably not be a way to do this.
- MassDOT said that if they build the formal bus stops they need to be A.D.A. compliant, but they did not say that we need formal bus stops. The VTA might want them, but they are not required.
- Chris Murphy said he remembers when this road went from a real country road to a state road. It was appalling. It destroyed the character of that area, but do we need it. Hell yes we needed it. Do we need this upgrade? He thinks we do. Do we need the bus stops? Maybe not now but eventually he thinks we will. As difficult as it is to swallow this is moving in the right direction. This is not the country road that it used to be.
- Linda Sibley asked how they handled this in Nantucket. Bill Veno said that in Nantucket they have a different alignment but essentially the same amount of traffic. He is not sure how much ridership they have on the buses but they do have set bus stops and do not allow passengers to flag down

buses outside of the designated bus stops. They do not have formal bus stops at the roundabout; buses stop in the travel lane for passengers.

- Doug Sederholm asked if there is a reason our roundabout would need these formal bus stops and pull-offs.
- Brian Smith said he has both managed at the VTA and driven for them. These bus stops are overkill. To have all this hardscape is ugly and serves no real purpose. After this weekend it will be rare for them to make any stops at that intersection again until May.
- Kathy Newman noted that Angie Grant (VTA Administrator) did not want to move the bus stop to the High School/YMCA. She wondered if there were any handicapped people that get on and off in that vicinity regularly.
- Doug Sederholm assumed that most of the passengers who would need assistance are coming from Hillside or Woodside Island Elderly Housing (IEH). He and Brian Smith have never seen anyone getting on or off with a wheelchair in such a rural/remote setting as this intersection.
- Holly Stephenson asked if we could look at the possible conditions and can we disconnect the roundabout from the bus stops.
- Doug Sederholm said it might throw a monkey wrench into their design schedule.
- Mark London referred Commissioners to the options outlined in the possible conditions prepared by staff. This included the possibility that there might only be four stops or that they be included – either now or at a future date – only if determined that they are necessary. A consideration would be whether we put off construction of the bus stops, they would they be eligible to be put on the TIP in the future and thus paid for by the state.

Scheduling:

- At about 7:00 pm Christina Brown said her sense was that we are a long way from wrapping up.
- There was a discussion of whether to continue this evening, continue to the following evening, or just go to the full Commission without further discussion the issues and without a recommendation.
- There was also some discussion of the other items that are on the MVC Meeting Agenda on Thursday night.
- The LUPC decided to go directly to the full Commission's Deliberation and Decision on Thursday night at 7:30 p.m.

Adjourned 7:11 p.m.