

ISLAND PLAN

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THE VINEYARD



**Transportation Forum
July 14, 2008**

Proceedings

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Readers are referred to a separate appendix to these proceedings, which includes four documents:

- Appendix 1: Transportation Discussion Paper;
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The Island Plan Transportation Forum was held in the Katharine Cornell Theatre in Tisbury from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Attendance

A total of 34 people participated in this forum including members of the Steering Committee, the Transportation Work Group, the Network of Planning Advisors, Island transportation organizations, town boards, MVC staff, and members of the general public.

<u>Moderator</u>	Richard Toole, Island Plan Steering Committee Member
<u>Opening Comments</u>	Greg Coogan, Member of Oak Bluffs Board of Selectmen
<u>Presenter</u>	Jeff Parker, Chair of the Transportation Work Group
<u>MVC Staff</u>	Emily Lindsey, Mark London, Donna Stewart, Jane Talbot
<u>Others</u>	Alex Bell, Christina Brown, Judy Crawford, Tad Crawford, Sherrie Cutler, Mimi Davisson, B. Donahue, Warren Doty, Chris Fried, Susan G., Dan Greenbaum, Mark H., Elba Hierta, Steven Katz, Wayne Lamson, Melinda Loberg, Marilyn Miller, Ned Orleans, Peter Palcher, Susan Parker, Lee Scott, Pete Scott, Steve Soriano, Henry Stephenson, R. Stowe, Paul Strauss, Connie Texiera, Linda Thompson, Matt Thibert, Marney Toole

1. Introduction

Richard Toole opened the Forum by introducing himself as the moderator and by welcoming members of the public. Mr. Toole gave an overview of the Island Plan planning process. He pointed out that Discussion Papers are a summary of all of the work that has been done by the Transportation and other Work Groups. He then gave an overview of the night's agenda and told the public about coming events this summer.

Mr. Toole took a poll of the audience members by asking how many were affiliated with the following groups:

- | | |
|--|----|
| • Island Plan Steering Committee | 3 |
| • Island Plan Transportation Work Group | 2 |
| • Island Plan Network of Planning Advisors | 7 |
| • Members of Town Boards | 5 |
| • Year-Round Residents | 24 |
| • Seasonal Residents | 3 |
| • Members of the General Public | 27 |

Mr. Toole explained the format for the evening, namely introductory remarks by Greg Coogan, a presentation by Jeff Parker, Chair of the Transportation Work Group, and a discussion.

Greg Coogan, Oak Bluffs Board of Selectman, gave introductory remarks about Islanders' love/hate for the road system, and each individuals wish for efficient transportation. He pointed out that most transportation issues must be dealt with on an Island-wide basis, and appreciates the MVC's efforts. People love this place because of the roads, but these are the same roads we've grown to hate because they are hard to navigate and hard to feel safe on, both in and out of a car. We've made great strides, such as the Steamship Authority holding the line on ferry capacity and the growth of the VTA. We all want instant, individual transportation, but how?

2. Presentation

Jeff Parker, chair of the Transportation Work Group gave a PowerPoint presentation that summarized the issues, goals, emerging directions and promising initiatives as identified so far, as outlined in the Transportation Discussion Paper. The efforts of the Work Group and the priority proposals covered three topics:

- Group Transportation (bus, taxi, ferry, etc.)
- Bicycles and Pedestrians,
- Roads and Traffic.

3. Discussion

Before beginning of the discussion, Richard Toole determined the sense of the room by asking for a show of hands for each of the Emerging Directions and Promising Initiatives, indicating whether people had the following preliminary opinion:

- **Blue:** Agree – High Priority
- **Green:** Agree
- **Orange:** Generally agree but have concerns (including wording)
- **Red:** Disagree

Then, audience members discussed the proposals.

Transportation Forum - Voting Tally				
	Agree - Priority	Agree	Agree - Concerns	Disagree
Emerging Directions				
T1. Promote and improve the efficiency of the Island's buses, taxis and ferries.	15	6	1	0
T2. Improve and expand bicycle and pedestrian facilities.	21	2	2	0
T3. Minimize road congestion and improve safety without compromising road character and scenic roadside views.	17	5	1	0
Promising Initiatives				
P57. Create public-private alliances to improve and promote alternative transportation including personalized, on-line itineraries, ticketing and possible rebranding transit.	7	8	5	1
P58. Set up programs to make town and village areas more pedestrian and bicycle friendly and to use traffic calming techniques to slow traffic in neighborhoods.	13	8	2	0
P59. Promote the use of energy efficient vehicles	20	3	3	0
P60. Extend the network of off-road bike paths. Improve the safety of existing off-road bike paths and on-road routes.	15	6	1	0
P61. Improve taxi regulations, training, quality and dispatching.	10	9	0	0
P62. Address problems at the Island's most dangerous and congested road locations.	17	4	3	0

Note: The following is a summary of comments made by individuals at the forum. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of all the people in attendance, of the Transportation Work Group, or of the Island Plan Steering Committee.

EMERGING DIRECTIONS

T1. Promote and improve the efficiency of the Island's buses, taxis and ferries

- Airport
 - We need to figure out where the airport fits in and tie this all together into a seamlessly integrated transportation system. The Airport Master Plan includes some thought about incorporating a transportation hub.
- Buses
 - Are VTA buses sized properly; they seem too big except during the summer? In the off-season, there is low frequency. What about people who live off the road? What about using one-way loops?
 - Jeff noted that it is a difficult challenge to serve a rural community with such a big influx of population. We need buses big enough to carry the peak crowds, and it is hard to justify having two distinct fleets for different seasons.
 - Angela Grant, from the VTA, said they had a mixed fleet, but that lack of funding is really what is holding them back from giving people additional smaller buses. She described the various funding sources, or lack thereof, and described the difficult juggling act needed to pull this off. They now have a fleet of 40 vehicles, 28 on fixed routes. The small buses haven't held up as well as the larger buses; for example, the VTA should use a different vehicle for the Tisbury Park-and-Ride because of its downhill route and number of passengers. Last August, the VTA carried 254,000 people. The most efficient way to carry a lot of people is to run the maximum number of buses for the least cost. She invited people to visit the website for their timetable/trip-planning tools, and mentioned the availability and popularity of the \$100 annual bus pass.
 - It was suggested that we could look at the possibility of a partnership with another resort location – a sister city – that has its peak time in the winter. The two transit agencies could share some buses which would allow them to better tailor the bus size to their seasons.
 - Can school buses be used in the summer? Jeff said that this might raise legal issues, but that the maintenance is already shared, which is a good thing.
 - From some parts of the Island, there are too many connections for it to be time efficient. The cost isn't an issue, rather the time.
 - It was suggested that the word efficiency be changed to effectiveness.
- Bus-Bike
 - Can we integrate bus and bikes more? It seems one-way bikers get stuck far from their destinations at the end of the day because of the limited bike capacity on VTA buses. Perhaps there could be a special vehicle to pick up cyclists at the end of the day.
 - Jeff mentioned the San Francisco bike car in their trains.

- Baggage
 - The Vineyard is a recreational community. How can we accommodate everyone's baggage, bikes, kayaks, and other sports equipment? Could we check bags and have them delivered?
- Taxis
 - What about regulating taxi prices at the airport; now the taxis from one town might charge twice as much for the same ride as a taxi from another town? Some taxis refuse to take passengers. The fares double after 1 am, when the bars close, which discourages people from taking taxis and getting home safely. Could the County become a regulatory authority? It should be noted that some drivers do a wonderful job.
 - Greg Coogan said the taxi issue has been discussed at the All-Island Board of Selectmen's Association. Although taxis are ultimately regulated by the towns, he welcomed any efforts by the All-Island Selectmen or the MVC to work on this. Oak Bluffs is keenly aware of the problem and is working on it. This will need the cooperation of the companies and drivers.
 - Tristan Israel suggested that the first phase should be standardizing regulations and fares. Later, we could look at better coordination or integration.
- Bus-Taxi Coordination
 - Presently, we have two distinct entities: the public VTA and private taxis. We should look at coordinating/integrating buses and taxis, with a range of options including the current maxi-taxis which are really more similar to on-demand minibuses. There could also be the type of individual taxis found off-Island. Perhaps the VTA could contract with taxis to provide service on low-density routes, instead of running standard buses.
 - Could we have an integrated dispatching system for buses and taxis, to offer a cost savings to both, especially in terms of more efficient trips including "dial-a-ride" and "fixed route with route deviation"? Could the VTA offer its trip-planning software for use for taxi trips?
- Ferries
 - The connection of Peter Pan busses with the SSA was mentioned; some seem to be timed to meet boats and some aren't. Angie mentioned that the VTA does plan with the SSA, but Peter Pan is very last minute in their scheduling efforts.
 - The idea of running a late night boat was suggested, but there was little support, because of the cost.
- Park and Ride
 - The Tisbury Park and Ride is fabulous. We need the same thing in Oak Bluffs.

T2. Improve and expand bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

- The proposals focus on completing the missing links Down Island. We should also look at extending bike paths Up-Island, though this might prove more difficult.
- Several years ago, Chilmark didn't pass a proposed road widening in order to preserve stone walls and mature trees. It might be possible to identify an interior route, off the main roads.
- The West Tisbury selectmen have appointed a committee to look at this.
- The presence of bikes on a road helps slow down traffic.

- Enforcement can help slow traffic, as shown with Chilmark’s successful effort to enforce speed limits on Middle Road.
- There is the feeling that the roads aren’t safe, with the combination of cars, bikes and mopeds, often with inexperienced riders.
- One person suggested making Upper State Road in Vineyard Haven more bike friendly. Henry Stephenson said that it might be better to identify an alternative bike route through neighborhood streets, back roads, and ancient ways, which by-passes State Road for bikers going from West Tisbury to Vineyard Haven.
- “Suicidal” bikers need to be aware of the dangers and their responsibilities; they go the wrong way on one-way streets, ride on sidewalks or side-by-side, and don’t use hand signals.
- The roads were designed for cars, not bikes. Now they carry three times more traffic, and are unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians.
- The re-configuration of New York Ave in Oak Bluffs is a good example of what can be done. [The car lane was slightly narrowed, and the shoulder was widened and flattened, within the same overall width.] It helps calm traffic and is safer for bikes and pedestrians.
- Education to bikers is needed. “Bikers just don’t realize what they are getting themselves into on the Vineyard with our narrow roads.”
- Could we reach out to cyclists at the Youth Hostel? Groups of young people on a cycle tour string along the side of the road, making it impossible to pass. They should leave gaps.
- Someone mentioned their annoyance with cyclists on the road when a bike path is readily available. Someone else pointed out that bikers have a right to the roads, and said that for bikes going fast, say 20 mph, they are safer on the roads than on the bike paths.
- It was suggested that there be greater rider education moped and bike rental places, including a pamphlet. The mandatory education program for moped rentals has been effective; we could do the same for bikes.
- There should be rest areas and toilets along bike routes.
- We should focus more attention on pedestrians: sidewalks, paths, crosswalks.

T3. Minimize road congestion and improve safety without compromising road character and scenic roadside views.

- Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road is not scenic. Chilmark made the right decision, in refusing to widen its roads. You can’t have everything. If you change the character of the country roads – with the trees arching across the roads – and make the Vineyard like everywhere else, we will lose a lot.
- Henry Stephenson suggested that we do remedial work on the Edgartown-Vineyard-Haven Road and on Upper State Road, planting trees and improving the landscaping.
- We could make simple road improvements including controlled planting at access points.

PROMISING INITIATIVES

P57. Create public-private alliances to improve and promote alternative transportation including personalized, on-line itineraries, ticketing and possible rebranding transit.

- The All-Island Selectmen could play a key role.

- Angela Grant discussed the trend of moving towards technology such as signs counting down the time to the next bus, tracking bus locations. Employers are the key. Mass Rides has a program that will pay for an emergency taxi for transit users. We need to do a better job informing the public about what services we already are offered.

P58. Set up programs to make town and village areas more pedestrian and bicycle friendly and to use traffic calming techniques to slow traffic in neighborhoods.

- We need to identify physical improvements on a town-by-town basis, involving DPWs, police, business groups, and other citizens.
- Oak Bluffs has done this for the downtown, and could do this for a larger area. We should promote Oak Bluffs as a pedestrian-friendly destination. People can get off the boat, stay in Oak Bluffs, and find everything they need. With rising gas prices, people will be increasingly looking for destinations like this.

P59. Promote the use of energy efficient vehicles

- Could we invite manufacturers of hybrid/energy-efficient vehicles to the Living Local fair, so people can see what technologies are available?
- The Vineyard could be a good pilot location for new transportation technologies because it is an Island. For example, if a company wanted to test hydrogen cars, all we would need is a few fueling stations, say at the Tisbury Park-and-Ride.
- The towns and other public entities should buy hybrids; some have already done so. They could do group buying. They could offer tax rebates to rental agencies if they only offer energy-efficient vehicles. Could we use the ferry fee structure as a way to promote energy-efficient cars? We should look at how Bermuda does this.

P62. Address problems at the Island's most dangerous and congested road locations.

- Ned Orleans asked if the places identified in the Regional Transportation Plan were really dangerous, or if people just don't like them because they are crowded. He wonders about the statistics.
- The priority is safety. Let's not worry about Five Corners; there aren't many accidents there.

General Comments

- Could we look into more Park-and-Rides?
- Will the roundabout really happen?
- A lot of this is related land use. Now, everyone has to drive to Edgartown and Oak Bluffs to buy alcohol. Could we have a liquor store at the airport? Post offices generate a lot of traffic; should they be relocated?
- The proposed Tisbury connector roads would provide alternative ways to get somewhere. This plan is moving ahead, not only for traffic reasons but also to restructure that area.
- What about putting up stop signs on State Road and at Five Corners?

These proceedings were prepared by Emily Lindsey and Mark London.



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