

Route 117 Study Committee
Minutes of the Meeting of November 3, 2015

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| Committee Members in Attendance: | Mark Ayotte Donna Beninati Mary Ciummo Alice Coggeshall | Al Ferry Mike Gorr Cia Ochsenbein Chris Post | Alice Roemer Marianne Savage Burt Shnitzler |
| Committee Members Absent: | None | | |

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. by Burt Shnitzler, chair of the committee. As its first item of business, the committee unanimously approved the minutes of the October 19, 2015, meeting.

The committee then undertook to review and prioritize the recommendations regarding Route 117. There was much discussion of how to organize our recommendations. In the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Safety, practicality, and cost emerged as the touchstones for evaluating the recommendations. The importance of safety as a criterion is obvious. Regarding practicality, there was widespread agreement that achievable, lower-cost solutions can remedy many deficiencies quickly and may be all that is needed. Cost is always a major consideration given the town's tight finances. While the selectmen directed the committee to make its recommendations without regard to their costs, the committee believes that the magnitudes of the costs of different recommendations are apparent and deserve a place in the evaluation process, particularly in regard to the achievability of the recommendations.
- Doubts were expressed at having a major project at the top of our list given the project's likely cost and complexity. A pragmatic approach that focuses on short-term projects of lasting value – not stop-gap measures – may be the best.
- An alternative approach is to focus on specific geographic areas along Route 117 and to prioritize these areas.
- Whatever we choose to recommend, it will be important to share our conclusions with the appropriate town committees (*e.g.*, Advisory, Capital Planning).

Ultimately, the committee concluded that the best way to proceed was to define specific geographical areas of concern, to rank those areas in order of importance, and to rank the recommendations within each area in order of importance. Tentatively, we identified the following areas of concern:

1. Traffic calming on Route 117 generally,
2. Nashoba Regional High School,
3. Town Center (including the Main Street/Wattaquodock Road/Manor Road triangle),
4. The Route 117/Route 110 intersection,
5. Mechanic St. (the approach to Florence Sawyer School from Main St.)
6. Repair or replacement of the guardrails on Route 117.

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The committee defined its top priority to be calming traffic on Route 117 generally. It will recommend that the traffic lines be repainted from the Lancaster line to the Stow line to narrow travel lanes to ten feet, the minimum required by law. The committee considers this a measure that offers a high level of benefit to the town, that can be accomplished quickly at comparatively low cost, and that offers significant secondary benefits with regard to biking in Bolton and parking in the town center.

The committee's next priority is to improve the traffic situation in the area around Nashoba Regional High School. Specific recommendations are:

1. Seek designation of the area as a school zone, with consequent safety improvements (*e.g.*, speed controls, crosswalks).
2. Perform an engineering study of the intersection from Forbush Mill Road/Green Road to the post office, with a view to rationalizing the intersection and making it safer.
 - a. Add crosswalks at the Forbush Mill Road/Green Road intersection, augmented by safety devices (*e.g.*, pedestrian crossing flags, lights).
 - b. Work with local stakeholders to improve traffic safety (*e.g.*, installation of curbing at Classic Pizza, cutting back brush at the corners to improve visibility).
3. Install sidewalks to facilitate foot travel to the post office and to the Forbush Mill Road soccer fields.

The following points were raised during discussion of improvements around the high school:

- It is unclear what is required for an area to be designated as a school zone. We should seek clarification from town counsel.
- The intersection at Main Street, Green Road, and Forbush Mill Road is dangerous and needs to be improved. Factors contributing to the danger include the prevailing speed on that section of Main Street, the confusing traffic pattern and poor sight lines at the intersection, lack of clear definition of the intersection (*i.e.*, absence of curbing on the Classic Pizza corner that encourages short-cutting of the corner), and the high volume of student foot and vehicular traffic.

The committee's third geographical area of concern, and its third priority, is the town center. The recommendations are:

1. Strengthen or repair crosswalks:
 - a. Add crosswalks at Harvard Road and the library.
 - b. Improve safety at all crosswalks (*e.g.*, pedestrian crossing flags; signage; alternative, more visible street markings).
2. Replace or repair all sidewalks over a series of years in a comprehensive way (*i.e.*, do not just "patch-and-fill" them) and establish a program of regular maintenance.
3. Extend the sidewalk from the Main Street/Wattaquadock Road intersection to Memorial Field to create a loop system for foot traffic.
4. Establish a truck exclusion on Wattaquadock Road.
5. Establish a turning lane at Wattaquadock Road for westbound traffic on Main Street.
6. Extend the sidewalk from town center at least as far as Pondsides.
7. Add some form of traffic control at the Main Street/Harvard Road/Manor Road intersection.

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During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Foot traffic is critical to the successful development of Bolton's town center and preservation of its historical character. Our top priority, therefore, should be to put in place the infrastructure – sidewalks and crosswalks – that will encourage and make it safe for people to walk around town. New sidewalks should be added and old sidewalks replaced in a comprehensive way, not merely patched or graded. The possibility of burying power and utility lines and removing the poles should be revisited.
- The previous studies provided to this committee have found that installation of traffic lights at the Main Street/Wattaquodock Road intersection would provide only limited relief from traffic congestion. Excluding trucks from Wattaquodock Road and defining a turning lane for westbound traffic at the Wattaquodock Road intersection should be considered.
- The Main Street/Harvard Road/Manor Road intersection is dangerous. Some form of traffic control should be considered (*e.g.*, flashing "Your Speed is __" signs on both Main Street approaches to the intersection, four-way stop signs, timed or on-demand traffic lights).
- Extending the sidewalk from Main Street to Memorial Field via Wattaquodock Road would create a pedestrian loop system from the Senior Center past the schools to Main Street. This would provide students a safer way to get to Main Street and the library on foot.
- Replacement of the pedestrian guardrail adjacent to Mechanic Street was assigned a low priority.
- Two additional items regarding town center came up, but were left outstanding for future consideration:
 - There was considerable discussion of parking in the town center. Among the points considered were how to delineate parking spaces and how to "block off" parking at crosswalks. Preference was expressed for delineating spaces with lines perpendicular to the curbside lane marking. It was thought that clear definition of a portion of the street for parking would discourage drivers from using the parking "lane" for through traffic and would help to calm traffic. It was also proposed that the curbside lane markings taper off to the curb at crosswalks to make it clear that parking was not permitted there.
 - The possibility of illuminating the crosswalks in some way was raised, but not discussed.

The committee then postponed consideration of the three other areas of concern (Route 117/Route 110 intersection, Mechanic Street, and the Route 117 guardrails) until the next meeting.

It was agreed that the next meeting of the committee would take place on Tuesday, November 16, at 7:00 p.m. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Chris Post



