

Aquidneck Island Transportation Study Public Participation Work Plan

July 6, 2009

OVERVIEW

The Public Participation Work Plan provides a framework for undertaking a comprehensive outreach process for the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study. It includes an identification of project goals, objectives, and key issues and opportunities that will need to be vetted with the public and Technical Steering Committee (TSC). In addition, the Work Plan establishes a process that will help achieve project consensus and facilitate community visioning through the use of various outreach tools and techniques that will be utilized during the public workshops and Technical Steering Committee meetings.

The outreach tools and techniques identified in the Work Plan will be used to vet the project purpose and need, determine community characteristics, gain consensus on future forecasting results, and evaluate implementation alternatives. VHB will work closely with the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission (AIPC) Project Manager to plan these public meetings and events.

BACKGROUND

The AIPC has long been aware that the transportation system has a great impact on life on Aquidneck Island. The Island serves as a major travel corridor for local island traffic and regional through traffic between southern Massachusetts, southern Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York.

In 2003, the Rhode Island Office of Statewide Planning identified the Aquidneck Island Travel Corridor as a major travel corridor of statewide significance and established long-range goals for the Corridor to the year 2020 including:

- protecting the open space and scenic vistas of ocean and agricultural lands by confining mixed-use development to designated growth centers; and
- providing transportation alternatives and linkages including expanded ferry service, increased bus schedules, improved bicycle and pedestrian circulation, and park-n-rides that provide safe linkages to various modes of travel.

In 2005, the AIPC completed The West Side Master Plan with the participation and overwhelming support from the Rhode Island Congressional Delegation, the Governor of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island General Assembly, state and local officials, and the public at large. Recommendations of the West Side Master Plan include implementation strategies for reducing congestion on West Main Road, setting aside land for public access to Narragansett Bay, supporting marine-related business and development, creating safe bicycle paths and walking trails, developing an alternate travel route, and many additional planning ideas and tools.

In 2008, the Newport Naval Station Master Plan identified up to 349 acres of Navy land that will be declared surplus property, including prime waterfront real estate comprised of tank farms and former

Naval Hospital and Navy Lodge properties. In June 2009, Naval Station Newport reduced the available land to 224 acres in order to pursue possible wind and solar energy generation on Navy owned Tank Farms 3 and 4. Even with the reduction in acreage, there still remains a significant opportunity to advance West Side Master Plan recommendations.

CORRIDOR ISSUES

The roadway network on Aquidneck Island is largely defined by its long and narrow island geography, the three bridges that connect the Island to the region, and the north-south traffic flows that connect the bridges and Island communities by way of Routes 114, 138, 138A, 214 as well as the Coddington and JT Connell Highways and Navy-owned Burma Road/Defense Highway. The underutilized Newport Secondary rail corridor follows the west side of the island.

Traffic volumes on the Aquidneck Island bridges and roadways have increased significantly over the past 40 years. This traffic increase is attributable to many factors, including more households spread among different destinations on the Island, changing commuting patterns, and increased tourism. Safety concerns have also been elevated after the occurrence of several pedestrian fatalities along the Islands' roadways caused in part by increasing difficulty in safely crossing the major streets.

Key issues include:

- establishing a connection to Defense Highway (Burma Road) to relieve congestion on West Main Road and provide an additional north-south corridor;
- safe and efficient accommodation of traffic flow while maintaining the character of the roadway's environment and ensuring multimodal mobility across all modes of transportation (bus, rail, bicycle, pedestrian, and auto);
- analyzing new and/or expanded pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists, including safety considerations;
- support rail service enhancements to and from the island;
- access management;
- accommodation for left-turns;
- improving RIPTA bus operations and efficiency;
- improving the lacking east-west connections throughout the Island;
- supporting economic development; and
- consideration of seasonal and special events that occur on the Island.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WORK PLAN GOALS

The Public Participation Work Plan for the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study will be guided by goals that will help shape the analysis including the creation and evaluation of alternatives and

recommendations that will follow from the preferred corridor plan. The public participation work plan goals include:

- Seek and sustain widespread involvement of residents, business owners, employees, local groups and public officials throughout the two year process; educate, engage, and empower these groups during the study
- Design a process that maximizes inclusiveness where stakeholders have ample opportunity to express their views.
- Build consensus through an open, transparent, and collaborative process where public and Technical Steering Committee input is sought at every appropriate opportunity.
- Start with a big picture perspective and gradually build toward precision (i.e. projects/initiatives). The public process should not be consumed with details without having the benefit of understanding the big picture issues on the Island as a whole.
- Use technology to help navigate and streamline the outreach process.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Outreach efforts will be focused on four target areas or groups. They include: 1) the Technical Steering Committee, 2) Public Workshops, 3) Stakeholder Interviews, and 4) General Public Engagement. The consultant team will conduct outreach efforts with these four groups throughout the course of the study process. A summary of the goals, outreach tools and deliverables follows.

1) Technical Steering Committee Meetings (TSC) - (Schedule: Bi-Monthly)

The purpose of the Technical Steering Committee is to vet and validate goals, objectives and assumptions and review and react to consultant work as it progresses. In addition, the TSC meetings will be used to develop a list of criteria and / or performance goals to evaluate alternatives. During these meetings VHB will work with the TSC to establish goal-based screening criteria and gather data to support the screening assessment. The project schedule includes 12 TSC meetings that will be held on a bi-monthly basis. The TSC will include broad stakeholder representation including:

- AIPC
- Planners from each Aquidneck Island community
- RIDOT
- Statewide Planning office
- RIPTA
- RIDEM
- RI Turnpike and Bridge Authority
- Navy
- Newport County Chamber of Commerce

- Newport County Convention and Visitor's Bureau
- FHWA

Staffing:

Two to three members of the VHB Team will participate in each of the TSC meetings, depending on the topic for discussion. It is assumed that two members of the VHB Team will be present at all twelve of the TCS meetings and that up to three VHB Team Members will be present at six of the TSC meetings.

Outreach Tools and Deliverables:

- Meeting agendas
- PowerPoint presentations
- Team worksite
- Informational boards & maps
- Meeting notes

2) Public Workshops (Four) - (Schedule: See below)

Four highly publicized workshops will take place at key stages during the study process. Each workshop will be organized around a theme. VHB will work closely with the AIPC Project Manager and the TSC to develop an agenda for these interactive meetings. It is anticipated that each meeting will start with a brief presentation by the client and members of the consultant team followed by "break-out" discussion groups, or "topic tables" where participants can circulate from table-to-table to learn more about various aspects of the project. For these meetings, VHB will prepare announcement flyers to be circulated in advance of each workshop via mail, based on a mailing list that will be developed in conjunction with the AIPC Project Manager. Live/work boards will be prepared for participants to place push pins to identify the places where they live/work. The themes for the public workshops will follow the progression of the planning study and will be focus on the following:

- "Discovery" (Fall 2009) – meet and greet format; purpose is to present the study framework (scope, goals, objectives, schedule), listen, inform, educate, and identify issues, challenges, and priorities to be integrated into the planning process.
- "Alternatives" – (Spring 2010) – review and discuss possible alternative solutions/concepts
- "Refinement" – (Fall 2010) – evaluate and screen options; identify preferred solutions
- "Recommendations/Implementation" – (Spring 2011) – review/discuss study recommendations

Staffing:

Four to five members of the VHB Team will participate in each of the four Public Workshops. It is assumed that the workshops will take place during a weekday evening or during the day on a weekend and that each workshop will last approximately four hours.

Outreach Tools and Deliverables:

- Meeting announcements/flyers
- PowerPoint presentations

- Live/Work Sign-in Maps
- Project Logo/Buttons
- Break-out stations
- Interactive audience participation/electronic voting

3) Stakeholder Interviews - (*Schedule: During the initial phase*)

In addition to the Technical Advisory Committee and Public Workshops, the consultant team will also conduct interviews with key stakeholders in an effort to gather additional insight and input into the study. Key stakeholders envisioned to be interviewed as part of the study include (specific names to be identified):

- Municipal planners/engineers
- Municipal police chiefs or traffic/safety officers
- State police
- Old Colony Railroad
- Newport Dinner Train
- Sierra Club
- Grow Smart RI
- AARP
- Elected officials
- Elderly and ADA advocacy groups
- Bicycle advocacy groups (i.e. Narragansett Bay Wheelmen and Bike Shop Owners)
- Ferry operators
- Major employers
- Motorcoach Industry

Outreach Tools and Deliverables:

- Meeting agendas
- PowerPoint presentations
- Informational boards & maps
- Meeting notes

4) General Public Engagement - (*Schedule: On-going during the course of the study*)

During the course of the study, numerous outreach efforts will be targeted for the general public. Through the use of the project web-site, media releases, online surveys, and E-newsletters, the public

will be kept informed about the status of the project as it advances from “big picture” issues to more specific project recommendations and initiatives. The first step in the general public engagement will be to hold a public launch and press release to celebrate the initiation of the study. General public engagement efforts will include:

Outreach Tools and Deliverables:

- *Public launch/press conference (summer 2009)*

This event will be held during the summer of 2009 at a central location within the study area. Local and State officials will be invited to attend this event, as will the press. For the launch, VHB will prepare a series of presentation boards that illustrate the existing conditions for various sections of the corridor.

- Project Website

To ensure a clear, open, and transparent process, a study website will be established for public access. In addition to providing general information about the study, updates, and notices for upcoming meetings, the website will serve as a one-stop central repository for meeting notes, agendas, announcements, study reports, and online opinion surveys. Links to the study webpage will be provided on the AIPC webpage and on each municipality’s webpage. Every agenda, press release, email, or announcement that is sent to the public will contain the website URL (<http://www.vhb.com/aquidneck>).

- Media releases

At key stages in the process, VHB will prepare materials in support of media press releases for the AIPC Project Manager to issue to the local press. It is anticipated that these press releases will correspond to project milestones such as the formation of the study framework, development of the alternatives, screening of the alternatives, and the final study recommendations. Press release will also be prepared for the four public workshops.

- On-line community opinion surveys

The project web-site will include a community survey that will solicit feedback on a range of topics including travel patterns, areas of the transportation system that work well or that need improvement, and ideas for solutions.

- E-Newsletters

Email communication to the public will be employed as a supplemental outreach method. Distribution lists will be developed from the Technical Steering Committee, public workshops, the study webpage, and stakeholder outreach. VHB envisions working with the AIPC to develop a format similar to an E-newsletter with a project logo/banner at the top and links provided to the study website.