

Management can help ease traffic tie-ups

By Tina Dolen
and Christopher Witt

The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission (AIPC) read with interest the Newport Daily News June 16 editorial, "Road work a sure sign of summer." The organization agrees that traffic congestion caused by construction projects is a problem on the island, particularly during the summer. But construction projects are not the only cause of traffic delays; special events such as the Newport Jazz Festival or the Tall Ships festival, beach traffic and accidents also create problems. Traffic back-ups on the bridges or on East and West Main roads seem to be an inevitable and unfortunate aspect of summer on Aquidneck Island.

AIPC believes that this doesn't have to be the case. In February, the organization embarked on an 18-month process to develop a traffic management program for Aquidneck Island with the goals of reducing traffic congestion, improving safety and increasing traveler access to information. The new program is a direct outgrowth of the ongoing and large-scale AIPC Aquidneck Island Transportation Study.

The traffic management program, officially called the Aquidneck Island Regional Traffic Incident Management Program, is funded through a \$68,000 challenge grant from the state Division of Planning. When AIPC met with local officials during the data-gathering phase of the larger study, it heard repeatedly that responses to traffic problems, particularly those caused by special events and construction projects, needed to be improved. Especially pressing was the desire for improved coordination among the many entities with responsibility for managing traffic on the island.

AIPC is doing just that through the traffic management program. The organization has brought together representatives from the island's municipal police departments, the State Police, the state Department of Transportation, the Rhode Island Bridge and Turnpike Authority, the Newport and Bristol County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and others with a stake in improved traffic conditions on the island to form a standing committee that will work to develop plans and protocols for preparing for and responding to traffic incidents.

The traffic management program will improve local and state coordination to ensure that response to traffic problems is organized and effective. The final plan produced by AIPC and the standing committee will encompass operations, technology, communications and implementation. It will include recommendations to address detours, satellite parking, lane closures, personnel deploy-

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ment and the use of intelligent transportation systems such as electronic signs and a Web site that provides up-to-date information on traffic conditions and upcoming events and construction projects to local officials.

The development of the traffic management program will ensure that state and local officials hear about potential traffic problems before they occur and will have a plan to mitigate them through the deployment of safety officers, the use of signs and effective communication to the public. By creating the standing committee, AIPC is building a sustainable group that can continue far beyond the study period to address new problems and issues as they arise.

The traffic management program is one aspect of AIPC's broader mission to drive island-wide planning and thinking. It is in the midst of the long-range Island Transportation Study to plan for the island's future, and has been a leading facilitator in the process to redevelop Naval Station Newport's surplus property. Other current projects include addressing regional energy conservation, planning for bicycle paths, kayak trails, access to Narragansett Bay and improved pedestrian walkways. In all of AIPC's projects, it seeks to address problems with island-wide impacts and identify solutions that are comprehensive and multi-municipal.

AIPC seeks public involvement in all of its projects, and it will hold two public workshops for the traffic management program. They will be an opportunity for all those interested to learn more about the program and offer opinions on island traffic problems and potential solutions. The dates and times have not been determined, but they will be posted on AIPC's Web site, www.aquidneckplanning.org, and publicly advertised.

AIPC believes that Aquidneck Island residents, commuters and visitors don't have to suffer through traffic jams. The organization's traffic management program will improve the handling of traffic problems, so that travelers experience smoother trips around the island, better information from signage and reduced delays.

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