



December 14, 2007

Ed Hanscom, Project Manager
Maine DOT
State House Station 16
Augusta, ME 04333

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RE: DEIS - Wiscasset Bypass

Dear Mr. Hanscom:

The Friends of Midcoast Maine (FMM) was founded to protect the quality of life and economic sustainability of the midcoast. We work to preserve and promote our small town character and traditional patterns of settlement and growth, and to prevent sprawl and all of the negative features associated with sprawl. We work to integrate transportation and land use decisions. The following comments on the DEIS are based on the environmental, historic, public safety and economic impacts of the proposed bypass routes and how they affect our mission.

FMM strongly recommends that any bypass route meet the following criteria:

1. Minimize environmental impacts to wetlands, vernal pools and streams and wildlife habitat;
2. Protect Wiscasset's historic district;
3. Protect Edgecomb's undeveloped lands;
4. Minimize impacts on homes & businesses;
5. Minimize visual and noise impacts;
6. Maximize traffic benefits.

While some may suggest that the "no-build" alternative meets many of these environmental concerns, in reviewing the DEIS we find the need for a bypass unavoidable. We believe a bypass of Wiscasset Village, with the least possible environmental impact, is needed in order to protect and preserve the economic prosperity and quality of life for those living and working there. We can point to the economically successful downtowns of Belfast, Damariscotta and Brunswick to demonstrate that a vibrant downtown can thrive with a well designed bypass and does not depend on pass-through traffic. In fact, a bypass can enhance the vitality of a downtown because it provides travel options instead of forcing through traffic to compete with destination traffic, causing back-ups, congestion and delays.

In addition, we believe a bypass must:

1. Be the shortest route possible;
2. Have carefully designed and engineered on-ramps so as to reduce the amount of earth movement and disturbance and to reduce the impact on adjacent businesses, residences and natural areas;
3. Be limited to two lanes with travel lanes, shoulders and right-of-way acquisition reduced to the maximum extent;
4. Be a no access highway (including at the access points) so as to preserve future capacity and discourage sprawl and strip development along the route and at either end of the bypass.

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5. Provide adequate vegetative buffers and landscaping (grade separations and berms) to minimize visual and noise impacts to surrounding property and to protect abutting waterways from unfiltered runoff from paved surfaces, including runoff from the bridge itself.
6. Minimize the profile of the bridge crossing the Sheepscot River and be designed in a way that enhances, not detracts from, the view.
7. Minimize unnecessary impacts of the bike or multi-use paths by varying the distance of their centerlines from the outside line of the shoulders and varying their grades relative to those of the travel lanes.

Finally, we strongly urge MDOT to truly consider a regional approach to the decision making about this project. While we commend the MDOT for establishing the localized task force to address this project, we believe this project is truly a midcoast project with potential impacts extending far beyond the boundaries of the abutting municipalities. We recommend that the existing Gateway One Steering Committee be brought into the continuing process for discussion and consultation. The Steering Committee has been studying the Route One corridor for over three years. This 21 town committee has shown unprecedented cooperation, commitment and understanding of the issues facing the corridor. We believe this existing, MDOT and FHWA funded, regional structure should be used to the fullest extent possible.

The over-riding goal of the NEPA process and the DEIS is to improve the livability of Wiscasset Village and minimize the environmental impacts of any chosen route. In light of the above criteria and our evaluation of the DEIS, we believe, with some modifications, there are two possible routes that have the least impact. These are Route N2/N8c and Route N2/N2h/N2f-1. We believe these:

1. are effective in diverting trips from downtown from opening day and well into the future, thereby improving the quality of life in downtown;
2. have the least environmental footprint with the smallest amount of cutting and filling, the least amount of impervious area, and minimal impact on undeveloped habitat blocks.

We believe these routes are superior to the other options studied, including the no-build alternative, and should be taken forward for further local and regional input. We believe this regional process can be used to improve their ability to meet the DEIS goals. We believe they should be supported by the MDOT as well as communities and citizens in the region as two worthwhile options.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,



Jane B Lafleur,
Executive Director

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