

# Wiscasset bypass study lists 5 alternatives, but no favorite

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WISCASSET – The much-anticipated Wiscasset Route 1 Corridor Study Draft Environmental Impact Statement is in the hands of town officials, members of the Wiscasset Midcoast Task Force and at the Wiscasset Public Library.

The 200-page document offers something for everybody: In-depth analyses, color maps, appendixes and matrices. Everything, that is, except a recommended alternative route that would ease summertime congestion through the village downtown.

Prepared by the Maine Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, the book is the culmination of five years of study by traffic and environmental engineers. It's a major step in a years-long process out of which should emerge by the middle of next year a recommended route for the bypass.

The concept of a bypass that would reroute traffic around the downtown village area of Wiscasset to alleviate massive traffic congestion on Route 1 (Main Street) goes back to 1958. The current environmental impact study analyzes five alternate routes plus a "no-build" alternative. The latter would require only maintenance and minor changes in some areas, while the five alternatives would require major construction at greater cost.

The alternative routes all start at the same place, on Route 1 near the intersection with Old Bath Road. All the routes steer traffic north of the downtown and then across the Sheepscot River back to Route 1 in Edgecomb.

Five 'build' options

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The current draft environmental impact study does not recommend a single route, it merely analyzes the five routes being considered. The alternatives are as follows:

\* N2 is common to all five alternative routes. It begins on Route 1 near Old Bath Road and veers north and east to Gardiner Road (Route 27), approximately 1.4 miles.

\* N2/N8c turns south from the Gardiner Road and crosses Alna Road (Route 218) then continues across the Sheepscot River to Davis Island in Edgecomb, where it meets Route 1 near the MDOT maintenance facility. It will be approximately 3.2 miles long.

\* N2/N2h/N2f-1 from the eastern limit of N2 at Gardiner Road continues north and east crossing Alna Road, then over a portion of Polly Clark Cove to the Sheepscot River. It would require construction of a 1,600-foot bridge across the Sheepscot River, where it would join Route 1. It also would require building a total of three bridges and would total approximately 4 miles long.

\* N2/N2h/N2f-2 modifies N2/N2h/N2f-1 extending N2h east to Route 1 near the Atlantic Highway intersection in Edgecomb. Approximately 4.4 miles long.

\* N2/N2h continues north and east from Gardiner Road, crossing over Alna Road, following the southern tip of Clark Point to the Sheepscot River (requiring construction of a 2,200-foot-long bridge parallel to the railroad bridge), continuing south to connect with Route 1 east of the Atlantic Highway intersection. It is approximately 4.7 miles long.

\* N2/N2a/N2h continues further east and north from Gardiner Road crossing the northern portion of Polly Clark Cove, continue south and connect with Route 1 east of Atlantic Highway. It will be approximately 4.9 miles long.

'Build' is better

According to the Draft Environmental Impact Study, the no-build alternative would have an adverse impact on the area "by failing to remove traffic backups from Route 1 in Wiscasset and failing to address safety issues (at key intersections)." Traffic congestion in the downtown village is expected to worsen under the no-build alternative.

Building any of the five alternative routes, the report states, would result in "considerable beneficial effects" to the area.

"Each of the alternatives would have similar positive impacts to mobility and congestion in Wiscasset and Edgecomb," the report states. Seasonal traffic through the village area would be reduced "50 to 90 percent" depending on which alternative route is chosen.

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### Additional findings

#### Other highlights of the report:

\* By removing substantial numbers of automobiles from Main Street, there will be less conflict between vehicles and pedestrian traffic and make it easier for emergency vehicles to move freely through town.

\* Every alternative route except the no-build alternative would displace some businesses and residences in Wiscasset and/or Edgecomb, ranging from 33 residences and 15 commercial entities for alternative N2/N2h/N2f-2 to 25 residences and 12 commercial businesses for alternative N2/N8c.

\* Construction costs range from \$1.1 million if no alternative is built but minor interchange modifications are made, to \$79.1 million for alternative N2/N8c.

\* The impact on fresh water wetlands would range from 0.5 acres if no new routes are built to between 5.7 and 8.9 acres.

\* According to federal regulations, property owners will receive "just compensation" for their properties and the right to be present during the property's appraisal. The Maine Department of Transportation would make a written offer to the property owner, who would have available an appeal process if he or she felt the offer was not fair.

\* Construction of any of the alternative routes would create "excess earthen material" that would need disposal. The amount ranges from more than 206,000 cubic yards to about 73,000 cubic yards.

Carol Morris, operator of Carol Morris Communications, a public relations firm hired by the Maine Department of Transportation, said the next step in the process is to gather public comments.

"The next step is a six-week public comment period," she said in a telephone interview. "We'll have public meetings between Oct. 26 and Dec. 21 to get as much input as we can, then it goes back for any changes. The final Environmental Impact Statement I would say would be out by next spring."

No definite date has been set for the first public meeting, Morris said.

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