

TRANSPORTATION

A component of the NEEDHAM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Prepared for the
Needham Planning Board

Based upon technical studies performed by the
Central Transportation Planning Staff for the
Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization

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BACKGROUND

Fortunate timing is allowing integrated planning for the largest transportation change in the prospect for this sub-region, the Route 128 “Add-A-Lane” project, critically including the proposed Kendrick Street interchange, and planning for implementation of the approved concept and zoning for the New England Business Center and nearby properties. The planned expansion of development in that area will result in increased traffic demands, for which the planned addition of capacity to Route 128 and the addition of an interchange at Kendrick Street were judged to be of major importance. In particular, that interchange would provide much-needed relief to traffic at the Highland Avenue interchange to the north, and relief to traffic on Highland Avenue itself.

The Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) has conducted a major study of alternatives for the Kendrick Street interchange and its configuration, ranging from “no-build” to a full diamond interchange plus collector/distributor roads along Route 128. Impacts on traffic operations, cut-through traffic, traffic safety, access/egress, wetlands, economic development, right-of-way, visual, and cost were prepared and reported¹. Choice among those alternatives has yet to be made.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ELEMENTS

That CTPS study allows consideration of how choice among those alternatives relates to the Housing, Economic Development, and Open Space and Recreation elements of the Needham Community Development Plan. In brief summary, these are the major observations.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Needham’s economic development planning hinges upon the successful implementation of the changes approved for the New England Business Center and nearby areas. Success in achieving that is importantly related to adequacy of access. With the “no build” choice for the interchange the feasibility of accommodating another 2.5 million square feet of development there would be in serious doubt. From the perspective of economic development, the only choices worthy of consideration are the others, 1 through 7.

Alternative 6, the full diamond interchange with collector/distributor roads along 128, provides the highest evaluation among the alternatives for traffic operations improvements, avoidance of cut-through traffic, safety, and access/egress accommodation, all important for economic development. The only negative from this perspective is the necessity of rather small land takings at Kendrick Street from the area designated for commercial development. Clearly from the economic development perspective Alternative 6 is on balance the most preferable.

¹ Central Transportation Planning Staff, *Potential I-95 (Route 128) – Kendrick Street Interchange, Needham, Massachusetts*, for the Boston MPO, December, 2003.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

All of the “build” alternatives entail some impact upon wetlands. A full diamond interchange adds to those impacts to some extent, as does having collector/distributor roads alongside Route 128. As a result, Alternative 6 apparently would have the highest wetland impact of the alternatives, while Alternative 1, a half-diamond interchange only, apparently would have the least impact. CTPS notes that wetlands replication areas will be created within the Highland Avenue interchange and at crossings of the Charles River. The extent of these wetlands impacts is not quantified in the available materials.

From the perspective of the Open Space and Recreation element it is clear that there would be a preference for Alternative 1 over Alternative 6, but how heavily that should be weighed in light of the unstated scale of impacts and the assured mitigations is not clear.

HOUSING

Arguments against housing efforts consistently include concerns over traffic and concerns over the fiscal capacity of the community to accommodate the changes entailed. To the extent that Alternative 6 reduces congestion within the Town and facilitates fiscally-positive development within the New England Business Center it indirectly serves the housing objectives cited in that element. The original planning for the Wexford/Charles Street district contemplated multi-family residential use as well as commercial uses, although the current zoning would not accommodate that. Alternative 6 would better facilitate that than would any of the others.

ACTION STRATEGY

The key action for the Town at this point is to balance the considerations involved in the Kendrick Street/128 choices and to express the community’s preferences to the Metropolitan Planning Agency. The Board of Selectmen has done just that, conveying its preference for Alternative 6 in a strong letter to the CTPS on June 10, 2003².

Accordingly, to the extent that the Housing and Economic Development elements are affected by choice among these Kendrick Street alternatives they have been shaped to take advantage of that major capital investment in the event that it occurs.

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² Letter to Arnold Soolman, CTPS Director from the Needham Board of Selectmen “Re: CTPS Project No. 53212 Needham/Newton Traffic Impact Study,” June 10, 2003.

