

MAKING THE VINEYARD A SUSTAINABLE ISLAND

GRIDLOCK IN PARADISE: What Can We Do About Traffic?

FORUM PROCEEDINGS



Held on Wednesday, August 24, 2005
Sailing Camp Park, Oak Bluffs

“Gridlock in Paradise: What can we do about traffic?” was the subject of the fifth and final forum of the summer 2005 series. It was held on Wednesday, August 24, 2005 at the Sailing Camp Park in Oak Bluffs.

The 2005 series is entitled “Making the Vineyard a Sustainable Island”. It marks the second year of public forums focused on areas in which the Martha’s Vineyard Commission (MVC) is actively engaged. The fifth forum in 2005 was co-sponsored by the Martha’s Vineyard Regional Transit Authority (VTA). Funding for the series was provided by a generous grant from the Edey Foundation. The Organizing Committee included Judy Crawford (Moderator), Mark London (MVC Executive Director), Susan Mercier (Former MVC Administrative Assistant), Katherine Newman (MVC Commissioner), and Linda Sibley (MVC Commissioner; Producer of this forum). These proceedings were prepared by Judy Crawford and Jo-Ann Taylor. Thanks to Christine Rose and MVTV for videotaping and broadcast of this production.

This forum dealt with issues involving vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle traffic, as well as mass transit issues involving the VTA and the Steamship Authority (SSA).

Approximately 110 interested Islanders gathered in the Sailing Camp to hear a keynote speaker followed by a group of local panelists. Following their remarks, the speakers and panelists engaged in a lively discussion with the audience.



The forum was moderated by Judy Crawford and was made up of the following elements:

- Overview of Visual Preference Survey, Mark London, Executive Director, MVC
- Guest speaker, Catherine Donaher; Urban Planning and Development Consultant
- Panel Discussion: Susan Wasserman, Dan Greenberg and Angela Grant.
- A question and answer period



Moderator Judy Crawford and panelists Catherine Donaher, Susan Wasserman, Dan Greenbaum and Angela Grant

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Visual Preference Survey – Mark London
2. An Overview of Traffic on the Vineyard - Catherine Donaher
3. Panel Discussion

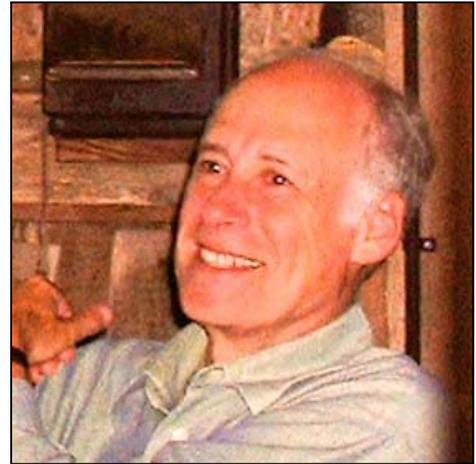
Appendices

- A1. *Traffic on the Vineyard* by Srinivas Sattoor and Mark London
- A2. Useful References

DVDs of all forums and written summaries of the proceedings are available in all Vineyard libraries or from the Martha's Vineyard Commission; proceedings are available on the Commission's website at www.mvcommission.org.

1. Visual Preference Survey – Mark London

The first speaker was Mark London, Executive Director of the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC). The MVC developed a Visual Preference Survey to gather data from the full-time and seasonal residents of the Island. The Survey made its debut at the 2005 Agricultural Fair, then appeared in all the town libraries. It was also set up for use both before and after this forum. Altogether, the Commission received 343 responses.



Mark explained that the Visual Preference Survey was one of the action items that came out of last year's MVC forum, entitled "A View From the Road: How to Preserve Our Rural Roadsides." This survey is an example of how these forums have laid the groundwork for the concrete steps needed to address issues of concern that they have surfaced. During the summer, the MVC engaged two interns to work on projects related to that forum. One completed a detailed analysis of all our rural roads for future planning and zoning purposes. The other worked on the Visual Preference Survey, collating and prioritizing photos and developing the questions that would be asked of the public.

The Visual Preference Survey photos were obtained by distributing disposable cameras to a wide range of Vineyard residents and asking them to take a series of photographs that best exemplified certain criteria. Hundreds of photos were collected and collated, and the nine best examples in each category became part of a second survey wherein a larger number of people could identify their strongest likes and dislikes. The following is a summary of the list of questions.

Section I

- A. Which plans scenes typify the Vineyard character?
- B. Unless we do something, which of these will be most threatened in the future?
- C. What features could be a good model for future development on Martha's Vineyard?
- D. Which of these places (generally disliked) could be remedied if we intervened?
- E. What plan or feature do you dislike and should not be repeated with future development on the Vineyard?
- F. Which buildings are out of place with their context?

Section II

- G, H, I. Where should parking be located?
- J, K. What kind of fencing is most appropriate?
- L, M. When designing roads, which types of shoulders and guardrails do you prefer?

Mark encouraged all the members of the audience who had not already taken the Visual Preference Survey to do so following the forum. A summary has since become available from the Commission.

2. An Overview of Traffic on the Vineyard – Catherine Donaher

The guest speaker was Catherine Donaher, who lives in Brookline, MA, and is the principle of Catherine Donaher and Associates (CD&A) a planning and development consulting firm. Ms Donaher has conducted many public and private partnerships in designing and redeveloping urban green space. She is on the Board of the Falls River Conservancy, a non-profit advocacy group founded in 1999 and dedicated to the renovation, maintenance and enrichment of the Charles River Basin. She has an impressive background in urban planning as well as background and experience here on the Vineyard, where she produced a Transportation Study in 1995, with the active participation of Susan Wasserman.



Catherine began her remarks by stating “Consultants usually come in to do a job, they complete the project, and then they are forgotten. But here we are, ten years later, and for me to get a call and know that someone remembered [me and my work] is extremely flattering, and I am grateful to be here.”

Ten years ago, when the report was being produced, traffic was a very hot issue on the Vineyard. Catherine then observed that this doesn’t seem to have changed much. Everyone still has an opinion about how to deal with traffic.

Catherine then asked rhetorically, what does it mean to experience the phenomenal growth that has taken place on the Vineyard? Traffic and gridlock are an outgrowth of the way we are living. We need to understand when and why traffic problems occur. We also need to understand what has been tried and what the impacts have been. Only then can we see what remains to be done and who should be responsible for taking those steps and making the changes that will alleviate the impact of growth on traffic.

Ten years ago, when Ms. Donaher’s firm was selected to join the Special Task Force on Transportation, under Susan Wasserman’s leadership, it was charged with looking at what could be done about the problems arising from the rapid growth of both visitors and year round residents on the Vineyard.

Rapid growth has a lot to do with the traffic problems the Vineyard has faced. Here were some of the findings of the Special Task Force on Transportation:

Population:

- Between 1970 and 1990, the Vineyard saw a 77% growth in its year round population.
- That number continued to rise every year between 1990 and 1995 at about 3% per year.
- Seasonal and visitor populations increased at about the same rate.
- At that rate, the number of people on the Vineyard in the summer would double every fifteen years.
- The combined annual growth of full and part-time populations here on the Vineyard exceeded the growth rates experienced both at the national and at the state level.
- Obviously, this rate of growth is unsustainable without serious and undeniable impacts.



Walk-on Passengers:

- In 1995, ferries brought to the Island an average of 11,600 passengers per day.
- Growth from 1990-1995 was an enormous 24%, not including passengers who arrived by cruise ship, private boats or by air.

Cars:

- During the same period, the number of cars carried increased by about 16%, and trucks increased by about 5%.
- The SSA brought over 54,000 cars in August of 1995 or 1,750 cars per day.
- 15,000 cars were registered on the Vineyard in 1995, up from 1,200 in 1991.

Construction:

- Building permits in 1994 were up 25% from those issued in 1990, representing an increased demand for transportation for the occupants.

When one considers residents, visitors, cars, trucks, houses and rooms, taken as a whole, an enormous demand was placed on limited streets, limited parking capacity, limited roadway capacity and infrastructure – a demand fueled by the increase in year round residents, the increase in seasonal and day trippers, the ability to accommodate more people and the very high visibility (the “Clinton factor”) that the Vineyard had experienced in the media over the previous decade.

Traffic during the peak season was a very serious problem.

The Task Force on Transportation came up with twenty action items that were addressed by the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC), the Steamship Authority (SSA), the Vineyard Transit Authority (VTA), the Chamber of Commerce and the individual towns. Each of these groups had a mandate to undertake change within their particular area of responsibility.

"What makes the Vineyard unique," explained Ms. Donaher, "is that I can stand here ten years later and tell you that you have done an incredible job!"

Actions taken immediately following the 1995 report:

- Consolidation to a single system of transit services for the entire Island, the Vineyard Transportation Authority.
- Hiring a strong leader to manage the VTA.
- Limiting ferry capacity for cars.
- Revising the automobile reservation system.
- Promotion by the Chamber of Commerce of the slogan, "Leave your car at home."
- Introduction of a seamless shuttle system in Vineyard Haven between the Park and Ride and the ferry.

These were substantial actions. Taken together, they have made a real difference. However, they are clearly not enough. If they had been, we would not have been talking, ten years later, about "Gridlock in Paradise."

What has happened in the intervening ten years? Many forces that are shaping our lives everywhere in the country are having a similar impact on Martha's Vineyard.

- Population growth, particularly the new wave of immigration.
- More automobiles and trucks registered per household.
- Very low mortgage interest rates and rising prices for real estate fueling increased investment in new construction.
- Changes in vacation patterns, including more weekend trips.
- Foot loose professionals who can work from anywhere.
- Retirees using their summer homes well into the shoulder season.

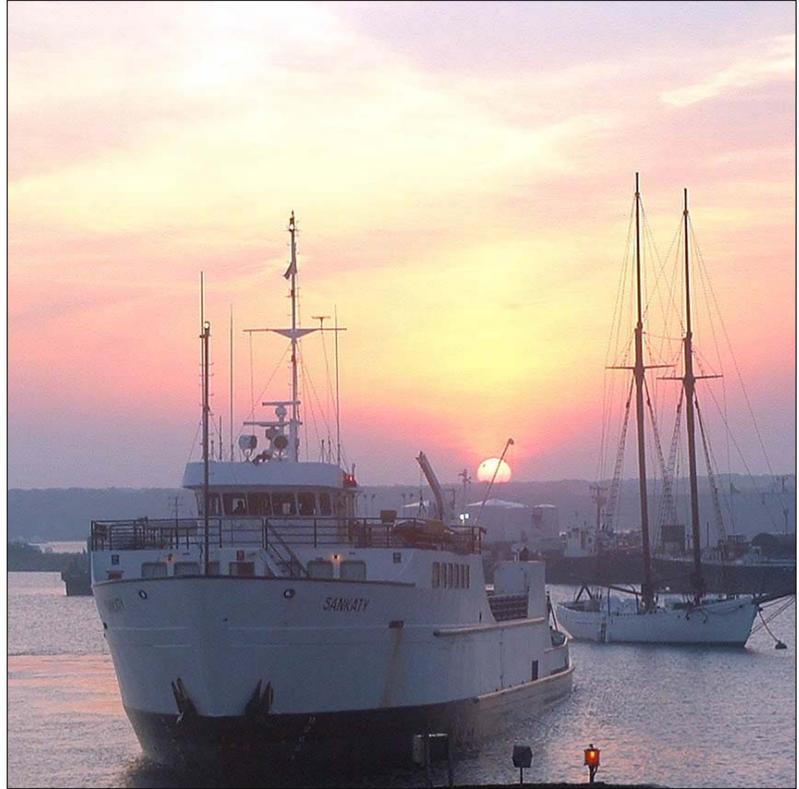
More people generate more trips. However, the cars are not the origin of the problem, according to Catherine. "Just as Pogo says, 'We have met the enemy and it is us.' Cars are not the problem; we who use them are."

It is important to look at the particular characteristics of vehicle trips on the Vineyard. For example, permanent residents and seasonal residents overlap, compounding traffic problems in peak and shoulder months. In addition, the business community relies on the movement of commercial vehicles, as well as patron vehicles, for its support

What are the conditions we face in 2005?

- Our population has grown another 30% in the past ten years.

- The number of permanent residents is double what it was in 1970.
- The distribution of population has changed.
 - Down-Island towns used to represent 85% of the population.
 - They now represent only 75%.
- The number of trips from up-Island to down-Island and back has greatly increased traffic flow.
- The peak season population, according to MVC calculations, now averages in the vicinity of 55,000, or 3½ times the permanent population (July and August reached 70,000 people)
- The profile of visitors has changed.
 - Vineyard is a magnet for celebrities.
 - Part-time residents use their seasonal homes for extended periods of time.
 - The age profile has changed with fewer young people and big increases in those over age 55.



Recent ferry passenger patterns showed steady growth between 1990 and 2002. This was followed by a decline in 2003 through 2005. This represents an interesting change that may be attributable to the introduction of fast ferries (or increased air traffic). Ms. Donaher suggested that we keep an eye on this trend.

Automobile traffic on the SSA shows similar trends. The numbers of cars increased steadily until 2002. This was followed by a small decline in 2003 and a much bigger decline during 2004, down approximately 6%, or 20,000 cars. Once the full year's numbers can be obtained from 2005, it should confirm this trend. We may be experiencing the deflection of attention from the Vineyard to other vacation "hot spots".

The trend with trucks, however, is quite different from that of cars. The number of trucks has increased steadily over the last ten years. There was approximately a 24% increase in truck traffic to and from the Vineyard between 2003 and 2004. The issue of truck traffic likewise warrants attention over time. Trucks take up more capacity on the roadways, slow the flow of traffic, particularly at intersections, and contribute to congestion in towns.

Other trends that should be monitored over the coming years include residential building permits and vehicle registrations:

- Residential building permits
 - Rose consistently from 1990-2000.
 - 5 of the 6 towns imposed building caps.
 - The number of new building permits is now much lower than in the 90's.
- Vehicle registrations
 - Have dropped back to historical levels.
 - Most people attribute the spike from 1990 to 2000 to the limitation of vehicles on steamships (as voted in 1997).

The number of vehicles is not what matters. It is their use. Today, mass transit is an even more important part of the overall solution to traffic problems on the Vineyard.

The VTA has reported consistent growth in usage over the past three years, particularly during the peak months of July and August. Summer numbers paralleled the ferry passenger numbers. Many of these passengers were day-trippers using the system for sightseeing and beach going, who otherwise would not necessarily have driven cars. In the off-peak months, ridership represented trips that would otherwise have been made by car, corresponding to 1,000 to 1,500 car-trips per day.

The Island continues to feel the pressure on its roads – more people, more cars, more business, increased congestion and greater delays. The infrastructure is strained, as are nerves. “The problem took time to get this way,” Catherine Donaher explained, “and it will take time to solve. However, if ten years from now we are standing here talking about this same problem, we will have missed an opportunity.”

What can be done?

The Tisbury Park and Ride had 3,400 riders in 2004, up 20,000 riders from 2003. This represents a huge number of cars taken off the road between the Park and Ride lot and the Vineyard Haven steamship terminal. An additional Park and Ride lot serving the Oak Bluffs terminal could help in the same way.

“It is my view, having looked carefully and I think pretty thoroughly, at the SSA website, that they could do a better job of informing would be visitors and seasonal residents as to the shuttle and transit opportunities on the Island. There needs to be a more coordinated and consistent message between the Island and the SSA.” Ms. Donaher said.

In addition to expanding the Park and Ride, a new SSA boat will be coming into service very soon that will be bigger and faster than the existing SSA ferries. In light of some of the other changes that have been made, namely the reservation system and limits on cars, how will this new ferry affect reservations? Will the auto limits continue to be observed? If not, what effect will that the additional cars have on the Island's traffic?

Now that the Vineyard has taken the most important step of creating the VTA, that entity can turn its attention to other improvements:

- Type and size of busses.
- Creating a more powerful and enticing image for the use of public transit.
- Promoting the culture of transit use.

These are long-term evolutionary steps and will need to be worked on persistently over time.

What incentives tend to encourage or discourage people from leaving their cars behind? First, pricing should create an incentive to leave cars on the mainland. Currently, in

the summer months, it is cheaper for a family of four to bring their car here than to leave it on the mainland for seven days and buy transit passes for two adults and two children. At today's rates, it is about \$30 cheaper.

In Boston, one doesn't think of taking a car to Harvard Square unless one is feeling very lucky or is willing to pay the very heavy price to park in a garage. As a result, the numbers of cars has reduced significantly in that area.

The design of parking spots plays a big factor as well. The issue of angled vs. parallel parking provokes a time-honored debate. Angled parking offers more spaces, but slows down traffic. Parallel parking provides a wider right of way, yet creates fewer spaces. The solution is different in each individual case.

Finally, changes can be made to the roadway system. Should the roads be widened? Should a roundabout be installed at the blinker light? These questions are not easily answered, since they involve more complicated issues than traffic. They are really asking us to decide what kind of place we want the Vineyard to be.

How does gridlock occur? The answer is simple. When many of us want to drive to and from the same places at the same time, and there isn't enough road capacity to handle it all, that's gridlock! If any of these four factors changes, gridlock is reduced.

Most of us don't think of ourselves as the ones causing the gridlock. We tend to look at the other cars and wonder why they are there. However, if we are willing to look in the mirror, we can play a part in alleviating gridlock.



We need to be vigilant. It doesn't take much time for initial capacity to be used up, but if the delay is reduced, people's disincentives to drive are taken away and the viscous cycle begins again. "These are all tough issues to resolve," Catherine Donaher declared. "The very real benefit of forums such as this one is that they give people an opportunity to discuss and debate potential solutions and to hear many different and legitimate points of view."

Ms. Donaher relayed a story about a captain of industry who was once asked what was his secret to success. He answered, "Two words... right decisions." And how do you make the right decisions? He answered, "One word... experience." And how do you get experience? He answered, "Two words... wrong decisions."

Many right decisions have already been made here on the Vineyard, such as establishing the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank, the Martha's Vineyard Commission, the Vineyard Transit Authority, the Park and Ride system, setting limits on ferry capacity and developing caps on building permits. Ms. Donaher encouraged Islanders to feel good about steps already taken and to continue to do more of the same. All these steps have had incremental benefits and will continue to do so.

2. Panel Discussion

The panelists: Susan Wasserman, Dan Greenbaum and Angela Grant then stepped forward and were introduced.

Susan Wasserman

Panelist Susan Wasserman spoke next. Susan is a long time Vineyard resident and community activist. She led the project that produced the "Vineyard Transportation 2000 Citizen Survey." She also worked with Catherine Donaher on her 1995 traffic study and has a unique finger on the pulse of the community. Susan was asked to address what Vineyarders are thinking about traffic.

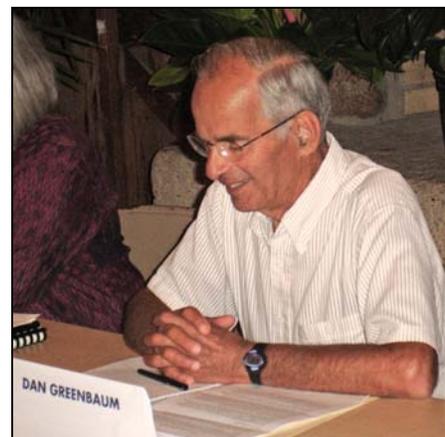


Susan Wasserman began her remarks by saying that traffic problems are not viewed as just a summer or shoulder season problem. She cited a recent ad in the newspaper encouraging Islanders to "Avoid the Bermuda Triangle... Shop in Katama." This is a clear sign that traffic is perceived as a problem on the Vineyard.

Our reluctance to change things here, while, poses additional problems in terms of finding solutions to traffic. Every time a traffic light or a round-about is proposed at the blinker, for instance, people are adamant in their opposition to seeing the Island become "suburbanized." There are no easy answers.

Dan Greenbaum

Panelist Dan Greenbaum, a traffic engineer, spoke next. He led off his remarks by saying that the audience probably would not like to hear what he came here to say. He then said that all the things Catherine Donaher said we had already done are fine, and all the things she suggested we should do, should be done. However, when we have completed all these things, we will still not have solved the traffic problems on the Vineyard.



There is a perception that the short-term visitor is causing the traffic problem, and if we could just get them to leave their cars on the mainland, everything would be better. But that is a misconception. A recent study showed that short-term visitors to the Island make up only 2% of the traffic. "The real problem," Mr. Greenbaum said, "is us."

Although bus ridership is steadily rising and use of the bike paths is increasing, these changes are not enough to make a real dent in the traffic. We need really strong incentives, really bad delays, to get people to give up the great convenience of their automobiles.

Sometimes incentives become disincentives. If great new parking were to be made available in downtown Vineyard Haven, for instance, we might find many fewer riders on the VTA and the Park and Ride.

Continued growth is the main cause of increased traffic problems. The speaker saw only two ways to stop the growth; one would be very difficult and one would be very easy. The difficult solution is to do things that would seriously limit the construction of new homes. This, he admitted, could be the topic of another entire forum. If done, however, growth would stop and related traffic problems would also. The easy solution, he said with a smile, is to just ignore the traffic problems completely. The Vineyard will quickly get to be a place where people just don't want to be.

Angela Grant

The final panelist, Angela Grant, is the Executive Director of the Vineyard Transit Authority. She spoke about the current status of the VTA, trends in VTA ridership, the issues facing the VTA today, and future plans for public transit on the Island.



While important gains have been made in the alleviation of traffic problems on the Vineyard by creating the VTA, Angela Grant felt there is much still to be done. In 2000, the VTA expanded its routes to provide Island-wide summer coverage. In early 2002, the VTA adopted Island-wide, year round schedules. New more extended winter routes are currently being pilot tested.

On-going study of ridership has revealed some interesting trends:

- Off-season ridership is the only area of growth VTA is experiencing.
- Off-season growth has been huge; averaging 10%-15% annually, just short of 100,000 riders.
- Peak season ridership experienced a decline, when traffic is at its worst.
- Revenue is decreasing because more passes are being sold, and passes are a more cost-effective way to ride than "pay as you go".
- More 3-day and 7-day passes, and less one-day passes are being sold.

The VTA is currently focusing on several issues:

- The need to double frequency on major routes.
- The need for major capital investment to make up for lost revenues.
 - Spend \$3 million/year, collect \$1 million/year, equaling \$2 million shortfall.
 - Towns pay \$450,000/year, the State pays just over \$1 million/year, the federal government pays \$300,000/year.
 - VTA decided to make student passes and senior passes very affordable to encourage these groups (Students and seniors can ride all year for \$50; for others the cost is \$100).
 - One-day visitor pass will remain at \$6.
 - Encouraging as many \$6 fares as possible to offset the cost of the transit system.

In addition to focusing on these items, Angie Grant explained that she is exploring other funding opportunities that might have a positive effect on the financial health of the organization. The VTA is a rural transit system. Therefore, it is not guaranteed any funding for capital projects. She

needs to look for special funding through the state and federal governments. In order to increase service on the lines, she would need a major influx of capital. However, the VTA is already competing with thirteen other transit systems across the State, including the "T" system in Boston. Obviously, funding is a big hurdle.

What is the future of the VTA? The main focus will be to target markets that can increase ridership. These are seen as youth, seniors and those who ride the busses to their place of business. The VTA is not focusing on increasing the summer ridership, because they are already running well beyond 100% capacity during many parts of July and August.

Ms. Grant is looking to technology to help manage the loads and increase customers' sense of reliance on the VTA. Next summer, she hopes to pilot the use of digital signs at key bus stops along the routes to inform the public of how many minutes are left until the next bus arrives. ("6 minutes away", "4 minutes away", etc.) In addition, patrons will be able to use cell phones to ensure they have not missed the bus at the end of their road. There will be an interactive voice response for those without Internet capacity on their phones.

Every attempt will be made to reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles. Infrastructure capacity issues at the two steamship terminals will also be examined carefully. The VTA is anxious to begin the Emergency Rides Home Program. Working with Mass Rides, the VTA hopes to allow business people who use public transit to get to work and who then have an emergency and need to leave work suddenly, to call a taxi or rental car, if busses are not scheduled at the times needed. By supporting such programs, the VTA hopes to increase the trust of the public in their ability to respond to emergency personal needs, thereby increasing ridership.

In her closing remarks, Ms. Grant reiterated that the VTA would place strong emphasis on the next major markets, the student population and the senior population. She encouraged any comments or questions to be addressed to the VTA by calling the office or visiting the website at www.vineyardtransit.com.

As a surprise to the audience, Angie Grant offered \$5 coupons to anyone who currently held a one-year VTA pass. Two lucky winners received these coupons. She then offered everyone at the forum a complimentary one-day pass, good for one year. The VTA plans to track the usage by serial numbers on the card to determine if such an incentive might be useful in other settings.

APPENDICES

A1. Traffic on the Vineyard by Srinivas Sattoor and Mark London

This article, by Srinivas Sattoor, MVC Transportation Planner, and Mark London, MVC Executive Director, appeared in the Martha's Vineyard Times on August 18, 2005 and in the Vineyard Gazette on August 19, 2005.

You thought traffic was getting worse and you were right. We have the numbers. Last year, you may have noticed all the traffic counters around the Island, and may even have seen the two of us and other staff members of the Martha's Vineyard Commission handing out traffic survey cards. As the lead transportation-planning agency for the Island, the MVC monitors Island traffic and has, since 1990, counted traffic at 131 different locations, of which 73 are sites regularly monitored every few years. The traffic counts are used for various transportation planning activities such as project review by the Commission and town boards, and for the MVC's preparation of a computer model of Island traffic to aid the community's planning efforts.

In 2004, we collected traffic volumes at 39 different locations including two permanent count locations— New York Avenue in Oak Bluffs and the Edgartown - West Tisbury Road at Mill Pond. The following are some highlights of the results.

- Beach Road near Five Corners had the highest traffic volumes, an average of 22,265 vehicles per day last July. The two-mile stretch of Beach/State Road from the town landing near the Drawbridge to Holmes Hole Road is the busiest on the Island. The other location with more than 20,000 vehicles per day was Edgartown's Upper Main Street near Donaroma's.
- Vineyard traffic stays consistently at a pretty high level between 11 am and 5 pm, unlike most off-Island locations where morning and evening peaks are more pronounced.
- In Down-Island towns, Saturday daily traffic was generally higher than weekday traffic, whereas Up-Island, it was the reverse. Across the Island, traffic was lightest on Sunday.
- Total summer traffic volume has increased about a third since 1990, an average of about 2% a year, although the change varied considerably from one road to the next. For example, on Edgartown - West Tisbury Road east of Mashacket Road, the increase was over 4% per year. On Beach Road near the Drawbridge, the annual increase was only 0.3%, presumably because there was limited capacity to handle any more traffic. On Katama Road, traffic actually went down slightly since 1990, perhaps because South Beach isn't quite as hectic as it was a decade ago.
- Traffic in July and August is about three times greater than the quietest month, February. The highest traffic levels were recorded during the second week of August.

Also, last August, the MVC helped the Tisbury Planning Board analyze the feasibility of creating a system of connector roads between upper State Road and the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road (Look Street Intersection) by carrying out an origin-destination survey. The following are some key results.

- Even at the peak of summer, most traffic consisted of year-round residents, 68% on Tuesday and 58% on Saturday.
- About 5% and 8% of trips were related to the SSA ferry on Tuesday and Saturday respectively.
- Most motorists going through the intersection went through it more than twice a week (72% on Tuesday and 59% on Saturday; 77% and 68% of the year-round residents).
- Most people were driving alone (61% on Tuesday and 49% on Saturday; 71% and 60% of year-round residents).
- About half of the vehicles arriving at the intersection from the Edgartown / Vineyard Haven Road turned left. A third of these were heading Up-Island (beyond Holmes Hole Road) and therefore likely to use a connector road.
- About 11 % of vehicles approaching the intersection from State Road came from beyond Holmes Hole Road and had destinations in Edgartown and outer Oak Bluffs, also candidates for using a connector road.

The Vineyard faces a real dilemma as the number of people on the Island continues to grow. It would be great to eliminate those summer bottlenecks in town centers and major intersections. However, the Vineyard's appeal is based largely on its uncommon natural beauty: its two-lane, tree-canopied country roads, its wooden bridges, its exquisite bike paths . . . a distinct, rural character symbolized by the absence of traffic lights. Our vacation-based economy depends on continuing to offer seasonal residents and visitors an exceptional visitor experience, but how do we balance congestion relief with protection of the Island's distinct scenic values?

Vineyarders have long been opposed to expanding the Island's road network to deal with growing traffic. Recent MVC surveys suggest that this opinion continues today. Hence, the Island's Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) – made up of representatives of Island towns, the county, and private citizens – focuses on maximizing the existing capacity of roads by favoring alternative solutions such as transit, car-pooling, van-pooling, and biking. This is also the thrust of the Island's Regional Transportation Plan, updated every three years by the MVC. Changes to the 176-mile public road network (38 miles owned and maintained by MassHighway, the rest by the towns) concentrate on limited fine-tuning for safety and modest improvements to congestion. (There are also 668 miles of private roads. In all, 155 miles are paved, the rest are dirt.)

For example, the Look Street Intersection mentioned above is perhaps the most congested on the Vineyard. The standard engineering approach would be additional lanes and traffic lights. An alternative is to divert traffic from the intersection. The Tisbury Planning Board has proposed creating a system of connector roads, which would also serve a new mixed-use neighborhood close to existing development and services rather than out in the more rural areas. Using data from the origin-destination survey, the MVC's traffic study of this proposal indicated that up to a third of the existing trips at the intersection could be diverted to the proposed connector roads. As a

result, the Look Intersection would operate with acceptable delays and, provided all three links to State Road were built, the impact there would not be great. Interestingly, it also showed that a single bypass road, the object of some controversy several years ago, might well have made matters worse.

This year, the Commission will be helping towns look at other trouble spots. We are working with Edgartown Town boards on the possibility of conducting extensive traffic studies there, possibly including another origin-destination survey.

The MVC was asked by the Oak Bluffs Board of Selectmen to look at traffic at the intersection of the Edgartown - Vineyard Haven Road and Barnes Road. Safety has improved considerably with the implementation of the four-way stop at the blinker light, but anecdotal reports about summer congestion vary between "hardly any delays at all" to "usually backed up halfway to Vineyard Haven." Objective information should help the Selectmen decide whether they want to move ahead with a roundabout, or some other solution, sometime in the future.

Martha's Vineyard receives about \$400,000 a year from MassHighway and the Federal Highway Administration for transportation improvement projects: road improvements, bike path improvements and other so-called transportation "enhancements." The JTC programs these projects annually and helps coordinate other transportation planning activities. The committee is now working on an expansion of the Island's Park & Ride system, preparation of a bus stop/shelter master plan and an Island bicycle plan, and the possibility of using Traffic Management Organizations to promote alternate means of travel.

The MVC is planning a forum in August to discuss how to improve getting around the Vineyard, and this will be a key topic in the upcoming Comprehensive Island Planning effort. For more information, go to the MVC website (www.mvcommission.org) and search for "Traffic Counts," "Connector Road Study" and/or "Regional Transportation Plan."

A2. Useful References

The following websites may be perused for further information on the Martha's Vineyard Commission's transportation program, on Catherine Donaher, and on the Martha's Vineyard Regional Transit Authority. Much useful information resides there, including many downloadable reports, and links to related sites.

Catherine Donaher

www.gsd.harvard.edu

Martha's Vineyard Regional Transit Authority

www.vineyardtransit.com

Martha's Vineyard Commission and its Transportation program:

www.mvcommmission.org/planning/transportation

Visual Preference Survey Summary of Results

www.mvcommmission.org (type "VPS summary" in the search box)

Vineyard Transportation 2000 Citizen Survey

www.mvcommmission.org (type "vineyard transportation 2000 citizen survey" in the search box)

Transportation Planning Report 1995

www.mvcommmission.org (type "transportation planning report" in the search box)



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