

New Hampshire Statewide Rest Area and Welcome Center Study
Public Information Meeting Report
Concord, NH
December 1, 2015

State Agency Staff attending: Assistant Commissioner Bill Cass and Study Manager Roger Appleton, NHDOT; Director of Travel and Tourism Development Victoria Cimino and Bureau Chief, Jennifer Codispoti, DRED.

Consultants attending: Jeffrey Maxtutis and Dirk Grotenhuis, AECOM; Carol Morris, Morris Communications.

The meeting opened at 5:30 pm.

Commissioner Bill Cass opened the meeting by explaining that the purpose of public meetings is to hear feedback that will inform strategy for the state's rest areas and welcome information centers. He also noted that while DOT owns the land and maintains the rest areas, they are managed by DRED. He introduced Director Victoria Cimino, who talked more about the partnership, which was formed in FY12 to improve visitor services and maximize the marketing opportunities to promote the state. She noted the annual budget for the centers is \$3.1 million.

Jeffrey Maxtutis provided an overview of the study, reiterating that the goal is to assess traveler uses and needs, identify needed improvements, and recommend the appropriate number, size and location of Rest Areas/Welcome information centers. He noted that the study had begun in January 2015 and data collection has included inventories, traffic and parking data, visitor counts, driver surveys, focus groups with tourism representatives and Legislators, along with input from the trucking industry. An evaluation of best practices in other states is also taking place.

Maxtutis then reviewed the upcoming meeting schedule and noted that the statewide system overall has over three million annual visitors, and this does not include the new Hooksett center.

He reviewed industry guidelines on the spacing of centers: there should be 60 miles or 1 hour between stopping opportunities. Based on this, I-89 and I-95 meet guidelines as does the south segment of I-93; the north segment does not meet guidelines.

Jennifer Codispoti then provided an overview of each of the centers in the local area: Canterbury, Sanbornton, Hooksett, Sutton, and Epsom, which is closed.

Maxtutis then talked about the driver survey results, noting they had captured information on trip purpose, reason for stopping and suggested improvements. He told

the group that there was little difference in responses in those three categories among the centers.

At this point meeting attendees were asked if they had comments or questions. A summary is below.

Closed Facilities

- Several people expressed concern with the fact that Epsom was closed, wanting to know why it had been closed and if it would open again. Commissioner Cass indicated the decision was based on factors such as which rest areas needed major maintenance, the number of visitors served and whether there were other nearby facilities for travelers, including private facilities.
- It was noted that the Epsom location is a gateway for the town and that it is an eyesore now. There was discussion of this during a recent visioning session the regional planning commission undertook for the town. Also discussed were the number of adjacent pullouts in the area, some of which are maintained by local people just to make their town look better.
- It was suggested that if the state will not consider reopening the rest area as a result of this study, the town would like to consider doing something else with the facility, privatizing it for example for commercial use. A selectman from Epsom requested that a discussion take place once the study is complete.
- Another suggestion was to use technology for security purposes, so that the expense of staffing this or other rest areas would be reduced.
- It was asked if traffic counts were available for Epsom; AECOM indicated that the average daily traffic volume on that section of Rte. 4 is approximately 14,000 vehicles.

Amenities/Services

- In response to a question about providing food service, Maxtutis explained that most of the state's rest areas were built partially with federal dollars in the 1960's and by federal statute, this means that they cannot offer services that compete with privately operated businesses (food, gas, etc.) Hooksett is the one exception.

Tourism

- An attendee with family in Vermont and Massachusetts talked about her experiences with the centers. She felt that Lebanon should be open year round because it is the first one that travelers see in New Hampshire southbound on I-89 and it would attract many skiers. She noted that rest areas in Vermont are beautiful and also have volunteer groups selling food. She believes that New

Hampshire should encourage travelers to stay in the rest areas longer by offering the same. She also noted that she and her husband had used the Antrim rest area extensively before it was closed.

Visitor Services

- Other suggestions included emphasizing that these are safe places to stop. Travelers should be encouraged to stop and use electronic devices, especially with the new hand's free state law. It was also made clear that other states use rest areas to highlight local businesses and economic development opportunities.

Miscellaneous

- It was also noted that Vermont has a rest area that showcases its sustainability in terms of energy use, including water recycling and a solar array. They have turned the rest area into an educational experience.
- Another attendee has been working on a Scenic Byway plan for the Lakes Region and wondered what opportunities could be shared. He wondered how some of the smaller rest areas that do not have facilities figure into this study. Cimino suggested that they could discuss this later in more detail.

The meeting closed at 6:30 pm.