1

Study Process and Framework

This chapter presents the process and framework for the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study (AITS). The study goals, scope, study area, and evaluation criteria are presented in this chapter. In addition, the development and execution of the public participation plan is described in this chapter.

1.1 Study Background

The AITS is an initiative of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission (AIPC), working in close partnership with its member communities of Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth, Rhode Island and its funding agencies, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) and the Rhode Island Department of Administration’s (RIDOA) Division of Planning.

The AIPC has long been aware that the transportation system has a great impact on the quality of life on Aquidneck Island. The Island’s transportation system accommodates residents, businesses, and visitors to the Island while also handling 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 & Rides that provide safe linkages to various modes of travel.
In November 2005, the AIPC completed the Aquidneck Island West Side Master Plan. Among the recommendations of the West Side Master Plan are 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, and developing alternate travel routes.

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 locations on the Island, increasing levels of automobile ownership, changing commuting patterns, and increased tourism. Safety continues to be a major concern of the Island community. These concerns were elevated following several pedestrian fatalities along Island roadways caused in part by the increasing difficulty in safely crossing major streets.

Recognizing these trends and building off the success of the West Side Master Plan, the AIPC and its partner communities secured grant funding in 2008 using FHWA support and administered through RIDOT and the RIDOA’s Statewide Planning Program to conduct and develop the Island’s first comprehensive multi-modal transportation study and long-range plan.

1.2 Study Vision and Goals

This regional transportation planning study will result in the development of a Comprehensive Multi-Modal Transportation Master Plan for Aquidneck Island that will guide the investment of future funding into the Island’s overall transportation system. The Master Plan will take a holistic, Island-wide approach to transportation infrastructure needs and recommend a program of short, medium, and long-term capital improvements suitable for inclusion into the State of Rhode Island Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

This study is critically important to the future economic viability and quality of life on Aquidneck Island. It reaches across all modes of transportation (bus, rail, ferry, bike, pedestrian, auto, etc.) and seeks to make modal connections and improvements consistent with sound land use planning. These efforts are aimed at increasing overall mobility, modal choice, and safety for residents, businesses, employees, and visitors while decreasing traffic congestion and its negative impacts on the environment, economy and quality of life.

To accomplish this vision, the following goals were established for the AITS:

- To provide an analysis of existing and potential interrelationships among transportation facilities, services and land-use.
Based on State planning goals and local comprehensive plans, provide recommendations to accommodate development on Aquidneck Island without creating adverse community or environmental impacts.

To develop, through an open, public planning process, recommendations to accommodate future travel demands while enhancing environmental quality, multimodal traveler safety and other important quality of life aspects, where possible.

To determine the current operational characteristics and deficiencies of the transportation system.

To develop and compare future conditions of the transportation system with and without transportation demand management plans and proposed transportation improvements.

To recommend multimodal transportation system improvements that enhance efficiency and safety.

To formulate recommendations that are compatible with and help preserve the capacity of future transportation improvements.

To build a consensus for proposed transportation improvements and sustainable development through public forums.

To establish a framework for enhanced public education and for improved communication between governmental agencies that can be built upon during the implementation of study recommendations and other projects on Aquidneck Island.

To promote the equitable sharing of the transportation system’s benefits and to accommodate such considerations as age, income, physical and mental ability and transit dependency.

1.3 Study Area

Geographically, the study includes the entire 38 square mile Island, including Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth. The study area includes the Newport Naval Station and the Newport Secondary rail corridor which runs along the west edge of the Island. The key roadways under evaluation for this study are shown on Figure 1-1 and include:

- Route 114 (West Main Road/Bristol Ferry Road)
- Route 138 (East Main Road)
- Turnpike Avenue
- Burma Road/Defense Highway/Stringham Road
- America’s Cup Avenue
Memorial Boulevard
Coddington Highway/JT Connell Highway
Admiral Kalbfus Road
Route 138A (Aquidneck Avenue)
Route 214 (Valley Road)

The roadway network on Aquidneck Island is largely defined by its long and narrow 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 Coddington and JT Connell Highways and Navy-owned Burma Road/Defense Highway. The underutilized Newport Secondary rail corridor parallels the Navy’s Defense Highway (Burma Road) on the west side of the Island.

1.4 Study Scope

A comprehensive regional transportation planning initiative requires a well-defined structure and process. The Aquidneck Island Transportation Study is comprised of six tasks:

- **Task 1: Outreach & Community Vision: Public Involvement and Participation** – Establish the study framework including the goals, objectives, evaluation/screening criteria, and Public Participation throughout the study.

- **Task 2: Technical Investigation (Data Assembly & Analysis)** – Collect data on existing and proposed transportation and development conditions, including non-automobile modes.

- **Task 3: Transportation Improvement Alternatives & Integrated Scenarios** – Develop transportation alternatives (including a no-build scenario) suitable for future implementation that meet the stated goals and objectives. Transportation improvements will include not only capital projects but policies, actions and strategies to improve the overall transportation system.

- **Task 4: Evaluation of Alternative Transportation Improvements & Integrated Scenarios** – Evaluate transportation improvement alternatives and integrated land use scenarios for the future years of 2020 and 2030.

- **Task 5: Transportation Improvement Plan** – Develop a multimodal Transportation Improvement Plan with a recommended program of short, medium, and long-term capital improvements suitable for inclusion into the State of Rhode Island TIP.

- **Task 6: Plan Implementation** – Develop an implementation plan for the recommended Transportation Improvement Plan.
1.5 Public Participation Work Plan

The Public Participation Work Plan provides a framework for undertaking a comprehensive outreach process for the AITS. 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 TSC 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.

The public participation work plan was established to:

- Seek and sustain widespread involvement of residents, business owners, employees, commuters, 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 TSC 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.

Outreach efforts were accomplished through four activities. They included:

1) TSC meetings;
2) Public Information Workshops;
3) Individual Stakeholder Interviews, and
4) Continuous public engagement through the study website, e-surveys, and e-newsletters.
Technical Steering Committee (TSC)

The purpose of the TSC was to validate goals, objectives, assumptions, and recommendations throughout the study. The TSC was also charged with developing study goals, objectives, and a set of evaluation criteria. The TSC membership included:

- AIPC;
- City of Newport;
- Town of Middletown;
- Town of Portsmouth;
- RIDOT;
- RIDOA, Statewide Planning Program (SPP);
- Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA);
- Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (RITBA);
- Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM);
- FHWA;
- Naval Station Newport;
- Newport County Chamber of Commerce;
- Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau; and
- Sierra Club.

Public Workshops

Four highly publicized workshops occurred at key stages during the study process. Each workshop was organized around a theme that followed the progression of the study as follows:

- **Discovery (September 2009)** – presentation of the study framework (scope, goals, objectives, schedule) and identification of issues, challenges, and priorities to be integrated into the study planning.
- **Alternatives (April 2010)** – review and discussion of possible alternative solutions and policies.
- **Recommendations/Implementation (May 2011)** – final review and presentation of study recommendations and implementation.

Stakeholder Interviews

In addition to the TSC and Public Workshops, one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders were conducted in an effort to gather additional insight and input into the study. Key stakeholders interviewed included:

- Municipal planners/engineers;
- Municipal police chiefs or traffic/safety officers;
State police;
RIDOT;
Old Colony Railroad;
Newport Dinner Train;
Rhode Island Association of Railroad Passengers;
Sierra Club;
Grow Smart RI;
Newport County Chamber of Commerce;
Newport County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau;
Elected officials (AIPC council liaisons for municipalities);
ADA advocacy groups;
American Association of Retired Persons (AARP);
Bicycle advocacy groups (i.e. Narragansett Bay Wheelmen and Bike Shop Owners);
Major employers; and
Motorcoach Industry.

General Public Engagement

During the course of the study, numerous outreach efforts were targeted for the general public. Through the use of the project website, media releases, online surveys, and e-newsletters, the public was informed about the status of the study as it advances from “big picture” issues to more specific project recommendations and initiatives. General public engagement efforts included:

- Public launch/press conference (July 2009)
- Project Website (http://www.vhb.com/aquidneck)
- To ensure a clear, open, and transparent process, a study website was established for public access. In addition to providing general information about the study, updates, and notices for upcoming meetings, the website served as a one-stop central repository for meeting notes, agendas, announcements, study reports, and online opinion surveys. Links to the study webpage were provided on the AIPC webpage and on each municipality’s webpage. Every agenda, press release, email, or announcement that was sent to the public included the website URL.
- Media releases – Media releases and editorials were prepared for the four public workshops and the initial study launch.
- On-line opinion surveys – The project website included a community survey that solicited 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 was employed as a supplemental outreach method and to give a general study update on progress. Distribution lists were developed from the TSC, public workshops, the study webpage, stakeholder outreach, and the AIPC distribution list.

Table 1-1 summarizes the Public Participation Plan execution.

1.6 Evaluation Criteria

The criteria used to help evaluate proposed transportation system enhancements are described in this section. The proposed evaluation criteria are consistent with the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program TIP criteria for evaluation of proposed projects and have been vetted by the TSC and during the first Public Workshop. They are as follows:

- **Mobility Benefits** – The project reduces delays and back-ups at intersections, improves transportation system reliability, reduces travel times and vehicle-miles traveled, improves modal accessibility by improved access for transit and pedestrian and bicycle transportation.
  - Reduced vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) or reduced trip lengths
  - Reduced vehicle-hours traveled (VHT) or reduced trip durations
  - Reduced delays/back-ups for vehicles at intersections
  - Travel time differences
  - Improved mobility for bicyclists and pedestrians
  - Improved access for transit
  - Physical or operational enhancement to bus, rail, ferry, and parking systems
  - Average system travel speeds

- **Cost Effectiveness** – Considering the cost/benefit of the project and ability to phase the project over time.
  - Order of magnitude costs
  - Opportunity for phasing

- **Economic Development Impact** – The project strengthens the Island’s economy by attracting visitors; enabling residential development; or encouraging appropriate types of businesses which in turn creates jobs and an expanded tax base;
  - Impacts to existing economic bases
  - Economic development potential (enhanced access/travel time savings to existing and targeted commercial/industrial development areas)
Improved access to vacant and underutilized sites
Enhances opportunities for transit-oriented development

**Environmental Impacts** – Considering preservation of the Island’s natural landscape (wetlands, floodplains, habitat, open spaces, historic areas), sustainability (vehicle emissions reductions), and the human environment (neighborhoods, schools, community facilities) which influence the overall quality of life on the Island.

- Greenhouse gas reductions
- Study area intersection delays and improvements to air quality
- Potential for vehicle trip reductions due to mode shifts/reduced reliance on automobiles
- Direct impacts to natural environment (wetland/habitat/open space/historic areas/conservation areas/others)
- Impacts to human environment (residential/business/schools/community facilities benefits and impacts, environmental justice)

**Degree of Local Support and State Goals and Plans** – The project alternative is aligned with regional goals and municipal plans, goals, and visions so that the public agencies will “champion” the project for implementation.

- Consistency with municipal plans, goals, and visions
- Concurrence by Portsmouth, Middletown, and Newport officials
- Support from implementing agency

**Safety, Security, and Technology** – Safer conditions for drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders; use of technology for incident or event management.

- Safer conditions for pedestrians
- Safer conditions for bicyclists
- Potential for crash reductions (direct improvement to intersection)
- Potential for crash reductions (indirect benefit from traffic shifts)
- Impacts to emergency response
- Improved driveway/roadway access management (consolidation/elimination of access points on major roadways)

Chapter 4 presents a recommended weighting for each of the evaluation criteria categories to help screen and evaluate recommendations.
# Table 1-1 Study Outreach Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Key Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 1</td>
<td>June 3, 2009</td>
<td>Study kick-off; Review of goals/objectives; Draft Public Participation Work Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Launch Event</td>
<td>July 29, 2009</td>
<td>Official Launch of the new AIPC Aquidneck Island Transportation Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 2</td>
<td>July 29, 2009</td>
<td>Burma Road Extension Feasibility Assessment; Data collection plan; Origin-destination survey; Comprehensive Plans/Land Use review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Workshop 1 (Discovery)</td>
<td>September 29, 2009</td>
<td>Present the study framework, listen, inform, educate, and identify issues, challenges, and priorities to be integrated into the planning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 3</td>
<td>October 21, 2009</td>
<td>Updated goals and objectives; Proposed evaluation criteria review; Land use assumptions and planning month for analysis review; Burma Road Extension Feasibility Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 4</td>
<td>December 9, 2009</td>
<td>Transit origin-destination postcard survey; Draft Chapter 1; Existing conditions assessment; Land use assumptions and planned transportation improvement projects discussion; Analysis intersections determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 5</td>
<td>February 3, 2010</td>
<td>Draft Chapter 2; Existing conditions traffic analysis; Updates to travel demand model and future land use forecasts; Draft evaluation criteria measurements and scoring; RSA review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 6</td>
<td>April 7, 2010</td>
<td>Updates to travel demand model; Evaluation criteria survey results; Draft alternatives matrix; Sustainability discussion; Public Workshop 2 preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Workshop 2 (Alternatives)</td>
<td>April 29, 2010</td>
<td>Review and discuss possible alternative solutions/concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 7</td>
<td>June 2, 2010</td>
<td>Public Workshop 2 summary; Evaluation criteria and alternatives matrix updates; Preliminary conceptual alternatives; Draft Chapter 3; Newport Jitney Study update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 8</td>
<td>August 4, 2010</td>
<td>RSA review; Conceptual alternatives review; Alternatives packaging and evaluation criteria weighting discussion; Draft Chapter 4 discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 9</td>
<td>September 8, 2010</td>
<td>Railroad options/impacts; West Main Road/East Main Road sidewalks; Alternatives packaging and evaluation criteria weighting; Draft Chapter 4 outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 10</td>
<td>October 2, 2010</td>
<td>Revised alternatives packaging; Evaluation of alternatives packages; Recommended policies; Public Workshop 3 preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Workshop 3 (Refinement)</td>
<td>December 9, 2010</td>
<td>Evaluate and screen options, and identify preferred solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 11</td>
<td>January 19, 2011</td>
<td>Public workshop summary; Phasing/prioritization of recommendations; Implementation matrix; Review of draft report chapters/outlines</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSC Meeting 12</td>
<td>April 6, 2011</td>
<td>Review of final report chapters; Review of recommended plan and next steps for implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Workshop 4 (Recommendations/ Implementation)</td>
<td>May 4, 2011</td>
<td>Review/discuss study recommendations</td>
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Note: Refer to [www.vhb.com/aquidneck](http://www.vhb.com/aquidneck) for meeting notes and slides.