

Date:	10/14/15	Time	9:30 AM	Project Number	60336743
Location:	7 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH, Kancamagus Conference Room				
Project Name	Statewide Rest Area and Welcome Center Study				
Regarding	Legislator Focus Group Meeting				

Attending

NH Legislators

Gene Chandler: Carroll, District 1
 Alan Cohen: Hillsborough, District 30
 Susan Ford: Grafton, District 3
 Frank Edelblut: Hillsborough, District 38
 Jeanie Forrester: Meredith, District 2
 Bill Kuch: Bow/Dunbarton, Merrimack, District 3
 Mark McConkey: Carroll, District 3
 Mario Ratzki: Merrimack, District 1
 Herb Richardson: Lancaster/Dalton, Coos, District 04
 Robert Theberge: Berlin/Coos, District 3
 Ken Weyler: Rockingham, District 13
 David Wood: Rockingham, District 21
 Jeff Woodburn: North Country/Dalton, District 1

NHDOT/DRED:

Roger Appleton
 Bill Cass
 Victoria Cimino
 Jennifer Codispoti
 Hilary Denoncourt
 Caleb Dobbins
 Kathleen Mulcahey-Hampson
 David Rodrigue
 Jeffrey Rose
 David Smith

Consultant Team:

Dirk Grotenhuis
 Jeff Maxtutis
 Carol Morris

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
 Bill Cass, NHDOT Acting Commissioner
 Jeffrey Rose, DRED Commissioner

2. STUDY OVERVIEW
 Jeff Maxtutis, AECOM

3. OPEN DISCUSSION

a. What do you hear from constituents, visitors, or the traveling public, regarding existing rest areas/welcome centers?

Closed WICS

- Can the Rumney facility be re-opened?
- Since Shelburne has closed, Gorham restaurants have reported issues with through-travelers using their rest rooms
- The Shelburne Inn has also reported that people stop to use their facilities
- Shelburne has high numbers of visitors and depends on tourism for economic support
- If Shelburne is not re-opened, the property should be sold as it is shabby and gives a bad impression to travelers entering the state
- Colebrook and Littleton are closed in the winter during a time of many visitors - Colebrook could be used by snowmobilers

- Antrim facility was well used before closing and was effective
- WIC at exit 6 in Nashua used to be a nice facility, now a DMV office
- There is an opportunity to provide new services at the abandoned facility on Route 4 in Epsom
- Tear down old facilities if they will not be re-opened, safety concerns, e.g. Shelburne.

Partnerships

- Investigate public/private partnerships
- Explore opportunities for revenue generation
- Begin developing discussions with local Chambers of Commerce where maintenance of facilities can be shared, need to make process of working together with the state easier
- The Chair of the Scenic Byways Committee wants to work with this group to find opportunities for WICs
- Hooksett privatization is great model
- Can WICs be added to NH State Liquor stores?
- Consider public/private partnerships located off the interstates

Trucking

- Truckers need the Shelburne facility for rest stops; trucks parking in smaller lots at fast food restaurants
- North County needs facilities, especially for truckers

Visitor Services

- Provide more information in French
- Welcome and Information Centers (WICs) should leave positive impression for visitors. Do not want to have over-flowing porta-toilets
- Consider short video in WICs promoting NH, this is a potential sales opportunity for the state
- Consider volunteers to help at facilities – it is done in other states
- Should have more consistent schedule and hours – earlier opening as many travelers start early
- Need professional staff to run facilities, not volunteers

Tourism

- Colebrook serves Canadian visitors who should be encouraged to stop and shop tax free in NH
- For every dollar spent on tourism, receive about \$5 spent in the state
*The correct return on investment is \$9.23

Amenities/Services

- Add food amenities, even if just more vending choices
- Facilities in other states have more amenities; Vermont puts NH to shame by comparison
- Look into providing free coffee sponsored by local groups, who then also sell muffins or doughnuts
- 80% of comments on facilities, staff and operations are favorable, but most people want more services

Location

- Would like a WIC on Route 3 at the MA border
- Look at new facility at the state border in Nashua. This is a natural place to sell our state amenities

Miscellaneous

- Need security for vending areas
- Would like to see all facilities opened
- Guilford, VT has a nice WIC
- The Vermont WICs give out New Hampshire maps on request
- WICs should be a top priority – they are or can be an economic driver
- Need to add value to the WICs
- Need to identify funding mechanisms to support what we have now first
- Would need to provide a cost-benefit analysis for any recommended new facilities
- DOT to provide lease arrangements for the Hooksett facilities to this group via Bill Cass
- No ADA auto door opener button at Hooksett – constituent complaint

b. What services or amenities could be offered to the existing WICs that would enhance the traveler or visitor experience?

- Provide WiFi
- Electric car charging – some hotels in the north, e.g., Mount Adams, Maine have fast charging stations.
 - Hooksett has five Tesla charging stations that are successful – often full
Tesla driving clubs travel in packs and chart out around charging locations
 - Have had struggles to get companies willing to provide universal charging stations (DOT comment)
- Sponsorship should be considered – companies in the past say they can't make the finances work
- General agreement from group that NH legislature should form a group to push on a federal level to help change the federal restriction for commercialization on interstates. Providing new facilities with commercial services would not be a conflict with local businesses
- NH should look to what VT is doing – Bennington a good mid-size example – run by volunteers

* VT Rest Areas are run by paid state employees.

c. Do you feel the state needs to better accommodate the needs of the trucking industry?

- Unanimous answer: yes
- Safety to motorists is a major concern
- Concern with long haul trucks and length of time driving
- Take down barriers at closed areas to allow trucks to park – do not need to open building
- Provide a place for trucks to stop in Shelburne

- Want truck drivers rested!
- Keep rest area locations and spacing in line with changing truck laws
- Consider pull-off areas for trucks
- Widen shoulders for trucks to pull off

d. Funding Trade-Offs: How do WIC services compare with other DOT-funded services, i.e., road and bridge maintenance

- Tourism is base of NH economy, WICs can promote state
- WICs can bring revenue – add to gas tax money
- Do not reduce funding for WICs
- WICs were not a priority in the past
- Concerns with anger when rest areas are closed
- Promote NH in bordering states and Canada by coordinating brochure and information sharing
- NHDOT's direct priority is roads and bridges, not buildings and tourism
- DRED needs to promote the WICs
- The Seacoast is an area with a large number of tourists on the way to Maine, need to increase priority and capture more tourists in NH
- WICs need to be open when people need them
- General consensus that WICs are a high priority to NH and can generate dollars, but it is understood that marketing is not a priority for DOT. Need to determine the right revenue sources to fund the marketing aspects of WICs and not just shift resources around
- Create a dedicated statewide fund for WICs
- Federal grant money should be used

e. Other

- A briefing on the final recommendations prior to public release was requested.