



**MIDDLETOWN**  
Rhode Island

**TOWN ADMINISTRATOR**

**TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN**

350 East Main Road, Middletown, RI 02842

(401) 842-6500 | MiddletownRI.com

To: Members of Middletown Town Council

From: Shawn J. Brown, Town Administrator

Date: March 21, 2024

Re: Letter from RIDOT regarding East Main Road Project

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Robert Rocchio, Chief Engineer of the RI Department of Transportation, sent a letter dated March 14 in response to news stories that the Middletown Town Council was considering a road diet on East Main Road north of Wyatt Road in Middletown. (Letter attached, along with the report by RIDOT consulting engineer VHB.)

According to Rocchio, neither RIDOT nor their consulting engineers VHB have recommended a road diet, and that RIDOT has concerns about implementing a road diet on East Main Road.

Rocchio would like the Town Council to clarify their preference for the improvements to this stretch of East Main Road, whether for a four lane configuration (current project plans) or for a three lane road diet. RIDOT needs this information by April 19, 2024 in order to proceed with the construction project.



Department of Transportation  
Two Capitol Hill  
Providence, RI 02903

Office 401-222-2450  
Fax 401-222-3905

March 14, 2024

Shawn J. Brown, Administrator  
Town of Middletown  
350 East Main Road  
Middletown, RI 02842

Dear Mr. Brown,

In accordance with recent news articles, there appears to be a misunderstanding regarding the Rhode Island Department of Transportation's involvement with any road diet proposal on East Main Road. Just for clarification, we provided at the request from the Town, a memorandum from VHB dated July 28, 2023 that included pros and cons to consider regarding a road diet on East Main Road, north of Wyatt Road, in the Town of Middletown. At no point in the memorandum or through discussions with the Town was the road diet recommended by VHB or RIDOT. We have subsequently requested that VHB update their memo to include a Conclusion and Recommendations section. Both the updated and original memorandums are attached to this letter. RIDOT has concerns about implementing a road diet on East Main Road based on the information provided in the memorandums.

As we move forward with our East Main Road resurfacing project, we will need to know within the next month whether the Town wants us to proceed with implementing a three-lane road diet as part of this project set to begin construction this summer. Our current construction plans developed in conjunction with and approval from the Town Manager and Town DPW have a four-lane configuration. RIDOT had previously advised the Town in the July 28, 2023 memo from VHB that there could be adverse impacts to implementing a road diet here, including the following:

- Added delay and congestion especially during the summer peak season (Average 20 MPH speeds along the corridor and 10 MPH at lane reduction points).
- Very difficult to pull out of unsignalized side streets and driveways due to significantly less gaps in traffic.
- The vehicle queue is expected to spill back into the Mitchell's Lane intersection in the southbound direction and to Wyatt Road in the northbound direction during the summer peak season.

We need confirmation from the Town and Town Council to modify our current construction plans to accommodate a road diet, so our current project is not delayed. The Resurfacing of this section of East Main Road is currently advertised, and if we do not hear from the Town, we will proceed as designed with the four-lane configuration. Please provide us with a decision by April 19, 2024. We further recommend the Town consider public comments within its road diet deliberations.

Sincerely,

Robert Rocchio  
Chief Engineer  
Rhode Island Department of Transportation

cc: Middletown Town Council  
Cotter, Davis, DeSimone, Fissette, McCarthy, Pristawa, Raymond, Soderlund; Director's Office file; Town file (all w/ attachments)



To: Sean Raymond, P.E.  
Managing Engineer  
Office of Safety  
Rhode Island Department of  
Transportation

Date: March 13, 2024

## Memorandum

Project #: 72700.05

From: VHB

Re: Road Diet: East Main Road from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Drive  
Middletown, RI

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VHB has completed a feasibility evaluation of a road diet along East Main Road in Middletown, RI. The road diet consists of converting the existing narrowed four lanes roadway between Mitchell's Lane and Wyatt Drive to three lanes roadway with one through lane in each direction and a two way left turn lane (TWLTL). The evaluation assumptions and results are provided below.

- Based on available traffic counts, the Summer months traffic volumes are historically 20% higher than the Spring months. Analysis included both the Spring and Summer conditions.
- The daily traffic volumes along East Main Road are approximately 17,500 vehicles per day during the Spring and approximately 21,500 vehicles per day during the Summer.
- FHWA advises that roadways with average daily traffic volumes of 20,000 vehicles or less may be good candidates for road diet.
- The peak hour traffic volumes in the southbound direction are approximately 1350 vehicles in the Spring and 1600 vehicles in the Summer. In the northbound direction, the peak hour traffic volumes are 1250 vehicles in the Spring and 1500 vehicles in the Summer.
- FHWA advises the feasibility of a road diet is less likely above 875 vehicles per direction during the peak hour and expect reduced arterial LOS during the peak period. In cases in Rhode Island where the peak hour directional volume has exceeded this recommended threshold, detailed VISSIM analysis was performed to view the delays and travel times associated with the road diet.
- Today, it takes about 2-3 minutes to travel to/from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Road and takes about 2-3 minutes to travel to/from Oliphant Lane and Turner Road.
- With the proposed road diet, it is expected that additional delay would be added. Please see the speed maps and travel times summary graphics below.
  - Spring Conditions: The travel time from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Road is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 4-5 minutes during the AM peak hour. The travel time from Turner Road to Oliphant Lane is also expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 5-6 minutes.
  - Summer Conditions: The travel time from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Road is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 5-6 minutes during the AM peak hour. The travel time from Turner Road to Oliphant Lane is also expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 6-10 minutes. The Travel time from Wyatt Road to Mitchell's Lane is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 4-5 minutes.
- With the increased in traffic volumes in the Summer, the road diet (reducing the number of through lanes from two to one in each direction) would create vehicle queue to spill back to Mitchell's Lane in the southbound direction and queue spill back to Wyatt Road in the northbound direction during the peak hour periods. With the steady flow on traffic in the northbound traffic in one lane at the intersection with Turner Road, the vehicles turning in and out of Turner Road will have difficulty finding gap in the traffic and expected to create long queue on Turner Road.

In addition to the above traffic operations, here are some of the pros and cons to consider.

**Pros:**

- With the reduced number of lanes from four to three and the reduced speed, bicyclists and pedestrians would be more comfortable and feel safer to cross and travel along East Main Road.
- The addition of a TWLTL will improve operations for through vehicles by removing turning vehicle from the through lane and reducing the uncertainty it causes.

**Cons:**

- Added delay and congestion especially during the Summer peak season.
- The vehicle queue is expected to spill back into Mitchell's Lane intersection in the southbound direction and to Wyatt Road in the northbound direction during the Summer peak season.
- With the increased in delay with the road diet, motorists may shift to an already congested West Main Road, especially due the Summer.

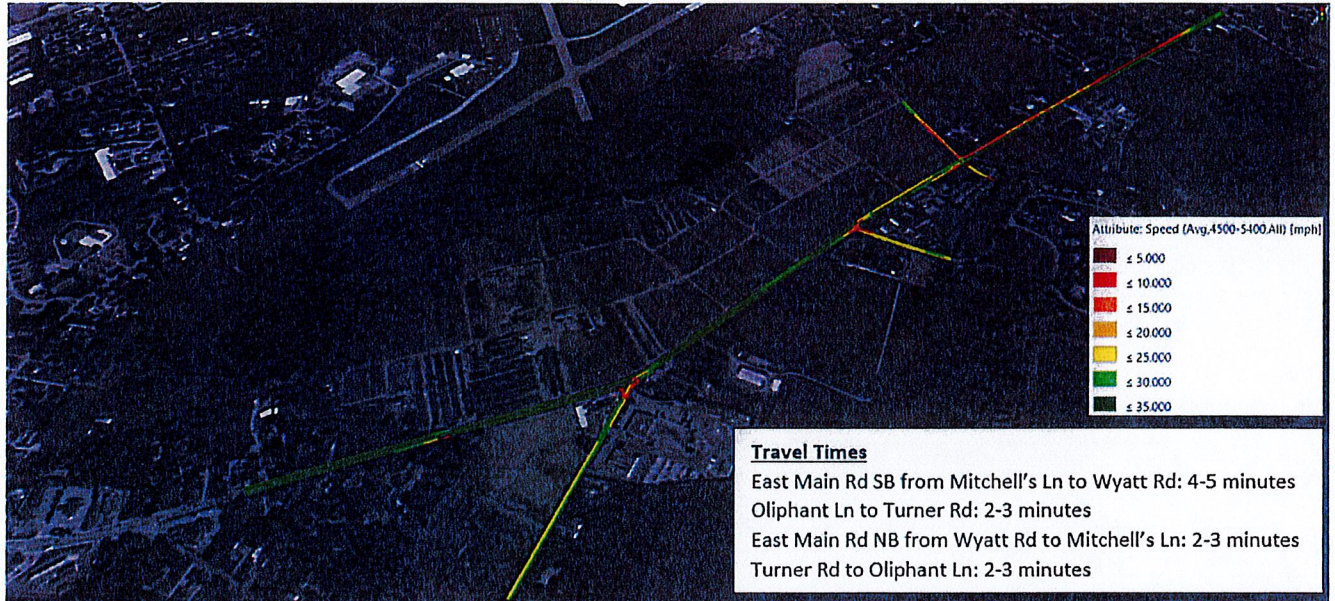
**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the above assumptions and analysis, there would be trade-offs between adding traffic delay to the corridor in exchange for slower/safer speed for all modes of traffic with the implementation of the road diet. Because of the seasonal increase in traffic during the Summer, the average daily traffic volumes along East Main Road are approximately 21,500 vehicles, slightly above the recommended volume threshold of 20,000 vehicles from FHWA. The directional peak hours volumes ranging between 1,250 and 1,600 vehicles also exceed the recommended volume threshold of 875 vehicles from FHWA.

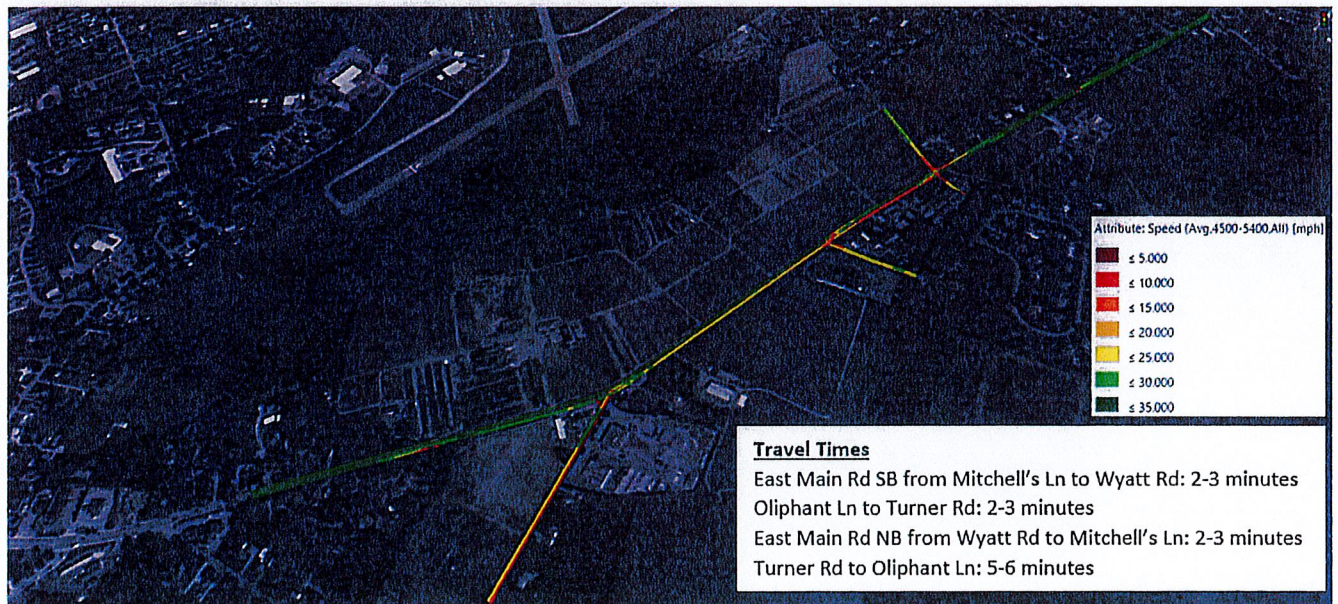
The travel time from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Road is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 5-6 minutes during the AM peak hour. The travel time from Turner Road to Oliphant Lane is also expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 6-10 minutes. The Travel time from Wyatt Road to Mitchell's Lane is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 4-5 minutes. It is very likely that motorists will shift to West Main Road which is also congested.

Based on previous road diets projects implemented in Rhode Island, this candidate segment along East Main Road in Middletown is on the high end of the direction peak hour volume threshold and would recommend not be pursued by RIDOT as part of the Road Diet Program. If the Town of Middletown would want to pursue the road diet, it is recommended that additional traffic (both vehicular and pedestrian), safety analysis, and public outreach be conducted and expanded to include the impacts along East Main Road and West Main Road.

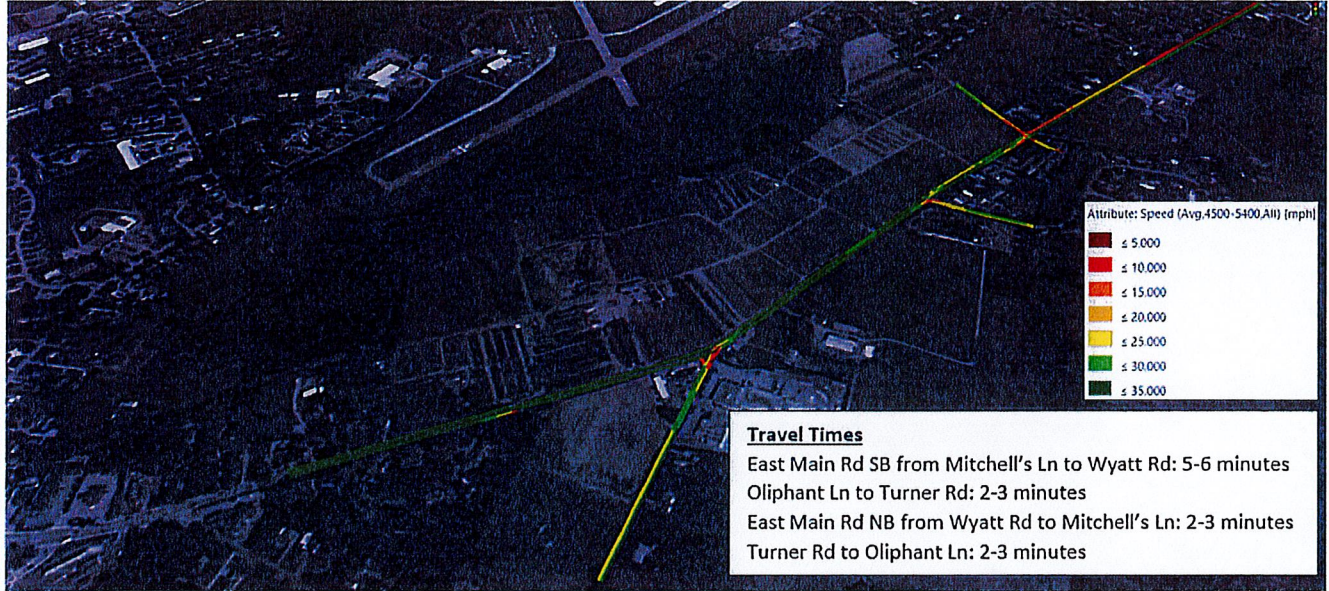
### Projected AM Peak Hour Speed during the Spring



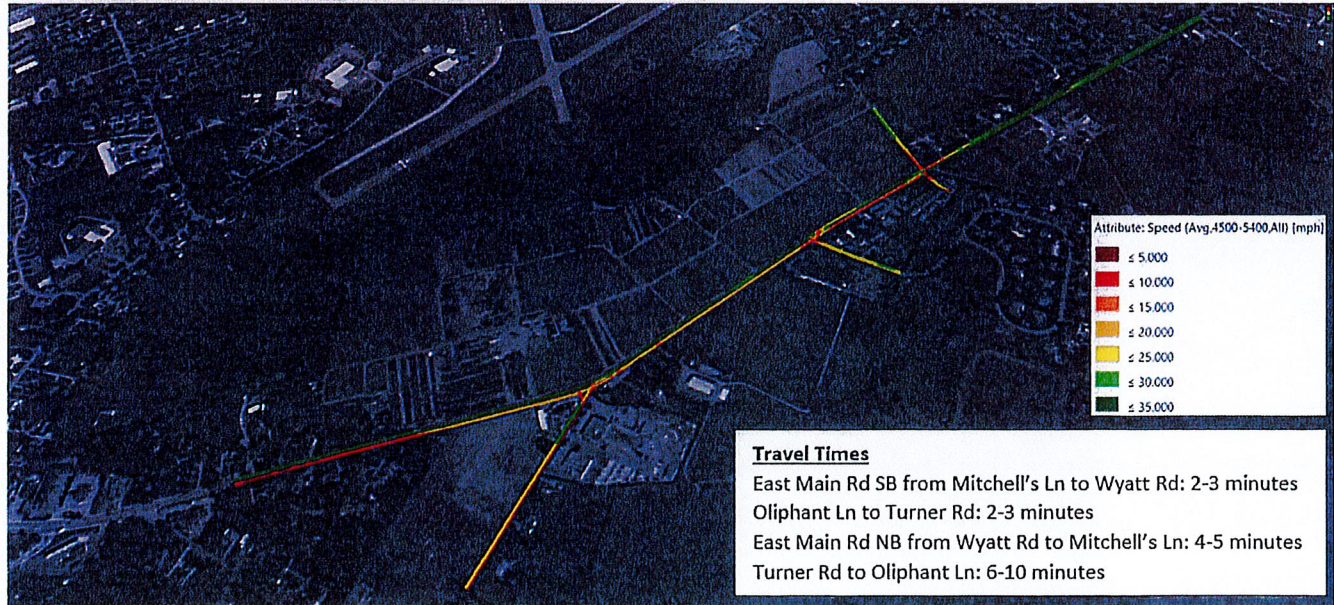
### Projected PM Peak Hour Speed during the Spring



### Projected AM Peak Hour Speed during the Summer



### Projected PM Peak Hour Speed during the Summer





## Memorandum

To: Sean Raymond, P.E.  
Managing Engineer  
Office of Safety  
Rhode Island Department of  
Transportation

Date: July 28, 2023

Project #: 72700.05

From: Amphone Soupharath  
VHB

Re: Road Diet: East Main Road from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Drive  
Middletown, RI

VHB has completed a feasibility evaluation of a road diet along East Main Road in Middletown, RI. The road diet consists of converting the existing narrowed four lanes roadway between Mitchell's Lane and Wyatt Drive to three lanes roadway with one through lane in each direction and a two way left turn lane (TWLTL). The evaluation assumptions and results are provided below.

- Based on available traffic counts, Summer (July) traffic volumes are historically 20% higher than the Spring (March). Analysis included both the Spring (baseline) and Summer conditions (highest volumes).
- The peak hour traffic volumes in the southbound direction are approximately 1350 vehicles in the Spring and 1600 vehicles in the Summer. In the northbound direction, the peak hour traffic volumes are 1250 vehicles in the Spring and 1500 vehicles in the Summer.
- Today (4 lanes), it takes about 2-3 minutes to travel to/from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Road and takes about 2-3 minutes to travel to/from Oliphant Lane and Turner Road.
- With the proposed road diet, it is expected that additional delay would be added. Please see the speed maps and travel times summary graphics on the following pages.
  - Spring: Travel time from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Road is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 4-5 minutes during the AM peak hour. The travel time from Turner Road to Oliphant Lane is also expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 5-6 minutes.
  - Summer: Travel time from Mitchell's Lane to Wyatt Road is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 5-6 minutes during the AM peak hour. The travel time from Turner Road to Oliphant Lane is also expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 6-10 minutes. The Travel time from Wyatt Road to Mitchell's Lane is expected to increase from 2-3 minutes to 4-5 minutes.
- With the increased in traffic volumes in the Summer, the road diet (reducing the number of through lanes from two to one in each direction) would create vehicle queue to spill back to Mitchell's Lane in the southbound direction and queue spill back to Wyatt Road in the northbound direction during the peak hour periods. With the steady flow of traffic in the northbound direction in one lane at the intersection with Turner Road, the vehicles turning in and out of Turner Road will be very difficult and expected to create long queue on Turner Road.

In addition to the above traffic operation, below are some of the pros and cons to consider.

### Pros:

- With the reduced number of lanes from four to three and the reduced speed, there will be less lanes to cross East Main Road and there will be room for shoulders on each side.
- The addition of a road diet with two-way left turn lane would allow for turning vehicles to get out of thru vehicle paths.

**Cons:**

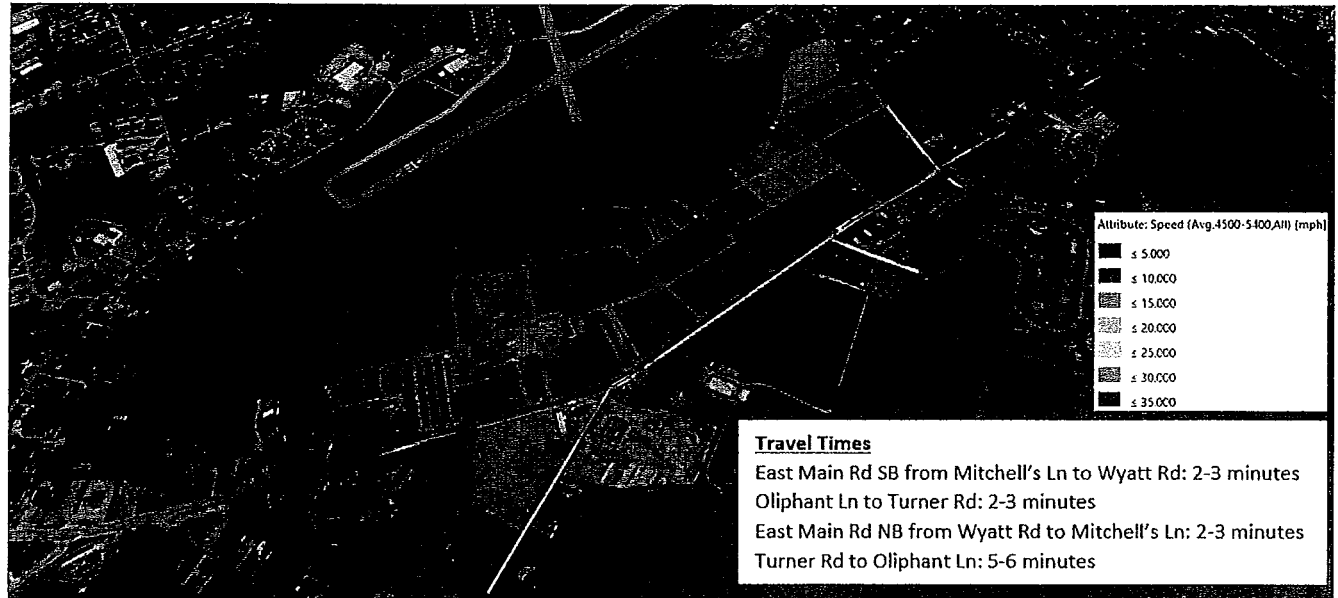
- Added delay and congestion especially during the Summer peak season (Average. 20 MPH speed along the corridor and 10 MPH at lane reduction points)
- Very difficult to pull out of unsignalized side streets and driveway due to significantly less gaps in traffic.
- The vehicle queue is expected to spill back into Mitchell's Lane intersection in the southbound direction and to Wyatt Road in the northbound direction during the Summer peak season.

**Projected AM Peak Hour Speed during the Spring**

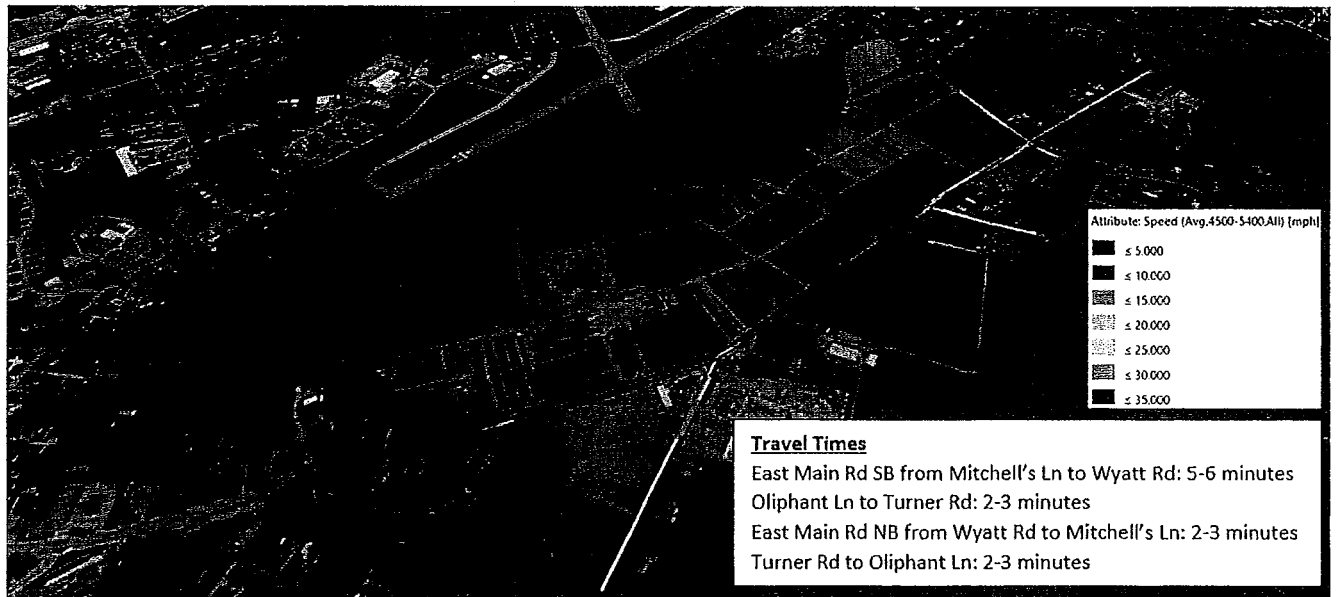




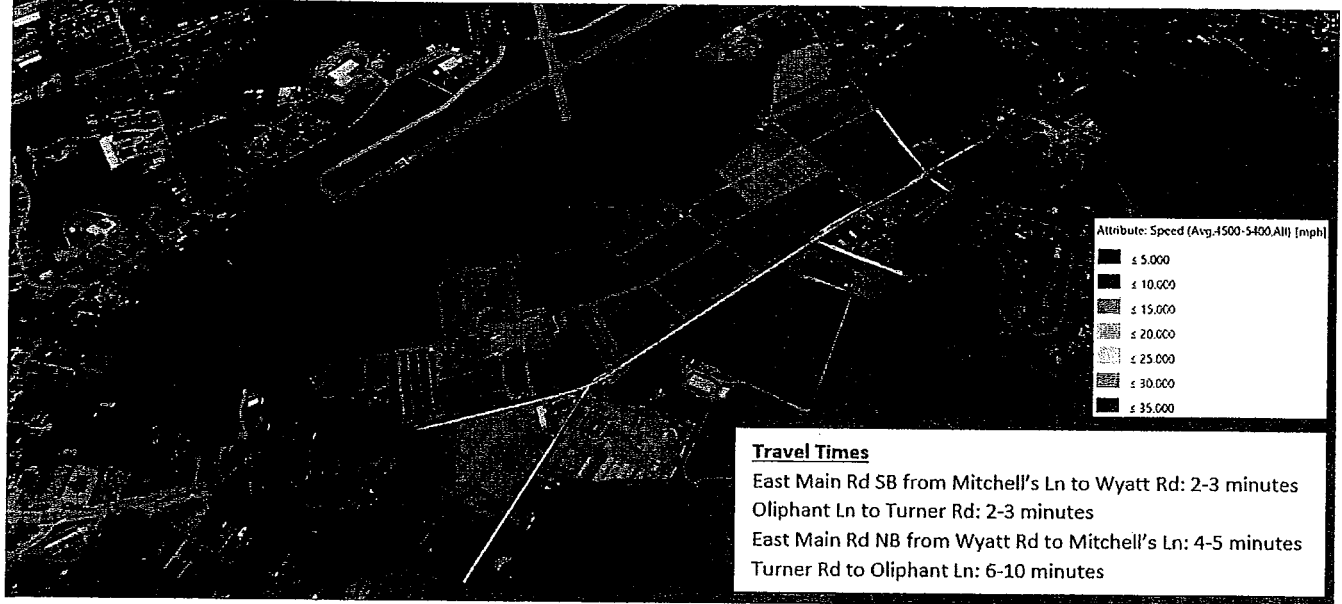
### Projected PM Peak Hour Speed during the Spring



### Projected AM Peak Hour Speed during the Summer



### Projected PM Peak Hour Speed during the Summer





**MIDDLETOWN**  
Rhode Island

## NEWS YOU CAN USE

**TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN**

350 East Main Road, Middletown, RI 02842

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Matt Sheley at (401) 842-6543 or [msheley@middletownri.com](mailto:msheley@middletownri.com)

### **EAST MAIN ROAD DIET COULD BE IN STORE**

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (MARCH 11, 2024) – East Main Road north of Wyatt Road could be trimmed to one lane in each direction in Middletown.

Known as a “road diet,” the proposal from the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) was discussed in detail Monday night by the Town Council in Town Hall.

According to a memo last summer from RIDOT consultants Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB), the area is prime for the upgrades during upcoming road work planned by the state.



After a thoughtful conversation, the council agreed to keep the conversation going and schedule a meeting with RIDOT in coming weeks to hear more and get feedback from residents and businesspeople. Although there appeared to be general support from most on the council, no decisions were made on the matter.

“I support this. It’s a nightmare out there,” Councilor Christopher Logan said. “I travel that road every weekend to visit my father and it’s like a raceway on a four-lane road that should probably be a one lane road...I’m not even going to talk about where Turner (Road) meets there because that’s a harrowing slight turn.”

“This road diet is not just for the safety of people on bikes or pedestrians,” Councilor Emily Tessier said. “This is mostly for the safety of people who are driving. Two hundred crashes

per year on East Main Road to me, that's wild. That's a lot. I'm sure we all know someone who has been in a car crash on East Main Road."

Over the past two decades, RIDOT has worked hard to upgrade and improve its roads across Middletown.

Almost every major intersection and roadway has undergone improvements from long stretches of East Main and West Main roads, Two Mile Corner and the intersection of Valley Road-Green End Avenue to upper Aquidneck Avenue, the most recent project.

The letter from VHB's Amphone Soupharath indicated there would be one lane of travel north on East Main and one south, bisected by a center turn lane. The move would also create shoulders on either side of the travel lanes to make it safer for bicyclists and others in the area.

In addition to reducing vehicle speeds, Soupharath wrote it would make it easier to make turns and better for those not driving vehicles.

On the flip side, he projected it would add minutes to travel times, creating delays and congestion, particularly during the busy summer months. He also said it would make it more difficult for vehicles to pull out from unsignalized side streets because of reduced breaks in traffic.

To read Soupharath's complete memo, go to [https://www.middletownri.com/DocumentCenter/View/11695/240304\\_19](https://www.middletownri.com/DocumentCenter/View/11695/240304_19) online.

Earlier, the council heard from Bike Newport Executive Director Bari Freeman, who supported the "road diet" concept. In her comments, Freeman said the move would make the entire stretch safer for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians alike at a minimal costs.

Freeman acknowledged the proposal was not the ideal, but it was a good stopgap until a dedicated bike path and other work was completed by RIDOT several years down the road. She also noted that if the "road diet" created more problems than it was worth, all that would be required to fix it was "road paint."

To see Bike Newport's entire letter to the council, visit <https://www.middletownri.com/DocumentCenter/View/11721/Bike-Newport-East-Main-Road-Diet-Memo> online.

"We all know that the lane configuration of East Main Road is dangerous and stressful," Freeman said. "The road has four travel lanes, no turn lanes, mostly no shoulder and side streets and driveways on both sides of the road. We all know what it feels like to have to stop in the travel lane and wait to make a left turn. It's scary to sit there and feel rushed."

**Document Link:** <https://www.middletownri.com/DocumentCenter/View/11764/NYCU-Diet>

## **Proposed “Road Diet” to Turn East Main Road into One Lane in Each Direction Sparks Discussion in Middletown**

**Newport Buzz – March 11, 2024**

**By Christian Winthrop**

A proposal to trim East Main Road north of Wyatt Road to one lane in each direction has ignited discussions in Middletown. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation introduced the concept of a “road diet” during a detailed Town Council meeting held on Monday night at Town Hall.

The proposal, outlined in a memo from RIDOT consultants Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) last summer, aims to enhance the area during the upcoming state-planned road work. The suggested configuration would feature one northbound and one southbound lane on East Main Road, separated by a center turn lane. This adjustment would also provide designated shoulders on both sides of the travel lanes to improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians.

Council members engaged in a thoughtful conversation during the meeting, expressing concerns and considerations. While there was general support among most councilors, no definitive decisions were made during the session. Councilor Christopher Logan shared his endorsement, citing the current chaotic conditions on the road, particularly near Turner Road.

“This road diet is not just for the safety of people on bikes or pedestrians. This is mostly for the safety of people who are driving. Two hundred crashes per year on East Main Road to me, that’s wild. That’s a lot,” commented Councilor Emily Tessier, emphasizing the need for improved safety measures.

To gather more information and feedback, the council decided to schedule a meeting with RIDOT in the coming weeks, involving residents and local business representatives. The potential changes, aimed at reducing vehicle speeds and enhancing safety, also drew support from Bike Newport Executive Director Bari Freeman.

Freeman, in her comments to the council, acknowledged the proposal’s imperfections but stressed its potential benefits for motorists, cyclists, and

pedestrians alike. She emphasized that the proposed “road diet” could serve as a temporary solution until a dedicated bike path and additional infrastructure improvements were implemented by RIDOT in the future.

While Freeman acknowledged the possibility of increased travel times and congestion, she highlighted the minimal cost and flexibility of the proposed changes, suggesting that adjustments could be made with simple “road paint” if issues arose.

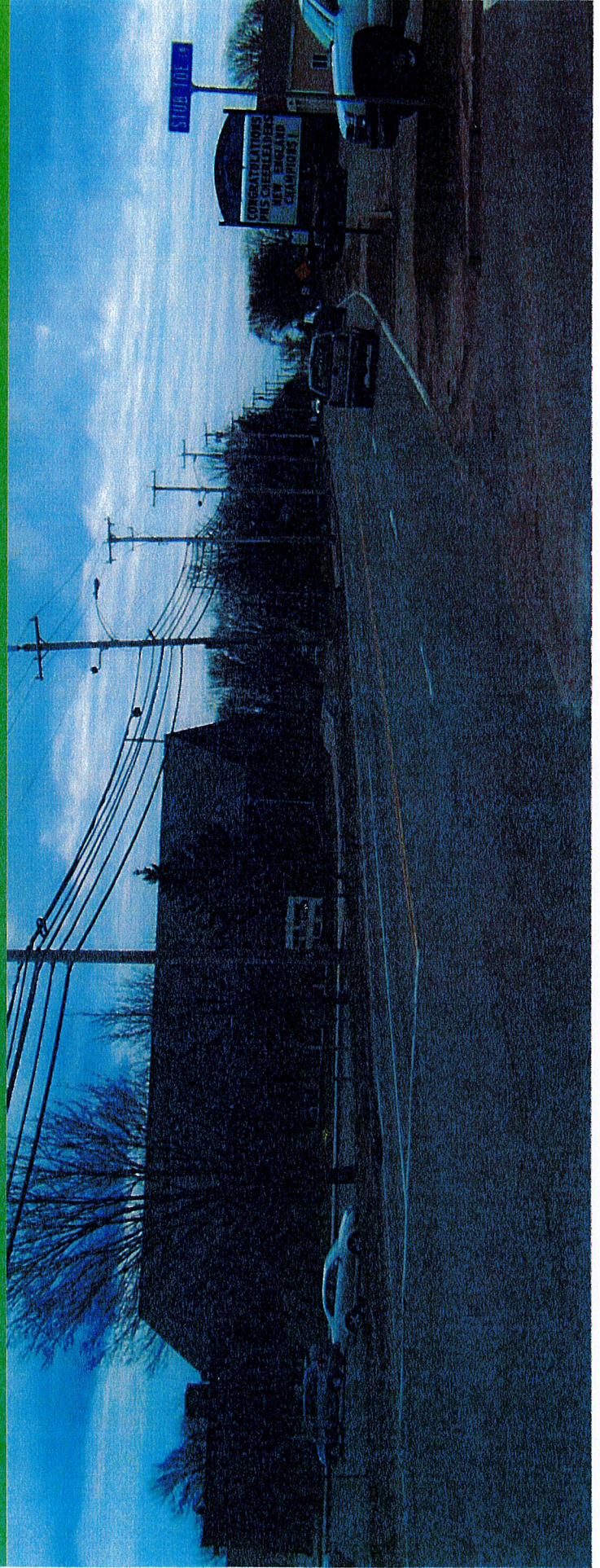
For further details, including the complete memo from VHB’s Amphone Soupharath and Bike Newport’s letter to the council, interested parties can visit the town’s official website. The ongoing discussions and potential modifications to East Main Road aim to address long-standing safety concerns and improve overall road conditions in the Middletown area.



# Town Council Meeting to Discuss Road Safety Assessment

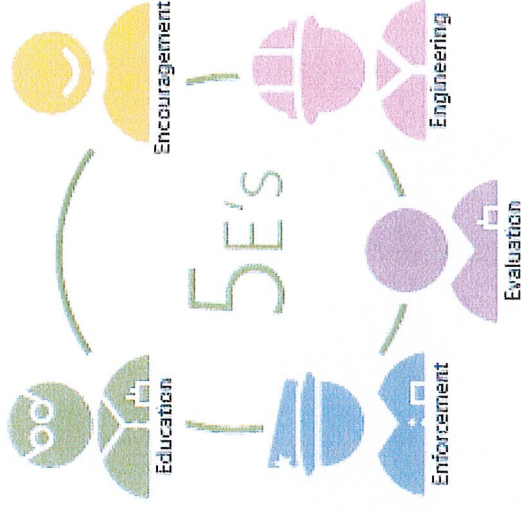
East Main Road | Portsmouth, RI

August 24, 2020



## Roadway Safety Assessment Objectives

- Identify safety concerns along East Main Road
  - Crash data review (2013 – 2018)
  - Stakeholders input
  - Site visits
- Develop strategies and solutions to mitigate crashes thru evaluation, engineering, education, encouragement, and enforcement.
- Develop a report that identifies proposed solutions





## Overview of RSA Process

### Identify Issues

- Identify existing and potential safety issues



### Develop Strategies

- Develop measures to target identified issues

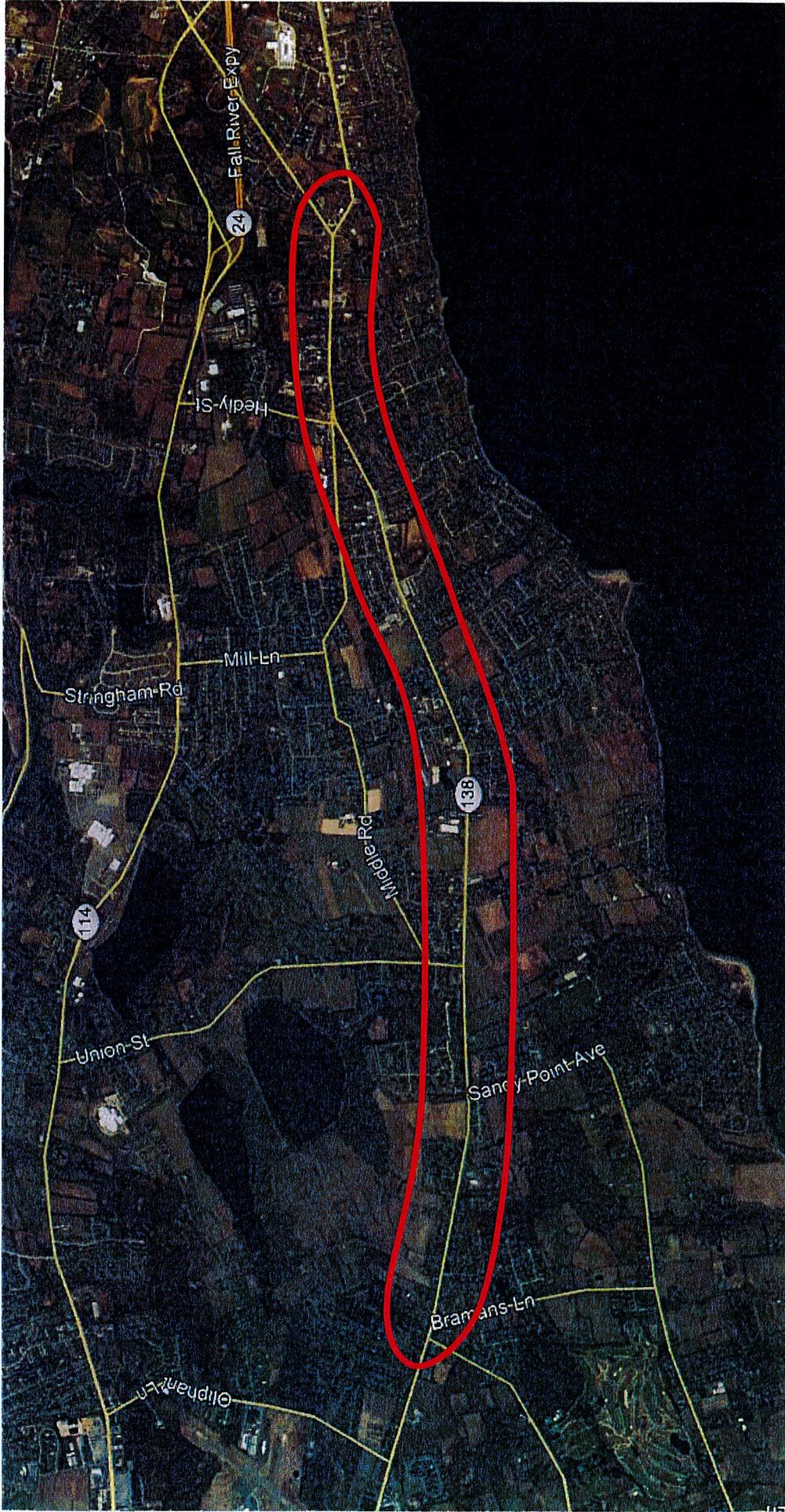
An RSA is a formal safety performance evaluation of an existing or future road or intersection by an independent, multidisciplinary team.

An RSA considers:

- Safety of all road users
- Surrounding environment
- Proactive mitigation measures



# Study Area



## Existing Conditions Inventory

- Roadway Cross Section Width ~42 feet
  - Existing travel lane widths – 10 feet
- Posted Speed Limits
  - Varies 25-35 mph
- 85<sup>th</sup> Percentile Speeds
  - Measured 42-48 mph
- No existing sidewalk present
- Existing RIPTA bus stops
- Traffic Volumes
  - AADT: 24,800 vpd
  - DHV: 1,500 vph



## Previous Studies and Efforts

- Aquidneck Island Transportation Study (AITS), 2009
  - Bristol Road and West Main Road - Road Diet;
  - ADA and safety updates north of Turnpike
- Road Diet Program Manual, 2015
  - East Main Road – Considered but volumes were too high
- East Main Road at Linden Lane, 2017
  - Signal Warrant Analysis
- East Main at Union and Glen, completed in 2018
- Road Diet Study, 2018 – Request by Portsmouth Officials
  - East Main Road – Evaluated traffic operations
  - East Main Road at McCorrie Lane
- Systemic Pedestrian Program, 2018
  - East Main Road at Quaker Hill Road
- East Main Road - Road Safety Assessment, 2019
- Safety Improvements at Route 24, 2020





# Next Steps

- Immediate-Term (<6 months)
- Near-Term (6 months – 2 years)
- Long-Term (TBD based on funding)

RHODE ISLAND'S HIGHWAY SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM – SAFETY CORRIDOR PROGRAM

## Road Safety Assessment

East Main Road | Portsmouth, RI








FEBRUARY 2020

LEADS TO SAFETY CORRIDOR

All improvement dates are based off the 3/12/2020 TIP



OBSERVATION	IMMEDIATE TERM IMPROVEMENTS Under 6 Months	NEAR TERM IMPROVEMENTS Under 2 Years	LONG TERM IMPROVEMENTS Over 2 Years	COMMENTS
<p><b>Lack of Intersection Visibility</b> - The unimproved intersection along the corridor are not highly visible due to lack of signage, street lighting, and clear sight triangles. This was observed at the intersections of East Main Road with Diamond Drive, Vermont Lane, Green House Drive, and the intersection of East Main Road with Diamond Drive.</p> 	<p><b>1.38</b> Realign STOP sign and install flashing yellow lights at the intersection through traffic signal offset.</p> <p><b>1.39</b> Realign STOP sign and install flashing yellow lights at the intersection through traffic signal offset.</p> <p><b>1.40</b> Realign STOP sign and install flashing yellow lights at the intersection through traffic signal offset.</p> <p><b>1.41</b> Realign STOP sign and install flashing yellow lights at the intersection through traffic signal offset.</p> <p><b>1.42</b> Realign STOP sign and install flashing yellow lights at the intersection through traffic signal offset.</p>			<p>Maintenance items should be incorporated in future work orders through RI DOT for repair.</p>
<p><b>General Maintenance Issues</b> - The road surface is in poor condition and a striping change is needed.</p> 	<p><b>1.43</b> Repave the road surface and install striping.</p> <p><b>1.44</b> Repave the road surface and install striping.</p> <p><b>1.45</b> Repave the road surface and install striping.</p> <p><b>1.46</b> Repave the road surface and install striping.</p>			<p>The Town of Portsmouth should be incorporated in future work orders through RI DOT for repair.</p>

## Near Term TIP Projects (Based off the 3/12/2020 TIP)

### Programmed RIDOT Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):

- East Main Road at Quaker Hill Road, HSIP
  - Programmed Fiscal Year 2020
  - Install 2021
  - Install Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacon (RRFB) at crosswalk
- East Main Road at Linden Lane, STC
  - Programmed Fiscal Year 2021
  - Install 2022
  - Install traffic signal
- East Main Road at McCorrie Lane, HSIP
  - Programmed Fiscal Year 2022
  - Install 2023
  - Roadway widening at intersection to install left-turn lane

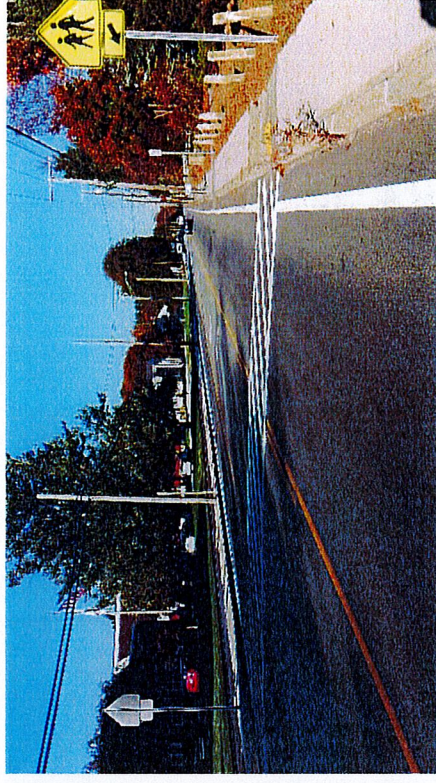
## Near Term Improvement– Road Diet

- What is a Road Diet?
  - Converting an existing four (4) lane undivided roadway to a three (3) lane roadway consisting of two thru lanes and a center two-way left-turn lane (TWLTL)
- FHWA Proven Safety Countermeasure
  - 19-47% reduction in total crashes
- Local Results
  - Rhode Island road diets have seen a 78% average reduction in total crashes as well as a 5 mph average reduction in 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed.



## Long Term Improvement – Road Diet

- Benefits:
  - Traffic Calming – reduction/more consistent speeds
  - Fewer lanes for pedestrians to cross
  - Provides refuge for left-turning vehicles
  - Reconfiguration of cross section to provide roadway shoulder. Shoulder min. of 4 feet not met for bike lane
- Negatives:
  - Reduction in corridor capacity – leads to increased queues and delays



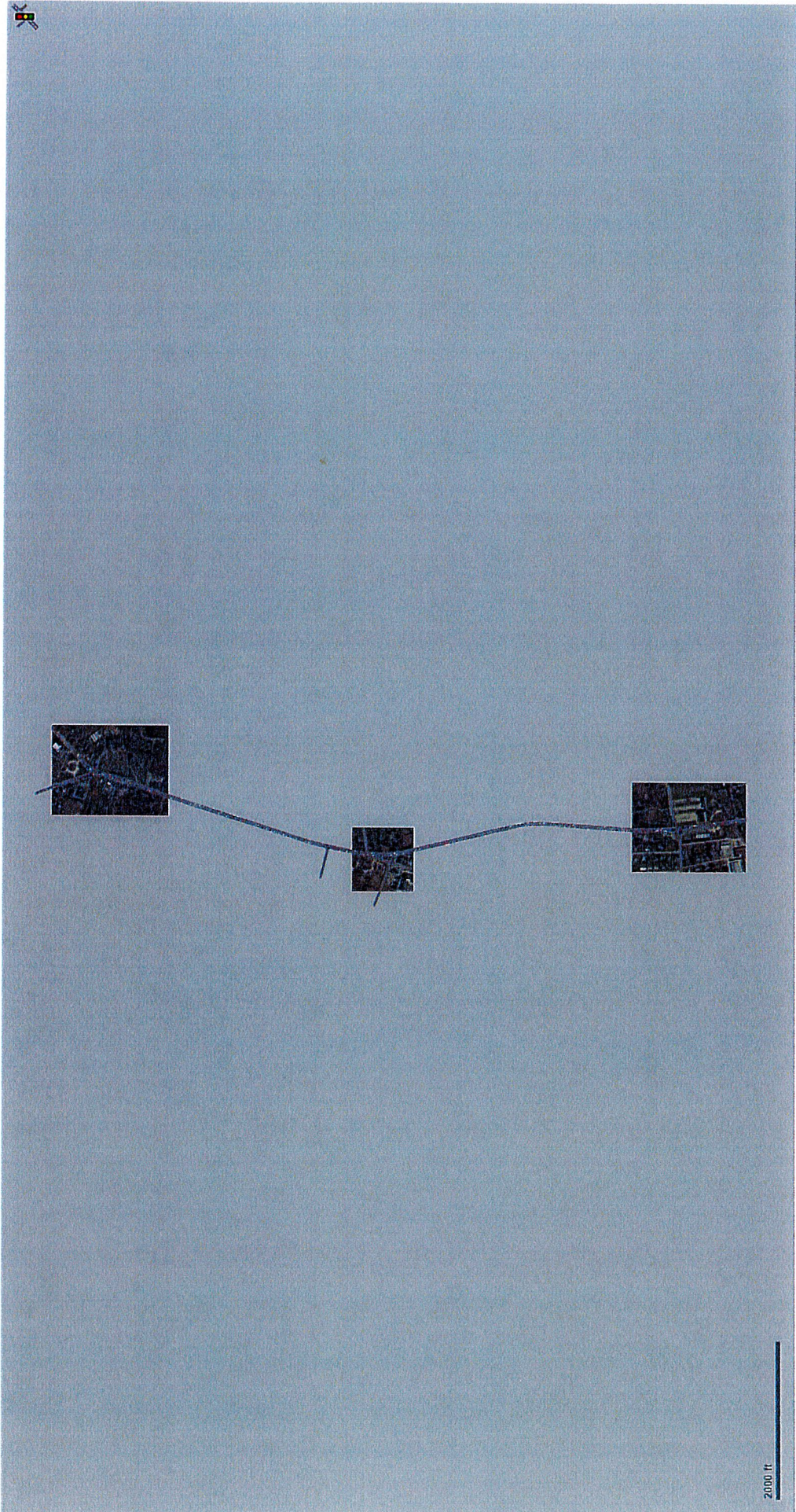


## Road Diet Discussion (between Turnpike and Stub Toe)

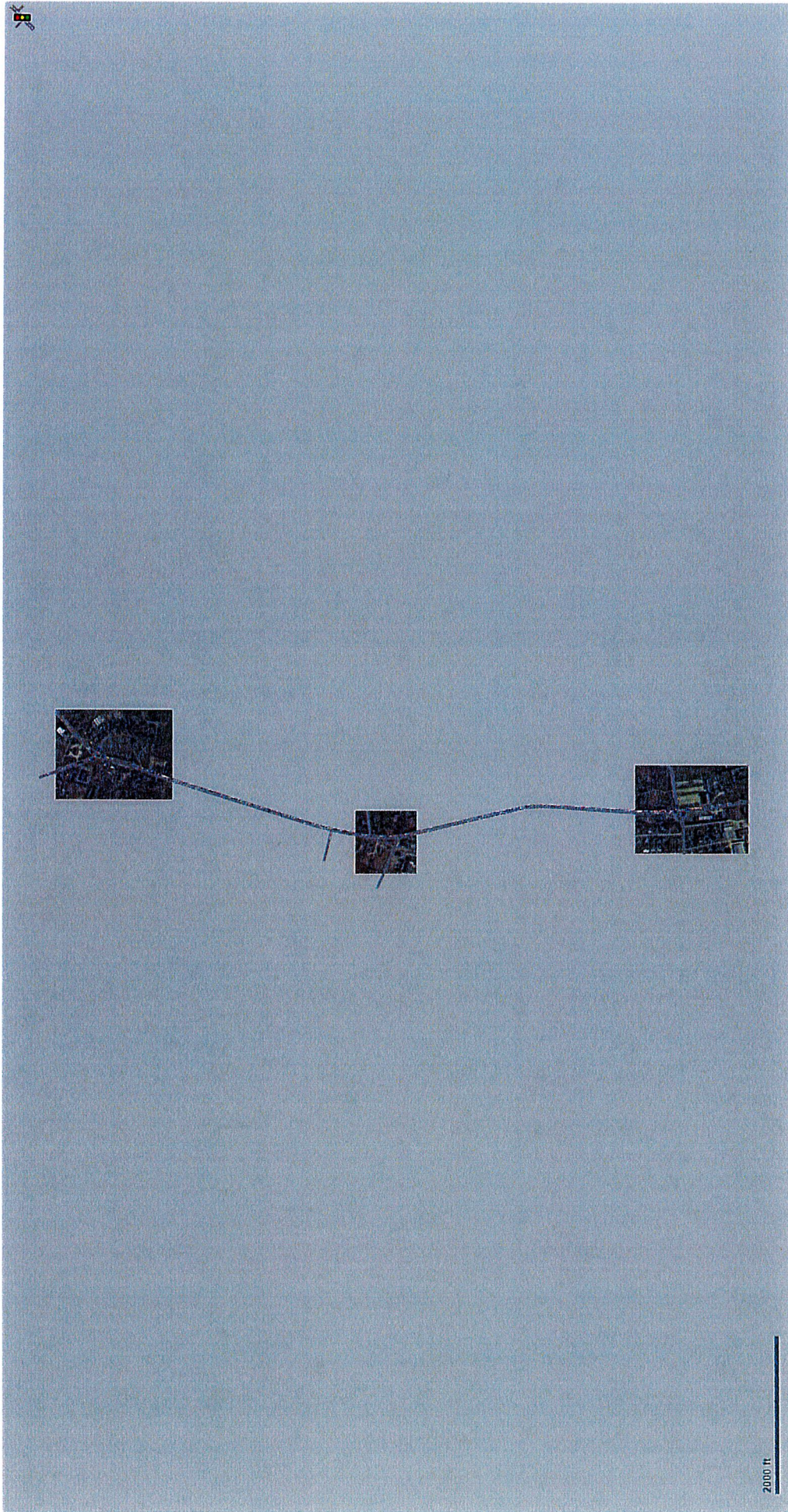
### RIDOT does not recommend a Road Diet for East Main Road

- AM Peak
  - Average speeds for both northbound and southbound: 20-25 mph
  - Some queuing approaching signals and the 2-1 lane drop
  - Approximately 97% of the vehicles during the peak hour (7:30am to 9am) can be processed
- PM Peak
  - Queuing issues along the northbound approach
  - Average speeds for the northbound approach: 10 mph
  - Side street traffic would have difficult time entering/exiting
  - Approximately 65% of the vehicles during the peak hour (3:30pm to 5:30pm) can be processed
  - Congestion would possibly cause vehicles relocate to West Main Road via Hedley Street, Stub Toe Lane, Pine Tree Lane, Schoolhouse Lane and Union Street

# Road Diet - AM Peak Southbound



# Road Diet – PM Peak Northbound



## Long Term Improvements

- Improvements
  - Road Widening
- Funding Opportunities
  - HSIP Program
  - TIP Application

Long-Term items need to be applied for

- East Main Road - Road Widening



# Questions

