



Memo

From the Department of Public Works

To: Colchester Selectboard
From: Bryan K. Osborne, Director of Public Works
Peter Hull, Acting Chief of Police
Date: October 17, 2023
Re: U.S. Route 2 and Clay Point Road Intersection

Issue: Shall the Colchester Selectboard, authorize the Selectboard Chair, to sign and submit a letter to the Vermont Agency of Transportation, requesting that they consider further reductions to the speed limit on U.S. Route 2 in the area of Clay Point Road, and, advance a series of short, medium, and long-term safety improvements to the U.S. Route 2 and Clay Point Road intersection?

Background: The Town of Colchester, and its citizens, continue to have significant concerns regarding the overall safety of the U.S. Route 2 and Clay Point Road intersection. U.S. Route 2 is owned and maintained by the State of Vermont and is designated as a limited access highway thus allowing for a higher speed limit than the 50-mph maximum on most state roads. While the Vermont State Traffic Committee officially lowered the U.S. Route 2 speed limit in 2022 from 55-mph to 50-mph, and the Town has advanced the installation of advanced stop condition warning signs on the north and south approaches of Clay Point Road, problems and concerns continue to persist at this intersection.

In reviewing the crash history from 2018 to 2023, there have been a total of eleven crashes at this intersection. While this is not a significant number of crashes over this time frame, the number of crashes is far less important than the severity of the crashes. From these eleven crashes, there have been a total of four accidents resulting in injuries, and two accidents resulting in a fatality. Viewed another way, if there is an accident at this location, there is a 55% chance there will be an injury or fatality resulting from the accident.

This is consistent with the observation that this section of roadway is very unforgiving. In reviewing the crash diagrams developed by the Vermont Agency of Transportation in 2022, the majority of the injuries included operator comments stating that they never saw the approaching vehicles on U.S Route 2 that they ultimately collided with.

Navigating the side street approaches to this intersection is an exercise of cognitive processing, motor coordination, and decision making. The cognitive demand to safely navigate this intersection is far too high for most average drivers. For example, a vehicle operator entering U.S. Route 2 from Clay Point Road is required to gather and process information from up to six different movements by other vehicles, and make a split-second decision on whether to enter U.S. Route 2 with vehicles traveling at near interstate speeds.

It is reasonable to conclude that the severity of injuries, including fatalities, could be significantly reduced or eliminated if vehicles were traveling at lower speeds along U.S. Route 2. In 2022, the Town submitted a request to the Vermont Agency of Transportation to lower the speed limit along this section of U.S. Route 2 from 55 mph to 40 mph. In response to this request, the Vermont State Traffic Committee lowered the speed limit from 55 mph to 50 mph.

Staff Recommendation: It is recommended that the Colchester Selectboard, authorize the Selectboard Chair, to sign and submit a letter to the Vermont Agency of Transportation, requesting that they consider further reductions to the speed limit on U.S. Route 2 in the area of Clay Point Road, and, advance a series of short, medium, and long-term safety improvements to the U.S. Route 2 and Clay Point Road intersection.

Motion: The Colchester Selectboard, moves to authorize the Selectboard Chair, to sign and submit a letter to the Vermont Agency of Transportation, requesting that they consider further reductions to the speed limit on U.S. Route 2 in the area of Clay Point Road, and, advance a series of short, medium, and long-term safety improvements to the U.S. Route 2 and Clay Point Road intersection, as per a memo dated October 17, 2023 from the Director of Public Works, Bryan Osborne, and the Acting Chief of Police, Peter Hull.



781 Blakely Road • Colchester, Vermont • 05446 • 802.264.5500

www.colchestervt.gov

October 24, 2023

Ms. Ann Gammell, PE
Vermont Agency of Transportation
Highway Division Director/Chief Engineer
219 N. Main Street
Barre, Vt. 05641

Re: U.S. Route 2 and Clay Point Road intersection, Colchester, Vermont

Dear Ms. Gammell;

As you know, in 2022, the Town submitted a request to the Agency to consider lowering the speed limit on U.S. Route 2 near the intersection of Clay Point Road, from 55 mph to 40 mph. In response, the Vermont State Traffic Committee lowered the speed limit to 50 mph. While we are deeply appreciative of this, the Town of Colchester, and its citizens, continue to have significant concerns regarding the overall safety of the U.S. Route 2 and Clay Point Road intersection. We are hopeful that VTrans can continue working with the Town of Colchester to improve the overall safety of this area for all travelers.

In reviewing the crash history from 2018 to 2023, there have been a total of eleven crashes at this intersection. While this is not a significant number of crashes over this time frame, the number of crashes is far less important than the severity of the crashes. From these eleven crashes, there have been a total of four accidents resulting in injuries, and two accidents resulting in a fatality. Viewed another way, if there is an accident at this location, there is a 55% chance there will be an injury or fatality resulting from the accident.

This is consistent with our observation that this section of roadway is very unforgiving. In reviewing the crash diagrams developed by the Vermont Agency of Transportation in 2022, the majority of the injuries included operator comments stating that they never saw the approaching vehicles on U.S. Route 2 that they ultimately collided with.

Navigating the side street approaches to this intersection is an exercise of cognitive processing, motor coordination, and decision making. The cognitive demand to safely navigate this intersection is far too high for most average drivers. For example, a vehicle operator entering U.S. Route 2 from Clay Point Road is required to gather and process information from up to six different movements by other vehicles, and make a split-second decision on whether to enter U.S. Route 2 with vehicles traveling at near interstate speeds.

It is reasonable to conclude that the severity of injuries, including fatalities, could be significantly reduced or eliminated if vehicles were traveling at lower speeds along U.S. Route 2. We therefore are formally requesting that the State of Vermont consider further reductions to the speed limit in this area. We are also requesting that VTrans consider engaging collaboratively with the Town of Colchester on a series of short, medium, and long-term safety improvement options to improve the overall safety of this intersection for all travelers. These include the following;

Safety Improvement Options, (Town of Colchester)

Short Term Options (0-3 Years)

- Collect input from residents and Town staff, (completed)
- Install advance warning signs for stop signs on Clay Point Road, (completed)
- Enlarge stop signs on Clay Point Road
- Install solar powered flashing red beacons above stop signs on Clay Point Road
- Install splitter islands on Clay Point Road approaches

Medium Term Options (3-5 Years)

- Work in support with CCRPC/VTrans on a scoping study of the intersection to evaluate future configurations including a signalized intersection and a roundabout.

Long Term Options (5-10 Years)

- Work in support of CCRPC/VTrans on implementation of scoping study's preferred alternatives.

Safety Improvement Options, (VTrans)

Short Term Options (0-3 Years)

- Install dynamic warning signs on US-2 for when vehicles are stopped on Clay Point similar to what exists for the US-2/Bear Trap Road intersection.
- Extend edge-line and centerline rumble strips on US 2 approaches up to the intersection as much as possible.
- Install optical speed bars on US 2 approaches to slow vehicles.
- Install guard rails around the jug-handle islands.

- Install an overhead flashing beacon or beacons that flash yellow for US-2 traffic and red for Clay Point Road traffic.
- Begin scoping study of the intersection to evaluate future configurations including a signalized intersection and a roundabout.

Medium Term Options (3-5 Years)

- Continue working with the Town and the CCRPC on a scoping study of the intersection to evaluate future configurations including a signalized intersection and a roundabout.

Long Term Options (3-5 Years)

- Implement scoping study's preferred alternative.

We thank you for your consideration of our requests. We also want to express our sincere appreciation for your overall efforts along this important corridor, including both the Exit 17 Interchange Project, and the planned Park and Ride Facility. Perhaps there may be some efficiencies in combining some of the requested improvements along with these other important projects. Please feel free to reach out to our Public Works Director, Bryan Osborne, bosborne@colchestervt.gov, 802-265-5619, or our Acting Police Chief, Peter Hull, peter.hull@colchesterpdvt.org, 802-264-5541 as needed.

Sincerely,

Pam Loranger
Colchester Selectboard Chair

Cc: Colchester Representatives and Senator Mazza
Michele Boomhower, Director of Policy, Planning and Intermodal Development
Robert M. White, Project Delivery Bureau Director
Josh Schultz, Operations and Safety Bureau Manager
Ian Degutis, State Traffic Engineer
Eleni Churchill, Transportation Program Manager, CCRPC