



TOWN OF HINGHAM  
South Hingham Study Group  
210 CENTRAL STREET  
HINGHAM, MA 02043

Meeting Minutes: 2/2/16

Members Present: Judith Sneath-Chair, Paul Healey, Dick Cook, Jerry Seelen, and Sue Sullivan

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. and provided an overview of the agenda.

2. South Hingham Transportation Master Plan:

a. Final Presentation by Vanasse & Associates, Inc.

b. Group Discussion

Jeff Dirk, Principal with Vanasse & Associates, Inc., introduced himself and the project, which involves an assessment of the existing transportation infrastructure in the area, as well as consideration of potential improvements necessary to mitigate impacts and support conceptual future development scenarios identified by the Group. He said that he has met with the group twice previously and the final report will include the input received at these meetings.

He reviewed the study geography, including jurisdiction of the roadways in the area. He reviewed other available transportation infrastructure such as bicycle and pedestrian improvements. He noted that the Town should plan for future extension of public transportation to South Hingham, which is likely to include bus route extensions.

Mr. Dirk then reviewed crash data along the corridor (158 crashes in last 3 years). The majority of these crashes occurred at intersections. Two locations experienced crash rates above the state average (Gardner Street and Rt. 3 southbound ramp). The state will be making improvements in both areas in the near future.

He reviewed the five development areas identified by the Study Group and the four different development scenarios identified by the Group. He indicated that VAI then reviewed the traffic volumes associated with each conceptual development scenario and explored trip distribution for both commercial and residential uses. More local-related traffic results from commercial development, whereas the residential uses lead more to commuter traffic (highway trips to large employment areas).

Judy Kelly, 19 Harvest Lane, asked about the information displayed. Mr. Dirk clarified that the identified distribution numbers represented the percent of new traffic generation, not a percentage increase over present conditions. A member noted that the traffic volumes could be very different based on the different scenarios.

Mr. Dirk then reviewed level of service (LOS), which reports operating conditions similar to a report card (A - F). LOS E means that the intersection is operating at its capacity. LOS F is a failing condition where delay times would be greater than a minute. The limit of acceptable conditions (35-45 seconds) is LOS D. He then reviewed LOS during morning, evening, and Saturday peak hours under existing conditions. There are presently failing conditions at the ramps and other unsignalized intersections.

Scenario 1 includes contemplated improvements at the intersection of Derby/Whiting/Gardner Streets. He reviewed the Derby Street corridor reconstruction project and programmed improvements. As a result, LOS improvements will occur (all LO D or better), creating capacity in the corridor. Only minor signal adjustments would be required to accommodate buildout.

Scenario 2 represents 1.5 M SF of additional development. Mr. Dirk confirmed that there appears to be sufficient capacity following planned improvements with the exception of Gardner Street intersection, though signal retiming would improve intersection performance. The SE bound lane on Rt. 53 would need to become a through right turn, requiring widening. Access to Buildout Area 2 would require improvements at Old Derby Street (EB two left turn lanes needed) and installing traffic signal. These improvements would make the overall corridor function.

Scenario 3 represents 2,450,000 SF of additional development. Mr. Dirk suggested that this level of development would result in profound impacts, particularly during weekday evening and Saturday midday peak hours. Significant improvements would be required, including roadway widening to accommodate exclusive turning lanes and/or through lanes at intersections on Derby Street at both Pond Park and Old Derby Street, as well as the intersection of Cushing and Whiting Streets.

Scenario 4 (3.58M SF) represents a potential increase in traffic volumes totaling 80,000 vehicle trips per weekday or 70,000 trips on a typical Saturday. There would be failures at Pond Park, Cushing, and Gardner. More demanding infrastructure improvements required, including new SB on-ramp to Rt. 3. The Derby Street bridge would also require widening or replacement.

A member asked about a second ingress/egress through South Shore Park, which has been discussed but was not represented in the report. Mr. Dirk said that that would result in improvements for traffic heading south, but otherwise would not affect the other necessary improvements.

Another member expressed concern about the number of driveways to office buildings and other developments. Mr. Dirk said that the coordination of the signal systems will provide gaps for driveways because there are thankfully fewer intermediary driveways along the corridor. Adaptive signal control could also help respond to particular demands, so that if a business suddenly released workers at 4pm, then the signal would recognize the issue and adjust.

The member then expressed concern about cut-through traffic in residential areas. Mr. Dirk said improvements could be made in a way to discourage this condition. Travel speeds and informed enforcement might reduce the cut-through traffic as well.

A member asked who typically funds these types of improvements. Mr. Dirk said there are different approaches. The state could take these projects on wholesale, or in coordination with the municipality. Alternately, private property owners could advance the projects. There are also state funding programs, like MassWorks or I-Cubed, that may help because the development would generate economic development. A member noted that Westwood received a grant for similar improvement.

A member asked about the signal spacing. Mr. Dirk said you could install a signal at Old Derby Street without impacting the ramps. He noted too that there may not be sufficient right-of-way available to support recommended improvements.

Public comment:

Judy Kelly, 19 Harvest Lane, asked about realigning driveways with signals to improve conditions. Mr. Dirk reviewed a conceptual realigning of the service road with Cushing Street, which would help. The Town should consider a fourth leg to the traffic to the Derby Street Shoppes light because it is close to capacity. She then asked about strategy. Mr. Dirk said that mitigation funds are helpful when the individual developments warrant improvements. The escrowed funds (horizon year, condition of project approval), based on percent impact, can later be used by the town as a match to state funds. Members briefly discussed the utility of the SHDOD Infrastructure Fund.

Gary Tondorf-Dick, 1029 Main St., asked Mr. Dirk to address the quality of the development as opposed to the quantity. Mr. Dirk confirmed that office and retail have more pronounced impacts on traffic. You see this with Derby Street Shoppes, which generates greater evening and weekend volumes. He cautioned the town to minimize overlapping or competing with this use. Mr. Tondorf-Dick also asked about the feasibility of scenarios 3 and 4. Mr. Dirk said that Scenario 3 is difficult, but Scenario 4 is extremely difficult.

A member reminded the audience that the group is not advocating for any particular development scenarios. The levels are not unreasonable and could be permitted under present zoning.

Clark Frasier asked about impacts of intersections outside of the study area, and specifically whether a light at Cushing and Main would help. Some believed that a light in this location would encourage cut-through traffic.

Mary Thomas, 9 Peter Hobart Drive, asked about office vacancy rates. Mr. Dirk said that the group have adjusted the office and medical office down to a value more reasonably likely to be absorbed in this market. Ms. Thomas then asked about impacts on Rt. 53, which serves as an ambulance route to South Shore hospital. Mr. Dirk said that the signals can sense emergency vehicles and allow through movements. The lights at the Rt. 3 ramps will improve access to South Shore Hospital as well.

Ed Demko asked why the Group is spending so much time on traffic when there are issues related to sewer and water in the area. The Chair reviewed the groups work on these topics, but said that the group focused first on traffic since the impacts are most visible to the public.

Buzz Constable, AW Perry, responded to a resident question regarding office vacancy. He indicated that the Park experiences a vacancy rate of about 8-12%, which is greater than property owners may desire, but not comparatively high. The Chair asked Buzz Constable what impact public transit (buses) might have on the area. He doesn't believe that bus service would draw businesses, but some existing workers may use it (Blue Cross, 3M).

Jim Bristol thanked Mr. Dirk for the presentation. He doesn't think that we'll ever see 3M SF of development in South Hingham, but it is important to know that it is achievable. He thinks infrastructure improvements will take a partnership. Bristol is prepared to contribute to the plan.

The Chair asked about impacts on the broader region, Rockland and Weymouth. Mr. Dirk said that the Town could elect to inform adjacent communities of plans, but the state filings also generate notice to these towns.

Mr. Dirk returned to the presentation. He reviewed expected impacts on residential feeder roads, which have a disproportionate level of traffic to residential homes. Cushing and Gardner were analyzed. Cushing Street has sufficient width, alignment, and a sidewalk on one side. Gardner Street has different characteristics, with horizontal and vertical curves creating poor sight lines. There are no sidewalks. There are greater delays for Gardner Street approaches to intersection with 53. He then reviewed the following volume impacts based on each conceptual development scenario:

Cushing Buildout Impacts

- 1 6% (may not be noticeable)
- 2 16%
- 3 21% (pronounced)
- 4 33% (really pronounced)

Gardner Street (upper 53 to Main)

- 1 5%
- 2 34%
- 3 27%
- 4 33%

Gardner Street (lower 53 to Hingham St)

- 1 13%
- 2 37%
- 3 51%
- 4 79% (not sustainable)

Finally, Mr. Dirk reviewed traffic management strategies, including traffic calming, peak period turn restrictions, heavy commercial truck restrictions, education and enforcement. Roadway widening is not recommended since it may in fact encourage cut through traffic. It would also affect the character of the roadways, loss of trees, that the town may not desire.

Public Comment:

Mr. Tondorf-Dick expressed concern about impact on quality of life for residents of Gardner, including noise from traffic.

Steve Diersch, 304 Gardner Street, asked about new roadways through the South Shore Park and the Bristol property. Mr. Dirk said it would provide significant benefit and should be considered in conjunction with larger projects.

Edna English, 36 Gardner Street, thanked Mr. Dirk for the presentation. She expressed concern about greater levels of traffic on the neighborhood. She asked about lights on Main Street. Jeff said that the neighborhood might do a design charette to review the menu of options.

Clark Frasier said that impacts on nearby intersections may be higher, bringing these to LOS E. He believes the Town could make traffic disappear, but that involves a greater study.

Judy Kelly asked AW Perry and Bristol to really consider the impacts of their future development and limit development plans to Scenarios 1 or 2.

Eileen Richards lives at corner of Plymouth River and Cushing. She thinks there is a problem now with traffic never mind after more development takes place.

Documents discussed during the course of the meeting include:

Draft South Hingham Transportation Assessment, dated December 2015, available at:  
<http://www.hingham-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3317>

VAI Presentation, dated February 2, 2016, available at:  
<http://www.hingham-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3416>

3. Approval of minutes

Paul Healey motion to approve minutes, Sue seconded, all in favor.

4. Upcoming meeting schedule

The Chair reviewed a meeting at Linden Ponds held the prior evening. She had reviewed all the work that the group had completed to date for the audience of approximately 100 people. She reviewed several questions posed by residents of the development. There was particular interest in sidewalks and roadway improvements.

The Group then discussed the upcoming schedule, tentatively agreeing to meet on Tuesday, March 8, 2016. Aquarion had offered to attend a future meeting and the Group also wanted to discuss the overall vision for the area.

The Chair finally noted that several letters had been in paper about the South Hingham Study Group.

5. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:31 p.m.