



**Meeting
Notes**

Attendees: Chris Cross,
Chair of the Advisory Task Force
Marlon Frink
Steven Stancel (for Bruce Woodruff)
Bill O'Donnell
Jack Newick
Sandy Hislop
Maria Stowell
Tom Fargo
Chris Waszczuk
Fred Pearson (Alternate)
Members of the Public (See Attached List)

Date/Time: July 30, 2003, 6:30 p.m.

Project No.: 51425
Advisory Task Force Meeting
No. 2

Place: Dover City Hall

Re: Newington to Dover EIS
11238

Notes taken by: Peter Walker

At 6:35 Chris Cross, Chair of the Advisory Task Force (ATF), called the meeting to order.

COMMITTEE'S ROLE and RESPONSIBILITIES

After introduction of the ATF members in attendance, Mr. Chris Cross, ATF Chair, reviewed the role of the ATF. He explained that the ATF is a citizens group, which serves as a conduit for local concerns and issues for the Newington-Dover study. The ATF will meet quarterly for the next three (3) years. Mr. Cross acknowledged that the EIS process is a long one, but explained that the process is designed to allow for input and proper study of all of the issues associated with the project. The ATF will alternate meeting sites between Dover and Newington. The Chair encouraged the ATF and members of the public to follow the progress of the project through the project's website (www.newington-dover.com). Throughout the EIS process there will be not only a number of ATF meetings but other public informational meetings and eventually the public process will culminate in a public hearing, which is currently scheduled for February 2006.

Mr. Cross explained the process for setting the agenda for the ATF meetings. About three weeks prior to the ATF's meeting a draft agenda will be circulated to the ATF. The agenda will be finalized approximately two weeks prior to an ATF meeting and will be circulated in a public announcement approximately one week to 10 days prior to the actual meeting. Members of the public who wish to have an item added to the agenda may contact DOT directly or may contact

any member of the ATF to suggest the agenda item. The Chair indicated that ATF meetings will typically be scheduled to run for about two (2) hours and will be held in the evening.

Mr. Cross asked Chris Waszczuk, NHDOT Project Manager, to add any additional thoughts on the role and responsibilities of the ATF. Chris Waszczuk stressed that the ATF is an important means for public feedback during the planning of the project. He mentioned that in the future, a bullet item for ATF committee feedback/questions/comments will be added to the agenda to solicit input and encourage discussion on type of feedback and comments the ATF has received from the community. Mr. Waszczuk explained that he understood many in attendance would like to know details of the final plan now, but he stressed that the project is still in its very early stages. Data is being gathered and a preliminary study of the area undertaken to support the development of any alternatives.

The Task Force then took up review of their April 30th meeting minutes which had been previously circulated. Tom Fargo moved to adopt the minutes. The motion was seconded and passed on a unanimous vote.

Mr. Cross then solicited questions and comments from the ATF Committee Members. Hearing none, the Chair then turned the meeting to the next agenda item.

PROJECT UPDATE

Environmental

Peter Walker provided an update on the status of environmental studies. He explained that the EIS is currently in its first phase, which involves collecting all published information on environmental resources as well as conducting numerous field investigations. This information will be developed into an analysis of existing conditions in the project area this fall, and will form the basis for impact assessments in a later phase of the EIS.

During this data collection phase, VHB and NHDOT have contacted all of the local, state and federal resource agencies and community organizations that might have an interest in the project. Mr. Walker reported that approximately 90% of the published information regarding resources in the corridor had been obtained and reviewed.

On-going field studies include mapping of wetlands, wildlife habitat, and farmlands in the corridor. Additionally, VHB is working with the University of New Hampshire to develop mapping of the inter-tidal and sub-tidal areas in the vicinity of the Little Bay and General Sullivan Bridges. Mr. Walker briefly reviewed a map depicting habitat resources in the inter-tidal zone. Mr. Walker reported that an early finding of the sub-tidal mapping indicates that the habitat in the vicinity of the bridges is more characteristic of offshore areas than estuarine habitat.

Other resources being investigated include threatened and endangered species. Mr. Walker reported that the State of New Hampshire has mapped three (3) state listed rare plant species including Bulbous Bittercress, Prolific Knotweed, and Small Spikerush as well as one population of a state listed bird species, Henlow's Sparrow. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has indicated that Bald Eagle and New England Cottontail Rabbit may occur in the project study area. Additionally, the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory has mapped two (2) exemplary natural communities on the Pease Tradeport property.

The data collection phase includes looking for areas of potential contamination that might be affected by the project. VHB has consulted with the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services and the EPA regarding contamination at the former Pease Air Force Base. Mr. Walker also briefly reviewed a map of the aquifers in the vicinity including a relatively high

yield area on Dover Point and the wellhead protection zone on the northwest portion of the study area. Other on-going investigations include inventories of the historic architectural resources and the historic and prehistoric archeological resources in the project area.

Mr. Walker then turned the meeting over to Frank O'Callaghan, VHB Project Manager, for an update on the traffic and engineering aspects of the project.

Traffic

Mr. O'Callaghan reported that the Department of Transportation and the Regional Planning Commissions are currently conducting additional traffic counts. Since June, approximately 46 different data collections have occurred in the study area in order to provide current conditions for the traffic model.

Additionally, the project has conducted a stated preference survey, which will be used to update the travel demand model. Approximately 58,000 flyers were distributed in the project area including the Hampton tollbooths, the Dover tollbooths, and the Rochester tollbooths with the intent to receive 1000 responses. Information on the survey was also available at the City Halls in the project areas and at other locations. Approximately 1,444 responses were received. Data from the survey is currently being reduced with the results expected to be posted on the web by August 15th.

Mr. O'Callaghan reviewed some of the preliminary findings of the survey:

- 3 out of 4 of the respondents were residents of the area
- 75% of the trips started at home
- 60% of the trips ended at a work place
- 13% of the trips were work related
- 4% were for shopping
- 7% were recreational
- 78% of the respondents drove alone
- 2% of the trips were by bus
- 0.5% of the trips were on bicycle
- 0.2% were pedestrian trips

Scoping Meeting Feedback

Mr. O'Callaghan reviewed feedback received from the public and resource agencies at the June 25th Scoping Meeting. Mr. O'Callaghan explained that minutes from the Scoping Meeting are currently posted on the project website.

The following issues were raised during the Scoping Meeting:

1. One participant asked why only the Dover portion of the Scammel Bridge and Bellamy River was included in the study area. The commenter inquired as to why the Durham portion of that area is excluded. Mr. O'Callaghan explained that no work is expected to occur on the Scammel Bridge or the Durham side of the bridge. This area is remote from the area where work is expected to occur under this project.
2. Others asked why the tollbooths and the area north of the tollbooths are not included in the study area. Mr. O'Callaghan explained that a long-range study of the Route 16 Corridor showed that the section of the Spaulding Turnpike north of the tollbooth would remain at a satisfactory level of service even 20 years into the future. This is in contrast to the conditions in the current study area. Mr. O'Callaghan also indicated that the

tollbooth issue is of statewide importance and indicated that further discussion on that subject would occur later in the ATF meeting.

3. Another comment relating to the study area recommended that Woodbury Ave. from Gosling Road to Market Street Extension be included in the current study. Mr. O'Callaghan indicated that the portion of Woodbury Ave. between the Turnpike and Gosling Road is included and that if the traffic analysis indicated a need that further areas of Woodbury Ave. may be included.
4. A representative of the Office of State Planning pointed out that the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department has plans to reconfigure the existing boat ramp at Hilton Park, and encouraged DOT to coordinate with Fish and Game. Mr. O'Callaghan indicated that the project team had met with the Fish and Game Department to review this issue.
5. Many residents inquired about the property impacts associated with the project. Mr. O'Callaghan indicated that the project has not progressed enough to make an accurate assessment of what property impacts might occur. He pointed out that the February 2000 Feasibility Study was very preliminary in nature and that the current study would reevaluate all prudent alternatives in much greater detail.
6. Another common issue regarded notification of project meetings. Mr. O'Callaghan reviewed the process for subscribing to an e-mail notification list. Alternatively, interested parties can leave their name with the ATF at current or future meetings. Mr. O'Callaghan explained that notice of future meetings would be issued 10 days prior to the meeting. He commented that the website seems to be a useful means for providing information about the project. The site has had over 2,600 visits by more than 2,000 different individuals since it was posted at the end of April 2003. The most frequently visited areas of the website include the photos and maps area as well as the summary of project highlights.
7. In response to comments at the April ATF meeting as well as at the Scoping Meeting, Mr. O'Callaghan pointed out the socio-economic study area had been extended to include the four (4) Strafford County communities of New Durham, Brookfield, Middleton, and Wakefield.
8. Other issues discussed included concerns regarding noise from the highway, which will be assessed in the Environmental Impact Statement.
9. The Army Corps of Engineers commented that project mitigation for wetlands impacts could include the removal of historic fill areas in the Little Bay Piscataqua River area.

Conceptual Alternatives

Mr. O'Callaghan reviewed the potential range of alternatives that will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement including:

- No Build
- Transportation System Management improvements
- Transportation Demand Management measures
- Upgrade of the corridor
- Combination of the above

With regard to upgrading of the Little Bay Bridges, Mr. O'Callaghan reviewed five (5) conceptual cross sections of potential reconfigurations:

- Widening the existing Little Bay Bridges on both sides of the bridge
- Widening on the east side of the bridge
- Widening on the west side of the bridge
- Constructing an entirely new bridge
- Constructing an entirely new bridge with a multi use path

Mr. O'Callaghan indicated that alternatives that involve widening the existing bridges would need to consider the seismic condition of the study area. He pointed out that the original bridges were not designed to current seismic standards. Also, visibility over the crest on the bridge is limited and will be a consideration with the bridge alternatives.

Mr. O'Callaghan updated the ATF on the status of the regional travel demand model. Work on this model is ongoing at the Regional Planning Commissions and through VHB's subconsultant RSG. Mr. O'Callaghan expects that a calibrated model will be available during the first week of September and that the results of the model will be presented to the ATF at the next meeting scheduled for October 29th.

The meeting was then opened to questions from the ATF on the project update.

ATF DISCUSSION ON PROJECT UPDATE

Marlon Frink inquired as to whether standard lane and shoulder widths are required for federal funding of the project. Bill O'Donnell indicated that the FHWA prefers standard lane configurations but there is a process for approval of lesser configurations. Marlon Frink suggested that the study consider the feasibility of constructing directional lanes to provide 4 lanes to handle the am/pm peak volumes of traffic and 2 lanes for the opposing traffic with the center two lanes reversible. This could potentially minimize the overall impacts and speed construction. He noted that the predominant traffic in the morning is southbound, whereas traffic is predominately northbound in the afternoon. He noted bridges in the New York/New Jersey area where the direction of travel in certain lanes changes depending on traffic conditions. Mr. Frink also suggested that the study address the reuse of the General Sullivan Bridge. After some discussion, Chris Waszczuk and Frank O'Callaghan indicated that both ideas would be considered during the alternatives analysis.

Tom Fargo explained that he has heard some discussion of bridge alternatives, but would like to know when decisions regarding the bridges (such as determination of bridge type) would be made, including the fate of the General Sullivan Bridge. He expressed some concern that decisions would be made behind closed doors. He stated that there are issues with the profile, navigation, and seismic vulnerability, which need to be considered. Chris Waszczuk replied that no decisions regarding the project would be made behind closed doors. He explained the Department has formed the Advisory Task Force explicitly to ensure public involvement in the decision making process. Over the next year, the project will be developing an alternatives analysis that would eventually lead to a preferred alternative. Public Informational meetings and Advisory Task Force meetings will be held at different stages of the project's development to discuss various issues and build consensus and community support. Chris Cross, ATF Chair, reiterated that the project is still in an early phase and that the intent is to have enough time to do a thorough analysis and adequate studies. He noted that if there is enough demand from the public that the project may develop solutions quicker.

Jack Newick commented that he believed that anything less than four (4) lanes in both north and south directions would be a disaster to the seacoast area. He stated that he could not support "a Band-Aid" solution. Chris Waszczuk replied that the project has \$100 million programmed for construction and that it is the Department's intent to find a solution that will handle the projected traffic, 20 to 25 years into the future.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT

The discussion then turned to the project Purpose and Need Statement.

Mr. Cross stated that the Purpose and Need Statement has been posted on the web for the past several months. He gave some background on the Purpose and Need Statement indicating that it forms the basis for the evaluation of alternatives and later phases. He then opened the discussion to the ATF Committee. Chris Waszczuk indicated that he had received some comments from ATF and had made several changes accordingly. He suggested that the ATF review the changes made from the original April 25th draft and requested that the ATF adopt the Purpose and Need Statement as amended. He noted that resource agencies would still have an opportunity to comment and possibly make changes to the final Purpose and Need Statement.

Mr. Waszczuk explained that the Purpose and Need would be presented in the Environmental Impact Statement. Any alternative that does not meet the Purpose and Need would not be carried forward for impact analysis.

The ATF reviewed the substantive changes made to the April 25th draft Purpose and Need statement as follows:

1. The project purpose was amended to refer to transportation system management improvement as an option.
2. The term "enhancing" replaced the term "reactivating" in reference to rail service. In response to a question from Tom Fargo, Mr. Waszczuk explained that there is a commuter rail line in the vicinity. Service on the Portland to Boston Rail Corridor could potentially be enhanced should studies show a benefit towards reducing traffic on the Turnpike, but the basic purpose of the project is not directly related to rail service. There was also a discussion of the existing rail lines within the study area. Chris Waszczuk said that those rail corridors would likely be preserved but not necessarily reactivated.
3. Reference to the Spaulding Turnpike as a major artery for freight was added to the project need.
4. A Paragraph referencing the inefficient and circuitous use of the turnpike between residential and commercial/industrial areas was added.
5. A reference to the seismic performance of the Little Bay Bridges was added to the project need.

Following Mr. Waszczuk's summary, the ATF discussed the Purpose and Need Statement.

Tom Fargo commented that a constituent of his had suggested that the Purpose and Need Statement include a reference to the bridges as a gateway. The task force discussed a proposed change to the project purpose that would incorporate this idea. After some discussion the ATF agreed that the appropriate place for this change would be in the first sentence of the project need as follows:

"The Spaulding Turnpike is eastern New Hampshire's major limited access north-south highway, servicing as a gateway linking the Seacoast Region with Concord, the eastern portion of the Lakes Region, and the White Mountain."

Steve Stancel suggested that the Purpose and Need Statement be amended to reflect that the project has to minimize environmental, recreational and neighborhood impacts. Chris Waszczuk commented that he had never seen such a reference in a project Purpose and Need statement, presumably because that concept is so much a part of the environmental impact statement. Tom Fargo agreed with Mr. Stancel's comments and requested that the Purpose and Need statement be amended to incorporate the idea that the project will minimize impact to residential areas. The ATF considered tabling adoption of the Purpose and Need Statement in order to allow time to consider the issue. Jack Newick encouraged the ATF to resolve the Purpose and Need issue at the current meeting. He agreed with the idea of adding reference to minimizing property impacts to the project purpose.

Bill O'Donnell suggested the following revision to the project purpose statement, which the ATF eventually adopted:

"The purpose of this project is to improve transportation efficiency and reduce safety problems, while minimizing social, economic, and environmental impacts, for an approximate 3.5-mile section of the Spaulding Turnpike extending north from the Gosling Road / Pease Boulevard Interchange (Exit 1) in the Town of Newington, across the Little Bay Bridges, to a point just south of the existing toll facility in the City of Dover."

With the two changes made, the ATF voted to adopt the Purpose and Need Statement.

TOLL STUDY

Mike O'Malley of New Hampshire DOT's Bureau of Turnpikes briefed the ATF on issues relating to the Dover tolls. Mike explained that in February 2000, the Governor and Council had approved a study of the entire toll system in New Hampshire. The study looked at four main elements including:

- The Merrimack Tolls
- The Circumferential Highway in Nashua and Hudson
- Congestion at the Hampton Tolls
- Elimination of all statewide tolls over a period of 20 years.

Mr. O'Malley explained that tollbooths in New Hampshire raise \$64 million per year in revenue. \$30 million pays for operation of the highways including maintenance, salt, and equipment. At the Dover tolls, the Turnpike Bureau processes approximately 13 million transactions per year and takes in \$4.7 million in revenue.

Mr. O'Malley explained that improvements to the Dover tolls had recently been made, in part to prepare for a planned electronic toll system known as "E-Z Pass." The tollbooths in Dover can currently process between 450 and 600 cars per hour per lane. With the E-Z Pass system the tolls will be able to process as many as 1,200 cars per hour per lane. Mr. O'Malley reported that the Department of Transportation expects to have E-Z Pass at the Dover tollbooth to be in place by the end of 2004. There are no further improvements planned at the toll facility in the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Plan. Mr. O'Malley also pointed out that no matter what happens to the tolls it will not solve the problems with the Little Bay Bridges. It is the Department's opinion that the Dover toll is adequate and will be adequate for the next 20 years.

The discussion was then opened to questions and comments from the ATF. Tom Fargo commented that he believes the main concern with regard to the tollbooths is the amount of noise generated in that area. Chris Waszczuk explained that as part of the environmental impact statement for the Newington to Dover project noise associated with the highway would be studied and that mitigation in the vicinity of the tolls would occur if warranted.

Marlon Frink expressed the concern that if the bridges and highway are improved then congestion in the corridor will move to the tollbooth. He asked why the tollbooth could not be moved north to the vicinity near an existing cemetery. Chris Waszczuk explained that capacity, safety, and noise concerns leading up to the tollbooths will be studied. Should capacity and safety issues be identified, a project may "spin-off" of the current project. He indicated that a proposal to move the tollbooths and the impact associated with moving the tollbooths would need to be further studied outside the scope of the current project.

Mike O'Malley suggested that moving the tollbooths to the cemetery area may be feasible but with the new expanded 8 lane tollbooths and the E-Z Pass system he believes congestion will not be a problem. Therefore, he does not anticipate a reason to move the tollbooths.

A member of the public suggested that the Dover toll be eliminated and that the 50-cent toll be added at the Rochester tollbooth. Mike O'Malley replied that directive would need to come from either the Governor and Council or through special legislation. Such a project would also need to be added to the Department's 10-year plan.

Kevin Smith, a Dover resident, asked if the tollbooths would need to be further widened in order to accommodate E-Z Pass. He also asked if the E-Z Pass system would work with motorcycles. Mike O'Malley replied that no further widening of the tollbooths would be necessary and that the system would work with motorcycles.

Roy Josselyn, a Dover resident, inquired about toll elimination costs. Mr. O'Malley replied that the toll elimination cost involves the fact that the Dover tolls raised \$4.7 million dollars per year that would be lost if they were eliminated. Additionally, there would be construction costs associated with the removal of the Dover tolls. The lost revenue would need to be replaced, presumably through the bonding of money for the highway system.

Chris Waszczuk stressed that tolls are a statewide legislative issue and need to be studied on a statewide basis in order to be fair. Other locales have expressed similar desires to eliminate or move toll plazas. Mr. Waszczuk reminded the audience that the core need for the project is to improve transportation efficiency and safety in vicinity of the Little Bay Bridges. He indicated that inclusion of the Dover tolls issue in the EIS would lead to delay of the project, which would not be good for Dover and Newington.

Marlon Frink commented that members of the public that are concerned about the tollbooths should contact their state representatives and the Governor and Council. Chris Cross, Chair of the ATF, suggested that the toll issues could be raised through the Regional Planning Commission.

Kevin Smith, Dover resident, commented that the Environmental Impact Statement should account for the pollution that is a result of the tolls.

In closing the discussion on tolls, Chris Cross acknowledged that the tolls will remain in place and that the EIS study should move forward acknowledging the constraint posed by the tolls.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS (GENERAL PUBLIC)

At 9:00 p.m. Chris Cross, ATF Chair, opened the meeting to other general comments from the public.

Alice Briggs, a resident of Cote Drive in Dover, expressed concern about Pomeroy Cove on the east side of Dover Point. She stated that as a long time resident she has seen the influence of freshwater and sediment on the cove. She pointed out that the cove is important ecologically as well as historically stating that in the past Pomeroy Cove was the landing site for ships. Peter Walker replied that Pomeroy Cove has already been acknowledged as a significant constraint to the project. The consulting team is mapping habitat in the cove. He stated that stormwater quality in the vicinity will undoubtedly become an important issue as the project moves forward and that a good engineering solution to this issue would be sought.

NEXT ATF MEETING

Mr. Cross announced that the next meeting of the ATF would be on October 29th at 6:30 p.m. at the Newington Town Hall. He suggested that any member of the public could contact him to request that an item be added to the meeting agenda. Chris Waszczuk suggested that the bulk of the next meeting agenda would be a summary of the Scoping Report and data collection phases.

At approximately 9:10 p.m. the meeting adjourned.