

Route 140
Safety Improvement Task Force
Public Information Meeting

Thursday, June 18, 2009 - 7:00 PM

Thomas Prince School

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome-Town of Princeton:

Joseph O'Brien, Princeton Board of Selectmen, welcomed those in attendance to the *Route 140 Public Information Meeting*, recognizing that there were a number of Princeton citizens, decision makers and stakeholders in the audience. He stated that the purpose of the meeting was to seek input from interested residents regarding the need for safety improvements to be considered along the Princeton segment of Route 140. Mr. O'Brien stated that he would be moderating the meeting while Rich Rydant from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) would be presenting and answering questions from the residents.

Introduction to Route 140 Safety Improvement Effort:

Rich Rydant provided those in attendance with a detailed meeting handout that contained a number of color graphics and maps that had been compiled by CMRPC staff as the study has progressed. The handout included the meeting agenda, an explanation of the purpose of the meeting, a brief overview of a planning "Charrette" effort, a working outline of a *Corridor Profile*, several maps, graphics and aerial photos.

Mr. Rydant introduced himself and provided an overview of the Route 140 effort and the *Corridor Profile* documentation that will be produced. Mr. Rydant then progressed through the meeting handout, explaining the entirety of the contents.

Upon completing his presentation, Mr. Rydant indicated that the Route 140 Safety Improvement Task Force was seeking any comments or suggestions that those in attendance may have. Mr. O'Brien moderated the ensuing discussion.

Public Comment & Questions:

Citizen A asked "What do you mean by safety, whose safety?"

Mr. Rydant answered that roadway safety is one of the most important subjects that planning agency CMRPC focuses on, a federally identified emphasis area. As part of the Route 140 study, agency staff worked directly with personnel from the local police department, researching crash files in an effort to determine root causes. Rydant further indicated that anyone who lives in town and anyone who uses the roadway will be affected by those improvements that will eventually be implemented on Route 140.

Citizen B suggested preserving the historical village areas that have been identified in the community. These include the East Princeton Village, Everetteville in both Princeton & Westminster and Pottery Village in Sterling.

Mr. Rydant indicated that these historical district boundaries can be added to the environmental consultation maps produced for the study area. *(Alex Fiandaca, a member of the Route 140 Safety Improvement Task Force, indicated that she would forward the boundaries of the historic village areas to Mr. Rydant's attention.)*

Citizen C asked whether the intersection of Route 140 and Route 62 (in neighboring Sterling) is included in the scope of the *Corridor Profile* study.

Mr. Rydant indicated that this busy intersection is included in the study and will be counted and analyzed by MRPC staff, as that agency is covering the Sterling and Westminster portions of the study. Montachusett staff will check to see if existing and projected future traffic volumes meet the standardized warrants for the installation of signalized traffic control. Geometric improvements are also envisioned at the Route 140/Route 62 intersection, specifically to raise the Route 140 southbound approach to this location for line of sight purposes as well as to likely eliminate the substandard fork-in-the-road geometry that exists on the eastbound Route 62 approach. MRPC's analysis will also indicate if assigned turning lanes need to be delineated at this location with any installation of a traffic signal.

Citizen D suggested putting a "kid friendly" bike path behind Route 140 guardrails, as a measure to improve safety and provide some type of separation between bicyclists, especially children, and Route 140 traffic flows.

Mr. Rydant indicated that type of treatment could be considered, particularly in the East Princeton Village area linking the nearby residential areas on Beaman Road, Hobbs Road and Leominster Road. For reference, a good example where vehicular traffic is separated from bicyclists and pedestrians exists in Brattleboro, Vermont on Route 9 east of the downtown. *(A*

“Walkable Communities” presentation is planned for the September 24, 2009 meeting of the Route 140 Safety Improvement Task Force.)

Citizen E said that he noticed in the handout materials that some of the highest number vehicle crash locations are the straightest sections of Route 140, for example, between Hobbs Road and Route 31 north (Fitchburg Road). He suggested altering roadway geometry - curves, humps, undulations - as traffic calming techniques that could be considered to slow Route 140 travel speeds.

Accepted traffic calming methods, where practical, can be considered to improve travel conditions and safety along Route 140 without impeding traffic flow or causing unnecessary delay. There is a range of techniques can be used to reduce roadway travel speeds. Included in the handout materials is a graphic showing active speed monitoring devices, something the community already has successfully employed right outside on Route 62 in front of the Thomas Prince School. This is an example of Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technology.

Citizen F suggested an improved sidewalk or multi-use trail along Route 140 linking the Sawyer Field playground at the corner of Leominster Road with the rest of the East Princeton Village. As traffic volumes have increased along Route 140, it has become increasingly difficult to walk or bicycle in this area.

Rydant indicated that there are a range of options that can be considered and eventually applied to the East Princeton Village area. The community may wish to consider a typical roadway cross-section through the Village that accommodates the Route 140 travel lanes and an adjacent walkway on at least one side of the street with some delineation or separation between the two. *(This concept can be explored further at the September 24, 2009 meeting of the Route 140 Task Force that will feature a “Walkable Communities” presentation.)*

Citizen G asked whether the large number of suggested improvement options shown on the map in the handout have been prioritized.

Mr. Rydant answered that both CMRPC and MRPC will craft an entire range of suggested improvement options for consideration by the Route 140 host communities, likely exceeding those already listed on the map. Later, in the autumn months, the Route 140 Safety Improvement Task Force, along with planning commission and MassHighway staff, will work to prioritize and then finalize the slate of recommendations that will be included in the final study

document. This material will be posted on the town website, as has been the case with all prior meeting summaries and exhibit items.

Citizen H indicated the concern that existing drainage culverts beneath Route 140 cannot continue to handle the weight of heavy trucks.

An inventory of existing culverts along Route 140 through Princeton is planned as part of the *Corridor Profile* effort. Any observed failures in the culvert pipes will be reported. As has already been observed, a number of culverts along Route 140 are undersized and occasionally overwhelmed in the spring or in periods of heavy precipitation. When the culverts are replaced, an assessment as to necessary replacement size can be made based on adjacent drainage needs.

Citizen I asked why trucks cannot be rerouted from Route 140.

Route 140 is a state numbered route that is eligible for federal-aid improvement funding. Local communities in Massachusetts cannot prohibit trucks from state numbered routes without offering an adequate alternative route. Obviously, there are few major arterial roadways in the town beyond Route 140, Route 31, Route 62, Mountain Road and Brooks Station Road. Trucking is already using Route 31 through the center over to Route 31 north (Fitchburg Road) and Route 2 due to the posted culvert in East Princeton. Again, perhaps accepted traffic calming techniques can be used to slow traffic on Route 140.

Citizen J asked how posted speed limits are determined.

Rydant indicated that posted speed limits need to be determined in an analytical manner using the results of an "85th Percentile Speed Study" required by MassHighway. Such studies observe the travel speeds of all vehicles along a particular section of roadway over a period of time and the 85th percentile observed speed (*the speed that 85% of vehicles are currently not exceeding*) is used to set the posted limit. This methodology is used in order to avoid the use of "artificial speed limits" (often arbitrarily assigned and unrealistic), that are not reflective of actual travel conditions.

Citizen K suggested a bike route on Route 140.

Noting that Route 140 is already heavily used by "Class A" bicyclists (including those training for the Longsjo Classic Bicycle Race), MassHighway's "Share the Road" program could be applied to Route 140 as well as other roadways in town popular for bicycling, such as Mountain Road. This program includes the posting of yellow-diamond warning signs that

display the "Share the Road" message. The overall purpose of the program is to educate motorists to "Share the Road" with bicyclists and also to educate bicyclists on how to be safe and responsible. This issue has been discussed at previous meetings of the Safety Improvement Task Force.

Citizen L expressed the idea of applying various zoning regulations to the East Princeton Village area in order to improve safety. This is something that the town's Planning Board has already started to investigate. He asked if Rydant could attend a future meeting.

Mr. Rydant thanked him for his suggestion and indicated that he would need to check the project budget to see if additional local meetings beyond the Task Force could be accommodated. (Rydant was also asked if he could attend a meeting of the local Historical Commission, TBD.)

Citizen M said another goal of the *Corridor Profile* could be making Route 140 more appealing by balancing roadway safety needs and the scenic views offered along different sections of Route 140.

Many have indicated at prior meetings of the Safety Improvement Task Force that they consider Route 140 a "scenic, country road". As that appears to be the sentiment of the community, no doubt a balance can be struck in order to improve the roadway for the traveling public while preserving the adjacent pastoral setting.

Adjournment:

At that time, having no further questions from those in attendance, Mr. O'Brien adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:30 PM.

Attachment: *Article from the Holden Landmark that covered the Route 140 Public Information Meeting.*

Pre-Meeting with Princeton Highway, Fire and Police:

Joe O'Brien, Princeton Board of Selectmen, called the Pre-Meeting Session to order at 6:30 PM. Mr. O'Brien stated that the purpose of the preview session was to get comments and input from the town's Public Safety officials and the Road Advisory Committee prior to the full public information meeting that will begin at 7 PM.

Rich Rydant from CMRPC briefly covered the background of the Route 140 *Corridor Profile* effort and the handout materials summarizing the work completed thus far by the CMRPC staff. (MRPC staff is covering the sections of Route 140 in the towns of Sterling and Westminster.)

Larry Greene asked Mr. Rydant to explain the data in the MassHighway permanent count station chart. This data is used to assess the seasonal fluctuation of traffic in the greater area. Despite the availability of winter sport opportunities in the area, traffic volumes are highest during the summer months. There are four (4) permanent count stations maintained by MassHighway in the greater area; the chart shows the average monthly fluctuations from the four different count locations. This data is collected continuously.

Police Chief Schmoll indicated concern on the steadily increasing traffic volumes on Route 140 and the safety issues associated with school buses and children on Route 140.

Fire chief LaPorte indicated that the narrow width of Route 140 has a definite impact on firefighting and vehicle crash operations. In the East Princeton Village area, a sidewalk would be viewed as an excellent safety improvement, assuring that people don't need to walk in the road. Any remedy for the need to improve the existing culvert from Onion Pond should also retain the existing access to fire fighting water. Perhaps this can be expanded to provide additional fire protection to the Village.

Glen Lyons, Highway Department, stated that he felt that the need to improve roadway drainage and pavement condition should be part of the recommendations for the Route 140 *Corridor Profile*. Joe O'Brien indicated that those types of recommendations will help preserve and improve Route 140 and will be included in the study document.

Mr. O'Brien adjourned the Pre-Meeting Session at 6:55 PM.

Attachment: *Article from the Holden Landmark that covered the Route 140 Pre-Meeting Session*

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Sign In Form



DATE: 6/18/09 MEETING: RTC 140 - PRINCETON

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East Princeton Village focus of Route 140 upgrades

BY PHYLLIS BOOTH PBOOTH@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM



Rich Rydant from Central Mass Regional Planning Commission explains what a corridor profile is to residents at a June 18 meeting. Phyllis Booth photo

Slowing down the traffic on Route 140 especially through the village of East Princeton, reducing truck traffic, repairing a bridge in the middle of the village, and making the road safer for bicyclists were all on the minds of local residents at a June 18 informational meeting at the Thomas Prince School.

The meeting, hosted by Rich Rydant from Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, and Selectman Joe O'Brien, gave residents along Route 140 the opportunity to air concerns and participate in the planning process to make safety improvements to the road.

Attendees asked whether bike paths could be put in so kids could safely travel around East Princeton. Others spoke out against widening or straightening the road because it would increase traffic speeds.

"In my mind that road isn't safe for kids on bikes," said resident Rick McCowan of Richards Road. "I'd like to see techniques used that will slow traffic down."

Rydant said a two-foot area along a roadside is considered safe for skilled bike riders. He suggested a bike trail might be added away from the road. "The whole corridor is a recreation area," said Sue Deliddo of Redemption Rock Trail. "We see motorcycles, classic cars, people with baby carriages, joggers on the road. I'd love to see the sidewalks cleaned up. They are so overgrown that carriages and joggers have to go out in the road."

Rydant said "traffic calming" techniques could be used in the village. Those include rumble strips, lines or electronic signs.

"We might be able to investigate having two 11-foot lanes in order to accommodate a sidewalk," he said.

Rydant said "the bridge is a linchpin in this area. The fire department uses the water dammed up on one side of the bridge and the area near the bridge and the stream has many historic sites from old mills that flourished in East Princeton in the 1840s. One side of the bridge has the original railing."

The Route 140 Task Force, with members from Princeton, Sterling and Westminster has been meeting since September 2008 to discuss improvements to the section of Route 140 from I-190 in Sterling to Route 2 in Westminster.

"I know the town is trying to balance road improvements with the rural character of the town," said Rydant. "We're working with abutters, officials and stakeholders."

"The Village of East Princeton is an area of concern and has to be treated with sensitivity. The community drives and guides the answers," said Rydant.

A Mass Highway Department count showed that traffic on Route 140 peaks in the summer and the road now has between 8,000-9,000 cars a day, double that of 20 years ago. With the poor economy, traffic volume has flattened to about a 1 percent increase per year. "But it's steady and will continue to increase," said Rydant.

The corridor profile that will be prepared as a result of the study looks at land use, environmental issues such as vernal pools and endangered species, congestion, safety, pavement conditions, bridges, bicycle and pedestrian traffic, truck traffic, vehicle crash analysis and traffic levels.

East Princeton will be more of a focus because homes are so close to the road, and there are playground and sidewalk issues, said Rydant.

Sheila Dubman of Redemption Rock Trail [Rte.140] asked that Everettville, the section of Route 140 north of the intersection of Route 31 to the Westminster town line, also be considered a village. "Some of the most historic homes in this part of the state are located there," she said. "They are also very close to the road and very historic."

In Sterling the intersection of routes 140 and 62 has emerged as a focal point, said Rydant. "It might meet the criteria for a traffic signal at that location and we could rearrange the roadway there and perhaps do something about the dip in the road on the north side of the intersection," said Rydant.

Another area of concern is the curvy area north of the road leading to Wachusett Mountain. That may emerge as a focus area in Westminster, said Rydant.

Leominster Road resident Dolly Sullivan said that trucks are now detouring from Route 140 onto Hobbs Road, to Leominster Road and back out onto Route 140 to avoid going over the bridge that has a weight limit. "That's not a good thing," she said.

"Why can't you reroute trucks?" asked Gleason Road resident Loraine Brodeur. "Why can't they stay on 190 to Route 2? We have to pay for the bridge repairs so the trucks can use it?"

Rydant said Route 140 is a state route, eligible for federal aid but maintained locally. Trucks are permitted to use the road, he said. If a community wants a truck restriction they have to provide an alternative route.

Asked what the priorities were for road improvements, Rydant said CMRPC would make recommendations for a whole range of improvements and offer options for the Task Force and the community to consider. "It boils down to the local level. The board of selectmen usually make the decisions about roads along with the highway superintendent," he said.

"We also have our Road Advisory Committee," said O'Brien. "This project will exceed the available funding, but with good planning and design we may be able to phase in the improvements."

"If we're going to spend money we want to be sure we address the serious safety issues on the road," said Road Advisory Committee Chairman Larry Greene.

The project would eventually be put on the Transportation Improvement Program list and be eligible for federal aid funds, Rydant said. CMRPC intends to get the study done by 2010.

Safety officials weigh in on Route 140 changes

BY PHYLLIS BOOTH PBOOTH@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM

Princeton's public safety and highway officials met with Rich Rydant from Central Mass Regional Planning Commission on June 18 to offer their thoughts on safety improvements for Route 140.

"Anything done on that road would be an improvement," said Police Chief Charles Schmohl. "The sidewalks in the village are in terrible condition. It's a shame people have to step out into the road to get around. You can't push a baby carriage anymore like you could 10 years ago."

Schmohl referenced a fatal accident near Redemption Rock where there are significant dips in the roadway. Black ice develops very quickly down in the hollows, he said.

Several areas along the roadway have dips that are shaded and ice forms in the winter, said Fire Chief Ray LaPorte. He suggested opening up the canopy allowing the sunlight to help melt the ice. He expressed concern about the bridge in the village and the fire pond there.

"When we answer a fire call in the village we have to close the road down to access the water resource," he said. LaPorte said he doesn't want to take the dam away from the bridge structure. "We need that water. I'd like to see it expanded to hold more water for additional fire protection for the village."

Highway Superintendent Glenn Lyons cited failing drainage along the road, poor soils, flooding issues, the need to use a lot of salt in the winter, and difficulty plowing the roadway. "All the culverts were installed in the same era and they are all going," he said.

Asked about bicycles on the road, Schmohl said, "It's scary to see the maneuvers of vehicles around bikes on Route 140." He noted the increase in bike traffic with so many people practicing for the upcoming Longsjo race on July 4. "Near misses is what we're seeing."

Schmohl suggested putting a dam in Keys Brook farther upstream, perhaps at the Onion Patch, and having a place off the road where the fire department could pump water.

"My biggest concern is we want to replace the bridge regardless of the dam," said Larry Greene, chairman of the Road Advisory Committee.