

PORTSMOUTH COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN
ELEMENT X – TRANSPORTATION

(Note to reader: Text printed in italics indicates more work needs to be done to the particular section where it appears. Effort has been made to outline topics and discussion points for sections in italics but the full text remains incomplete.)

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The following documents are incorporated by reference in this draft of the Portsmouth Comprehensive Community Plan:

- Comprehensive Community Plan – Town of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, Revised July, 2002
- Aquidneck Island Transportation Study, VHB for AIPC, 2011.
- West Side Master Plan, AIPC, 2000
- Aquidneck Island Bikeway – Interim Design Study, 2015

INTRODUCTION

The term transportation refers to the movement of people and goods from place to place. To accomplish this movement, the State, its municipalities and private enterprise have developed and maintain a network of facilities and infrastructure that accommodates multiple modes of travel, including streets and roadways, sidewalks, bike paths and travel lanes, bus stops and route corridors, ferry lines and rail service, all at a scale appropriate to each community. Maintaining safe and efficient access to this transportation network by all parties and at all levels is essential to the economic vitality and quality of life of Portsmouth.

The overall framework of this transportation element is (1) to align transportation goals with other aspects of the plan such as land use, economic development and housing, (2) to consider the varying transportation needs of all community members, and (3) to mitigate the public health and

safety impacts of our current and future transportation network. We accomplish this through three broad topics:

- How we manage and maintain our town-owned roadway network (See Transportation Goal 1);
- How we coordinate and cooperate with the State in the management and maintenance of their roadway network within our community (See Transportation Goal 2); and,
- How we achieve a well-balanced multi-modal transportation network for the varying needs of all our residents (See Transportation Goal 3).

Portsmouth's current Comprehensive Plan makes several points with regard to transportation that are as valid today as when the plan was revised and adopted in 2002.

First, because of (1) our dispersed rural/suburban geography, (2) our lack of a dense town center, (3) the dominance of two north-south state highways as principal arterials with minimal shoulders along most of the route, (3) sidewalks almost non-existent throughout the Portsmouth and (4) mass transit confined to the two state highways, automobile transportation is the dominant form of travel in our community and is likely to remain so in the foreseeable future. As such, addressing excessive traffic volumes, traffic safety and vehicular congestion and other impacts must be key components of Portsmouth's transportation planning (see Policies T-1.1, T-1.2 and T-1.3).

Second, most transportation planning in Portsmouth is often seen as something out of the Town's control. RIDOT controls the placement, design, construction and maintenance of all State roads in town. With nearly 23% of all the roadway surface in Portsmouth under state control, coordination and cooperation with the State is essential. Developing opportunities to present local needs to RIDOT must be an integral part of Portsmouth's transportation planning (See Policy T-2.1).

Third, despite the dominance of automobile transportation, a community that chooses to ignore the promotion of efficient mass transit puts citizens without ready access to an automobile at risk and degrades overall quality of life and economic vitality. The support and promotion of mass transit and alternate forms of transportation must be integrated into overall transportation planning (See Policy T-2.2 and T-3.1).

And lastly, movement of people and goods throughout Portsmouth does not exist in a vacuum. A large percentage of traffic in Portsmouth originates outside of our borders with destinations also outside our borders (*citation needed here*). Communities of the East Bay region (along with our State and Federal partners) must work together to define and solve common transportation problems (See section X below regarding the 2011 Aquidneck Island Transportation Study).

This element of the Comprehensive Plan will catalog existing conditions and planned improvements to our transportation network, discuss challenges and opportunities in developing well-balanced transportation systems in Portsmouth, reference in detail both the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the recommendations of the 2011 Aquidneck Island Transportation Study and set forth goals, policies and implementation actions in order to fulfill Portsmouth's vision for transportation in our community.

PORTSMOUTH'S TRANSPORTATION VISION

PORTSMOUTH WILL ENJOY A SAFE, EFFICIENT AND WELL-MAINTAINED MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK THAT INCREASES MOBILITY FOR ALL RESIDENTS, SUPPORTS THE GROWTH OF BUSINESS ACTIVITY, REDUCES NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, AND ENHANCES THE CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY.

THE TRANSPORTATION NETWORK – EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Roadway Network

Most north-south traffic in Portsmouth is borne by the two principal arterials: West Main Road (Route 114) and East Main Road (Route 138).

East Main Road is the major local artery, site of most retail/service business and adjacent to most of the residential areas. It runs from the Middletown Town Line to a ramp leading

onto Route 24 North at its intersection with Boyd's Lane. It has eight (8) signalized intersections.

Route 114, which includes Bristol Ferry Road and West Main Road, begins at the Mount Hope Bridge in Portsmouth and continues south to the Middletown Line. This segment of roadway is approximately 7.0 miles in length. The roadway allows four lanes for travel (two lanes northbound/two lanes southbound), the pavement is in good condition, and the posted speed limits (excluding school zones) are 35 miles per hour (MPH) on Bristol Ferry Road and 45 MPH on West Main Road. Route 114 carries substantial traffic volumes, ranging from an AADT of approximately 8,000 to its terminus at Bristol Ferry Road to 33,000 at the Middletown/Portsmouth town line. It has eight (8) signalized intersections. Much of the land abutting this roadway is undeveloped. The areas that are developed consist mainly of residential developments as well as two major commercial/industrial developments, Raytheon and the Hood and Little Harbor Marinas.

Burma Road (locally referred to as Burma Road, but more formally identified as Defense Highway by the Navy), which runs along the west coast parallel to West Main Road, begins in Portsmouth at Stringham Road, and continues south into Middletown. This is a two-lane roadway, and was recently repaved. The speed limit is 35 MPH throughout. The Portsmouth portion is approximately 2.5 miles in length. The majority of the land adjacent to the road is United States Navy property with limited development, including former Navy tank farms. The developed areas include the commercial/industrial (marine trades) area at the north end of Burma Road, and a public boat launch one mile south.

Minor Arterials in Portsmouth include Boyd's Lane, Sprague Street, Hedley Street and Union Street. They are characterized as:

- a) These form the network or backbone of cross-travel within a community.*
- b) May carry local bus routes.*
- c) Often carry traffic through a large portion of a city or town.*
- d) Often feed traffic from collectors into the principal arterials.*
- e) Preferably do not penetrate neighborhoods.*
- f) Provide the urban connections to rural collector roads.*
- g) May parallel a principal arterial and carry shorter length trips, connecting built-up areas and traffic generators in one or more towns.*
- h) May connect outlying smaller town centers and built-up areas with routes of higher classification.*
- i) May carry the heaviest volume cross-traffic between two principal arterials that closely parallel each other.*

Collector roads are characterized as:

- a) Are spaced at intervals to collect traffic from local streets and channel it to the arterial system. In built-up areas, often are the cross-streets along arterials that have signalized intersections.*
- b) Provide both land access service and traffic circulation to residential areas, as well as commercial and industrial areas. May carry traffic from a major industrial area or regional facility (i.e., institutional complex, landfill) to an arterial.*
- c) Almost always are fed by two or more local streets. The exception would be a street connecting an arterial to a transportation terminal (which is still feeding travelers, but from another mode).*
- d) May pass through neighborhoods.*

In Portsmouth, collector roads include Anthony Road, Bramans Lane, McCorrie Lane, Middle Road, Mill Lane, Park Avenue/Point Road, and Wapping Road.

All other roadways in town are classified “local”, and under town jurisdiction.

Traffic Data

Traffic Volumes & Accident Data

Traffic Counts and accident data will be presented in tabular and narrative format.

Traffic Generators & Commuting

Significant housing, shopping and employment centers will be presented in map and narrative form. Transportation choices and commuting patterns will be presented.

Recent & Planned Roadway Improvements

Portsmouth’s pavement improvement program will be discussed. Reference will be made to the STIP program addressed elsewhere in this element.

The Bicycle Network

This section will describe the existing on and off-road bicycle network with reference to maps included herein.

Recent & Planned Bicycle Network Improvements

Dating back to the West Side Master Plan’s support of the bike path recommendations of RIDOT’s Aquidneck Island Passenger Rail Study and AIPC’s FY06-07 regional TIP

application for construction of a bike path along the Newport Secondary rail corridor, bicycle network planning within Portsmouth’s boundaries has originated from several sources and has lacked a comprehensive approach. A partial list of past and proposed efforts include:

- *RIDOT’s Bike Map*
- *Bike Newport’s Newport County Bicycle Map*
- *Bicycle accommodations associated with road diet projects on State roads in Portsmouth*
- *VHB’s Aquidneck Island Bikeway Study to connect “gaps” in the contiguous Interim Bikeway*
- *The pedestrian/bicycle improvement recommendations in the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study*
- *AIPC’s STIP application for the “Melville Connector”*
- *RIDOT’s shared use signage & roadway stripping along Anthony Road & Boyd’s Lane*
- *AIPC’s Two-Bridges rail corridor bike path proposal*

This Transportation element proposes a local effort to review and coordinate all of these various projects and proposals in a consolidated fashion with the goal of providing better local input (Action T-3.1a).

The Pedestrian Network

This section will describe the existing sidewalk and walking path network with reference to maps included herein.

Recent & Planned Pedestrian Network Improvements

Sidewalk rehabilitation and new construction as part of RIDOT’s Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as well as the Aquidneck Land Trust’s Greenway Trail will be discussed.

The Public Transportation Network

RIPTA

RIPTA bus routes and schedules will be cataloged. Ridership data will be presented.

Ferry Service

Prudence Island ferry service, schedule and rates will be presented.

Rail

Current use of the Newport Secondary Corridor will be presented.

Recent & Planned Public Transportation Network Improvements

MAPS

Maps to accompany this Transportation Element (*still works in progress*) will include:

T1. A & B - Transportation Road Classification & Ownership Maps

Map displays the Federal Highway Administration's Approved Functional Classification System as provided in the RIDOT Roads dataset (RIDOTrds16). Road ownership is derived from information obtained in the aforementioned dataset and the Portsmouth DPW Pavement Management dataset produced by BETA Group, Inc.

T2 A & B – Transportation - Multimodal Maps

Map shows the multiple transportation networks throughout Town. Datasets contain RIPTA bus stops, routes and park and ride locations; ferry routes; railroad rights of way; roads; and RIDOT bike path information and bike roadway suitability network.

T3 A & B – Transportation – AITS Bike Routes

Map presents the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study's recommended bike routes and planned routes throughout Town.

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Reducing Auto-related Impacts to Quality of Life

Given Portsmouth will remain an auto-centric community for the foreseeable future:

Areas of the community that could benefit from the addition of bus or rail transit, and specifically areas where the existing or proposed density or the demographic characteristics of the area's population show a need for transit will be described and discussed.

Data points to be provided:

- *The percentage of the population that lives in a household without a private vehicle;*
- *The percentage of the population that use transit for commuting purposes; and*
- *The percentage of the population that bike or walk for commuting purposes.*

Areas of the municipality that are perceived to be unsafe for bicyclists and/or pedestrians in which the community has stated a desire for the use of such transportation modes will be described and discussed.

Traffic safety, improvements to high hazard intersections, and realistic alternatives to vehicle transportation in Portsmouth will be discussed.

The Roadway Jurisdiction Predicament

The fact that nearly ¼ of Portsmouth roadway surface is under the jurisdiction of either RIDOT or the US Navy will be discussed. Measures for better coordination between entities will be discussed.

Roadway Access, Congestion, and Traffic Flow

The fact that much of the traffic on the north-south routes in Portsmouth is through-traffic will be discussed.

Portsmouth's traffic sensitive district in our Zoning Ordinance will be discussed.

The need for improved traffic control devices, roadway design and traffic calming measures will be discussed.

Degraded air quality and other health issues due to traffic congestion will be discussed.

Local Roadway Maintenance

Portsmouth Roadway paving program and other maintenance measures will be discussed.

Ferry Service

The issues of providing continuous, affordable ferry service of critical need to a portion of Portsmouth's population, particularly a service provided by private enterprise under state jurisdiction and with a terminal in another community will be discussed. The issue of providing seasonal ferry service to Hog Island will be discussed.

Transportation & Land Use

The relationship between land use regulations and the transportation issues will be discussed.

THE STATE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP)

This section will describe the current STIP program, recent changes made to the program and how they relate to Portsmouth, a list of recent completed projects and a detailed list of current

RIDOT projects within Portsmouth along with scheduled construction dates. A wish list of potential projects to be submitted will be presented. (See Action T-2.1a)

THE AQUIDNECK ISLAND TRANSPORTATION STUDY (2011)

Led by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission and guided by a Technical Steering Committee made up of traffic engineers and transportation professionals, the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study was a two-year coordinated planning effort of many Island-wide residents, business owners, elected officials, municipal officials and staff, advocacy groups and state and federal agency representatives. The study followed a well-established planning process of evaluating existing conditions, projecting future needs, creating and evaluating a list of projects and policies and finally prioritizing recommendations for the improvement of all modes of transportation on the island.

Final recommendations from the study along with reference to relevant Policies or Implementation Actions within this Transportation Element are as follows:

Policy recommendations include:

- Promote safety as a top priority within all infrastructure projects and target educational activities to current and future travelers to improve safety for all transportation modes (Policy T-1.3);
- Continue to develop land use policies/Zoning Ordinances that support transit-oriented development with housing, retail, and jobs collocated with each other near transit (Policy T-1.2);
- Establish better communication and coordination between state and local agencies during development site plan review (Policy T-2.1);
- Expand the Island-wide bicycle network through bicycle suitability studies for local roads and development of bicycle plans for each municipality to increase the number of roads designated as suitable for bicycles linking key destinations to improve mobility (Policy T-3.1).

Transit Recommendations include:

- Encourage transit-oriented development;
- Provide additional bus service particularly on East and West Main Roads including the reestablishment of Flex Service (Action T-2.2a);
- Maintain the active Newport Secondary Railway Corridor and preserve the corridor as a contiguous right-of-way (Action T-3.1c);
- Enhance the transit experience by providing real-time bus information, providing branded bus shelters and sidewalk/crosswalk enhancements (Actions T2.1g, T2.2d);
- Encourage island employers to institute transit programs for employees;
- Create additional Park & Ride opportunities (Action T2.2c); and,
- Enhance ferry service including consideration of a ferry service between Melville and Newport (Action T-2.2e).

Pedestrian / Bicycle Improvement recommendations include:

- Construct the ten-mile Shoreline Bikeway (Burma Road) Shared Use Path;
- Connect the missing links between “suitable/most suitable” roads for bicycle travel;
- Construct a 6-mile off-road shared use path along East Main Road from Turnpike Avenue to Middletown Hall;
- Construct a 4-mile shared use path along West Main Road from Corys Land to Green Lane;
- Provide crosswalks with countdown timers at heavily crossed areas.

Roadway Improvement Recommendations:

- Coordinate Island traffic signals along major corridors such as East and West Main Roads (Action T-2.1d);
- Develop a program to maintain traffic signal equipment, collect new traffic volume data and regularly fine-tune timings (Action T-2.1d);
- Reconfigure the Mt. Hope Bridge/Boyd’s Lane/Bristol Ferry Road intersection (Action T-2.1d);

- Implement sight distance improvements at the Linden Land East Main Road intersection (Action T-2.1d);
- Realign Corys Lane with Hedley Street to eliminate one traffic signal , widen to provide left turn lanes (Action T-2.1d);
- Construct new Burma Road connections at the north and south ends (Action T-2.1e);
- Construct the traffic improvement project in Portsmouth locally known as the Town Center Project (Action T-2.1f).

GOALS, POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

As will be the practice throughout in this plan, each of the action items listed in this section are evaluated with the following guiding principles in mind. Does the action.....?

- Conserve, protect and enrich our historic landscape and cultural heritage.
- Embrace energy conservation and responsible stewardship of our natural environment.
- Provide a safe and healthy environment for current and future generations to live, work and play.
- Ensure a stable, long-term economic future by making Portsmouth a great place to live, work and conduct business.
- Improve community resilience in the face of a changing natural environment.
- Build on existing community strengths.
- Advance the wise use of technological innovation where appropriate.
- Minimize negative impacts on future generations.
- Foster civic engagement and community cohesion.

GOAL T - 1 - *Deliver a cost effective network of town-owned and maintained roadways that allows for the safe and efficient circulation of vehicular traffic throughout the Town.*

Policy T - 1.1

Ensure the community has a safe and well-maintained street and roadway network with high standards for roadway design and a program of continuous improvement in roadway safety and capacity.

Action T - 1.1a – Provide a safe town-owned roadway network through maintenance of infrastructure, consistent road surface conditions, and plowing and sanding of roads during and after winter storms.

Action T - 1.1b – Establish and maintain well-defined crosswalk pavement markings and enforce regulations for motorists to STOP for pedestrians in crosswalks on all town roads.

Action T - 1.1c – Institute a Pavement Management Program and continue to fund annual paving budgets in order to maintain an average Road Surface Rating (RSR) of 72.

Action T - 1.1d – Adopt a Mapped Streets Ordinance to establish ownership and roadway maintenance jurisdiction for all roads in Portsmouth.

Action T - 1.1e – Review traffic control device (e.g. stop signs, traffic calming devices, and pavement markings) placement and design policies to determine whether the town is in compliance with state and federal standards.

Action T - 1.1f – Continuously evaluate road salt and sand operations to minimize damage to the environment.

Action T - 1.1g – Undertake a program of roadway / drainage redesign and construction in critical areas of Portsmouth, particularly areas subject to storm water contamination, coastal flooding, and potential seal level rise.

Action T - 1.1h – In coordination with our fellow island municipalities and RIDOT, implement the recommendations of the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study where feasible and appropriate.

Policy T - 1.2

Advance land use regulations that improve vehicular traffic circulation, promote transportation safety and encourage alternative transportation options.

Action T - 1.2a – Review and update all Zoning Ordinance, Land Use and Subdivision regulations and Design Review Guidelines having to do with roadway design for procedural and regulatory consistency.

Action T - 1.2b – Amend Land Development & Subdivision regulations to require developers to cover the costs of a traffic study for projects that require more than 20 off-street parking spaces. (Vehicle trips rather than parking spaces?)

Action T – 1.2c – Review and if necessary, update the Traffic Sensitive Overlay District provisions in the Portsmouth Zoning Ordinance.

Action T - 1.2d – Inventory all intersections and vehicle access points on town-owned roads for compliance with clear view setback requirements in the zoning ordinance and land development regulations.

Action T - 1.2e – Amend Land Development & Subdivision regulations to prohibit new residential subdivisions having access off substandard private rights-of-way.

Action T – 1.2f – Amend Land Development & Subdivision regulations to require dual emergency access to all new residential subdivisions and to require the extension of all proposed dead end streets to connect with existing streets.

Action T – 1.2g – Amend Land Development & Subdivision regulations to require sidewalks in all new residential subdivisions requiring the construction of or extension of a street, unless infeasibility can be demonstrated.

Policy T- 1.3

Declare public safety to be the top priority in all matters having to do with transportation and circulation in Portsmouth.

Action T - 1.3a – Identify town-road intersections and other areas with high vehicular accident frequency and consider design changes or improvements to mitigate and improve safety.

*Action T - 1.3b – Establish and maintain additional well-defined crosswalk pavement markings as need is demonstrated and enforce regulations for motorists to STOP for pedestrians in crosswalks on all town roadways.

*Action T – 1.3c – Work with RIDOT to improve pedestrian safety with special emphasis crosswalks and pedestrian controlled traffic lights on all state roads in Portsmouth.

Action T - 1.3d – Collaborate with the State Police and RIDOT to implement an educational program in high schools to improve safety on both state highways and town-owned roadways.

GOAL T - 2 - Reach a high level of coordination and cooperation with RIDOT to improve the safety and efficiency of regional and local traffic circulation on State-owned roads within the borders of Portsmouth.

Policy T-2.1

Maintain a policy of coordination with RIDOT during all phases of planning, design, construction and maintenance on state transportation projects within the community.

Action T – 2.1a – Participate as an active partner in the development of the State’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for projects of local and regional significance.

*Action T – 2.1b – Work with RIDOT to accelerate major road maintenance and improvement programs within Portsmouth, particularly the north-south through traffic routes of East and West Main Roads.

Action T – 2.1c – Establish better communication and coordination between RIDOT and the Town Planning Department during development site plan reviews and RIDOT physical alteration permitting processes.

Action T – 2.1d – Collaborate with RIDOT in the design of left-turn lanes, road diets and other traffic calming and safety measures on all state-owned principal and minor arterial roadways in Portsmouth.

*Action T – 2.1e – Work with partners to consider enhancements to Defense Highway (Burma Road) to create as a viable alternative to East Main and West Main Roads north-south traffic flows.

Action T – 2.1f – Work closely with RIDOT and its design engineers on the redesign and construction of the Town Center traffic improvement project (East Main Road from Hedley Street to Turnpike Avenue).

Action T – 2.1g – Collaborate with RIDOT to prioritize enhanced roadway conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists in future transportation projects.

Action T – 2.1h – Provide recommendations to RIDOT regarding signage that will help to maintain adequate traffic flows through commercial areas in Portsmouth so as to support local economic activity.

Action T – 2.1i – Participate in all regional transportation planning efforts, including efforts by Statewide Planning, AIPC, RIDOT, RIPTA, RIBTA and others.

Policy T-2.2

Support the expansion of all aspects of state and local public transportation systems.

Action T – 2.2a – Pursue RIPTA to reinstate and promote its FLEX bus program of regularly scheduled local service in Portsmouth and the immediate surrounding area.

*Action T – 2.2b – Investigate the feasibility of establishing a town-subsidized local bus/trolley system for underserved areas of town and populations.

*Action T – 2.2c – Work with RIPTA and RIDOT to create and promote additional park-and-ride facilities in Portsmouth as need arises.

Action T – 2.2d – Work with RIPTA to install aesthetically compatible bus shelters at selected high usage locations in Portsmouth.

Action T – 2.2e – Participate with state and regional partners to establish regular ferry service with stops at selected locations in Portsmouth.

GOAL T - 3 - *Achieve a well-balanced multi-modal transportation system that reduces automobile dependency and is appropriately designed to produce safe and accessible facilities for all residents.*

*Policy T - 3.1

Encourage the use of alternate modes of travel.

Action T – 3.1a – Create a Town-wide pedestrian and bicycle Circulation Plan to serve as a basis for all multi-modal transportation system planning decisions.

*Action T – 3.1b – Identify existing town-owned paper streets and assess their potential as pedestrian walkways and/or bicycle paths.

*Action T – 3.1c – Work with state and regional partners to preserve the Newport Secondary railroad right-of-way for future public use.

*Action T – 3.1d – Work with the RIDOT to prioritize improvements to existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities and to include such facilities as part of any upgrade to state-owned roads in Portsmouth.

Action T – 3.1e – Develop a program to establish a network of safe walking paths and/or sidewalks on all collector roads within 1-1/2 miles of the High School, 1 mile of the Middle School and one half mile of the elementary schools.

*Action T – 3.1f – Work with RIDOT to provide sidewalks or a multi-mode path and crosswalks on East and West Main Roads where appropriate and feasible, with special attention to public transit stops.

Policy T-3.2

Ensure that reliable ferry service exists to and from Prudence Island on a year-round basis and seek ways to reestablish ferry service to Hog Island on a limited basis.

Action T – 3.2a – Work with the current ferry service provider and Prudence Island residents to address ridership concerns as they arise.

Action T – 3.2b – Investigate potential sites for a Prudence ferry landing on Aquidneck Island (Portsmouth).

Action T – 3.2c – Work with the Town of Bristol to ensure continued long-term access to Prudence Island ferry terminal facilities.

Action T – 3.2d – Work with our state and municipal partners to implement ferry service between Melville and Newport if it is determined to be economically viable.