

**Vermont Traffic Committee**  
**Minutes of Meeting Held**  
**September 15, 2020 (approved by email 9/17/2020)**

The Vermont Traffic Committee met on Tuesday September 15, 2020. Committee Chair Joe Flynn called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm on a virtual Microsoft Teams call. The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 pm.

**Attendees:**

Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation, Traffic Committee Chair  
Wanda Minoli, Commissioner of Motor Vehicles, Traffic Committee Member  
Lt. Tara Thomas, Delegate for Commissioner of Public Safety, Traffic Committee Member  
Sven Fedorow, AAG, Traffic Committee Legal Advisor

Ian Degutis, VTrans Traffic Operations Engineer, Traffic Committee Coordinator

Anne and Mike, Residents, East Middlebury  
Bob Kelley, Town of Derby  
Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator, East Montpelier  
Carl Etnier, Select Board Member, East Montpelier  
Caroline Korejko, Librarian, North Hero  
Dennis Percy, Fred's Energy, Derby  
Conrad Bellavance, Freds Energy, Derby  
Hailey Morgan, Reporter, NVU Lyndon  
Kathleen Ramsay, Town of Middlebury  
Marguerite Ladd, Town Administrator, Cambridge  
Timothy Page, Resident, East Middlebury  
Patty Helsingius, Resident, North Hero  
Peter Elwell, Town Manager, Brattleboro  
Tim Bourne, Selectboard Member, North Hero  
Tom Hanley, Chief of Police, Middlebury  
Daniel Williams, North Hero Resident  
Ben Joseph, Select Board and Planning Commission, North Hero

Marcos Miller, VTrans Traffic Operations  
Joe Kelly, VTrans Traffic Operations  
Stephanie Lemieux, Traffic Operations  
Kristin Driscoll, VTrans Traffic Operations  
Josh Taylor, VTrans Traffic Operations  
Erin Parizo, VTrans Traffic Design  
Matt Bogaczyk, VTrans Pavement Design  
Katherine Otto, VTrans Planning

## Agenda Items Discussed

- **Brattleboro US-5, Speed Limit:**

Mr. Degutis explained that the request was to review the speed limit on US-5 to the north of the Class-1 limits through the signalized corridor to the roundabout which is currently 40 mph. Mr. Degutis explained that the engineering study used tube counts to measure the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed to be between 34 mph and 40 mph. There is significant pedestrian usage in the areas well as vehicle turning movements. Due to these factors, Mr. Degutis explained Traffic Operations' recommendation is to reduce the speed limit to 35 mph. Bicycle lanes and pedestrian improvements will be coming soon through an upcoming VTrans project to further address concerns in the area. On the approach to the roundabout, the speed limit of 25 mph will be retained.

Peter Elwell, Brattleboro Town Manager, spoke in favor of the recommendation and appreciates the responsiveness of VTrans in regard to the recommendation as well as the upcoming VTrans pedestrian and bicycle project. Daniel Williams (resident) said that he is not in favor of lowering speed limit and that he was not aware of many crashes in the area. Lt. Thomas responded by stating that there has been a crash in that location every 7-10 days on average, mostly rear end collisions.

The Traffic Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- **Brattleboro VT-9, Speed Limit:**

Mr. Degutis explained that the request is on VT-9 extending from near Paradise Farm to the Class 1 limit. The existing speed limit is currently 40 mph and changes to 30 mph at the class 1 limits. Mr. Degutis explained that the engineering study used speed studies at different times of the year where speeds ranged from 42 mph to 48 mph. There are turn lanes, turning movements and pedestrian use of the shoulder. There is an upcoming paving project that may include some pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Mr. Degutis explained Traffic Operations' recommendation to reduce speed limit to 35 mph from Sunset Lake Road to the class 1 limits and retain a 40 mph speed limit through the rest of the study area. There is a distinct character change at the proposed 40/35 transition point which makes it a good location. Mr Degutis further explained that there are many houses in this area that are not visible from the road and the residents may want to walk or bike in this area.

Peter Elwell, Brattleboro Town Manager, voiced that the Town's initial request had been to lower the speed limit to 30 MPH but having reviewed the study he supported the recommendation as well. He again thanks the Agency for its responsiveness and informed the Committee that in this area there are a large number of low-income residential properties and also a number of commercial properties close by which creates a lot of pedestrian traffic.

The Traffic Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- **Cambridge VT-108, Speed Limit:**

Mr. Degutis explained that for this request there are two locations on VT-108. The first is near the Smugglers Notch Base Lodge where there is currently a 40 mph speed limit that becomes a 50 mph zone just before the Base Lodge parking, base lodge and curve. The request is to move the transition to the north so that the pedestrian crossing movements are in the 40 mph zone. Mr. Degutis explained that the engineering study found that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed is 45 mph in the summer and 40 mph in the winter. Based on geometry and crossing movements alone, moving

the transition approximately 0.2 miles to the north makes logical sense and this is more of a transition location adjustment than a change of speed limit. Traffic Operations' recommends moving the transition location in order to include the parking lot entrance where pedestrian crossing movements occur and the curve.

Lt. Thomas asked if there are plans for any other improvements in the area of the Smuggler's Notch Base Lodge for pedestrians due to the heavy foot traffic at parking area year-round. Mr. Degutis says Traffic Operations will be reviewing and updating the pedestrian crossing signs but there are not ADA accessible features and so it would not be appropriate to install a crosswalk in this location.

Mr. Degutis explained that the second location is further north as you approach Jeffersonville coming down the mountain. The speed limit is currently a 40 mph which changes to 35 mph near the Grist Mill Rd intersection, the speed limit then drops to 25 for a very short distance before a stop sign in the village. The town is requesting an extension the 25 mph zone. Mr. Degutis explained that the engineering study found that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile in this area was 35 mph but since the road is windy and narrow, a lower speed limit is reasonable. It is also not standard to transition to 25 just before stop sign. Traffic Operations' recommendation is to change both the 35 mph and 25 mph zones to become one 30 mph zone. Some other signing improvements may also be considered in the area.

Marguerite Ladd, the Cambridge Town Administrator, said that from looking at traffic data this appears appropriate and that Town is in favor of the recommendation.

Ms. Ladd asked to clarify if the speed limits in Jeffersonville beyond the stop sign would remain 25 or become 30 mph. Mr. Degutis clarified that the proposed 30 would only exist south of the Stop sign and the other portions of VT-108 in the village would remain 25 mph.

Lt. Thomas brought up the stop condition in the village and it was discussed that Traffic Operations would review the location of the stop ahead sign to see if any improvements could be made.

Both Cambridge proposals are consolidated into one vote and the Traffic Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendations.

- **Derby US-5, Speed Limit:**

Mr. Degutis explained that the request is a stretch of just over one mile on US-5, located north from 5A in the direction of Derby Line. The request is to reduce the speed limit from 50 mph to 30 mph and included a petition signed by local businesses in the area. Mr. Degutis explained that the engineering study shows that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed near Walt's Sales and Service was 49 mph and near Roger's Tires the speed was 53 mph. In the area are businesses and driveways but there is not a huge concentration. Mr. Degutis explained Traffic Operations' recommendation is to keep the current speed limits because there is good compliance and changing the speed limit will not change driver behavior but there will be a new warning sign installed. Mr. Degutis then explained that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile is the speed below which 85% of drivers are going, which eliminates the top 15 percent. The MUTCD says speed limits should be within 5 mph of 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed due to drivers driving at speeds that feel comfortable to them and, without strict enforcement, lowering the speed limit will not change behavior.

Dennis Percy (Fred's Propane) informed the Committee that he wants to add an addition to his business and, even though he will not be adding any additional traffic, he needed to complete a study through AOT which determined that because of the poor sight distance caused by a nearby hill he needs to move entrance. He then decided to start a petition to lower the speed limit (which

would reduce the necessary sight distance needed). Conrad Bellavance confirmed that they applied for an Act 250 and local permit which caused VTrans to review their entrance to Route 5. He stated that Nathan Covey (VTrans Permitting) said there is 370 feet of sight distance and there needs to be at least 425 feet of sight distance from the hill to the driveway. The options they were given are to remove hill elevation on Route 5 to increase line of sight or move their entrance but they cannot move the driveway due to wetland restrictions.

Secretary Flynn is aware of this but does not believe any AOT permits are holding him up and the sign improvements that will be installed soon (trucks entering) will suffice. Mr. Degutis has the same understanding that the sign should be adequate to approve the permit. Secretary Flynn agreed to assist if needed to ensure this issue is resolved so Mr. Percy and Mr. Bellavance can improve their business. Mr. Percy says if the signs suffice then they have no problem with the existing speed limit.

Bob Kelly then stated his concern with the area by Fred's because of poor sight distance, and Walt's Sales and Service which has a large open access used by many snowmobilers and large vehicles towing trailers. Stefanie Lemieux says that the sight distance appears adequate, but that Traffic Operations will look into whether further signage improvements are needed in the future. Kristin Driscoll explained the sign changes that will be made near the entrance to Fred's. The Traffic Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- **East Montpelier US-2, Speed Limit:**

Mr. Degutis explained that the Town's initial request was to create a reduced speed limit from Codling Road to near Mekklesen's RV dealership, and that after reviewing the location Traffic Operations confirmed with the Town they would be open to extending the study area through the village as well. The speed limit is currently 50 mph near Codling Road becoming 35 mph near Mekklesen's approaching the village.

Mr. Degutis explained Traffic Operations' recommendation is to reduce the speed limit through the village from 35 to 30 and create a 40 mph transition zone on each end, with the transition on the west end of the village lengthened to include Towne Hill Rd which is a high crash location. Since there has been significant roadway change in the last decade this is believed to be an appropriate recommendation.

Mr. Degutis explained that the engineering study shows the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed near Codling Rd is 54 mph which is why the recommendation will not extend that far.

Bruce Johnson, East Montpelier Town Manager, says feedback has been uniformly positive and this recommendation is exactly what they wanted to see. Carl Etnier is pleased with the recommendation especially since VTrans has improved upon the towns request. He also wanted to know the validity of the speed studies conducted during 2020 due to the decrease in traffic volumes as a result of many people working from home. Mr. Degutis explained that since they are trying to look at free flowing vehicles to get the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile, this reduces the concern of the decrease in volume, and that he had discussed this concern with his peers throughout New England before conducting the studies. Regarding crash history, VTrans looks at the past few years so a difference in the past few months will not affect the decision.

The Traffic Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- **Middlebury VT-116, Speed Limit:**

Mr. Degutis introduced the two Middlebury items together, and explained that although they are related they would be voted on separately as there are two different roads involved. He explained to the Committee that this request has been tabled a few times already and was first presented over a year ago. The request area is in the village of East Middlebury surrounding the 4 way stop on both VT-116 and VT-125. The town is requesting a review of the speed limits in the area.

Mr. Degutis explained that the engineering study shows that speed studies indicate the compliance is good but there were a few vehicles that accelerated vigorously from the stop which adds to the perception of speeding and that vehicles were generally within 5 mph of the posted speed limit at all study locations. There are also available pedestrian features along the road. Mr. Degutis explained Traffic Operations' recommendation is to retain speed limits because compliance with the existing speed limits is good.

Middlebury Police Chief Hanley found the same results in his own studies but notes that traffic volumes have increased in recent years especially from transient traffic which he believes is part of the problem, as routine enforcement is less likely to impact them. He states that there has also been a large increase in pedestrian use as well.

Timothy Paige voiced agreement with Chief Hanley, and stepped the Committee through a slideshow the community had developed. Due to the village becoming a through route there has been an overall increase in traffic and heavy truck traffic which affects the quality of life of the residents. He also wanted the Committee to know that the sidewalk is very close to the road and it is terrifying walking at night due to how close the vehicles are when they pass even when people are following the speed limit, which he says they often don't.

Anne would like the speed limit reduced to 25. Residents in the area are concerned with the high volumes and speeds especially in the 40 mph zone.

Mike would like the Committee to know that there are mailboxes and sidewalks on the other side of the street and elderly residents must cross the street to access them.

The Committee considered VT-116 first. Secretary Flynn inquired whether making the 40 mph zone north of the four-way stop a 35 mph for consistency with the south side of the four-way stop might improve driver behavior. Mr. Degutis agreed that it might be simpler for drivers to understand and obey, and shared that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed near the north end of the 40 mph zone was 45 mph.

Secretary Flynn proposed changing the speed limit from 40 mph to 35 mph on the northern approach to the intersection with VT-125 and changing the speed limit from 40 mph to 35 mph from the intersection with near the intersection Route 7, creating a continuous 35 mph zone on VT-116.

The Traffic Committee voted unanimously to approve Secretary Flynn's proposal, reducing both 40 mph zones on VT-116 to 35 mph.

- **Middlebury VT-125, Speed Limit:**

The Committee then considered VT-125 (Discussion of both routes is under previous item). Lt. Thomas suggested changing speed limit from 40 mph to 35 mph between Route 7 and the intersection with VT-116 to improve consistency, similar to what was just voted on for VT-116. Secretary Flynn proposed leaving the 40 mph speed limit near US-7 as it is and lowering the 35 mph speed limit on East Main St to 30 mph. Mr. Degutis suggested that minor adjustment may

be required on the east end of the village to ensure the transition location is appropriate for the tight curves near the bridge.

The Traffic Committee voted unanimously to accept Secretary Flynn's proposal to reduce the existing 35 mph zone on VT-125 to 30 mph, subject to minor adjustments on the east end as recommended by Traffic Operations. (Subsequent to the meeting, Traffic Operations reviewed the location and determined no change in transition location is necessary.)

- **North Hero US-2, Speed Limit:**

Mr. Degutis explained that this is a request that was tabled in the past. There was a pilot for a seasonal summertime 25 mph zone over a year ago and the Committee and North Hero Selectboard had subsequently discussed it and the Selectboard had gathered input from the community. The recommendation, which is supported by the Selectboard, is to change the speed limit in the village area to a year-round 30 mph with 40 mph transition zones, eliminating the existing 45 mph zone on the north. Secretary Flynn inquired about advisory 25 mph signs in the village. Mr. Degutis explained that advisory signs do not need formal approval from the Committee but that Traffic Operations plans to include Summer Recreation Area signs with advisory 25 mph speed limit plaques as well. Tim Bourne states that the select board is in favor of the changes as proposed.

Caroline Korejko, North Hero Librarian, inquired where the 30-40 transition would be located relative to the Town Library and whether it would be possible to move it so that vehicles are not accelerating as they pass the Library driveway. Ms. Driscoll explained where the transition would be located and that if it was shifted further out, the 40-50 transition location would not be in keeping with the roadway character at that location.

The Traffic Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

**Additional Agenda Items:**

- No other agenda items were planned or discussed.

Minutes prepared by Joshua Taylor, VTrans Traffic Operations, and submitted via Ian Degutis, Traffic Operations Engineer/Traffic Committee Coordinator