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## AQUIDNECK ISLAND

# Easing traffic is aim

The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission's report calls for better preparation and communication.

By Matt Sheley  
Daily News staff

Aquidneck Island plays host to a number of large-scale events every year, particularly during the summer.

But the traffic and gridlock that typically accompany such events can have a negative effect on the quality of life, the economy and the environment across the island.

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To read the Aquidneck Island Regional Traffic Incident Management Program, go to [www.NewportDailyNews.com](http://www.NewportDailyNews.com) and click on the 'Regional Traffic Management Plan' link.

The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission has developed a plan to help alleviate traffic problems, from the daily commute to major events, a number of which are planned for the summer of 2012, including the America's Cup World Series and the Ocean State Tall Ships Festival.

The commission is in the process of presenting the Regional Traffic Incident Management Program to local city and town councils and related agencies in the hopes of getting it endorsed and having it in place before the summer.

"We're still in the approval process, but we're ready to offer this fresh expertise if we're invited to help," said Tina Dolen, executive director of the planning commission, which is based on Broadway in Newport.

"Since the fiasco with the Fourth of July fireworks in 2004, people have been complaining about what we're going to do about traffic here on the island and it's something we're getting better at, but we can still do more," she said.

One of the things that should make the traffic management program attractive is the fact it contains a number of low- and no-cost solutions to traffic problems on Aquidneck Island, said Chris Witt, director of planning and communications for the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission.

For example, providing a central clearinghouse for events — such as an online Aquidneck Island calendar — could assist in both short- and long-term planning and help coordination among individuals and organizations planning to host or attend various activities. Currently there is no such clearinghouse, the study found.

## Traffic

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Including notification requirements — through the central online calendar as well as other media outlets — as part of each municipality's special-event permitting process is another idea broached in the report.

In fact, Witt and Dolen said, one of the keys to the plan's success is improved communication between event planners, the island's municipalities and emergency service providers. That will help everyone get on the same page and strategize how best to deal with the resulting traffic, whether from a planned event or unexpected occurrence, they said.

"Usually, the major events have traffic strategies in place and that's typically not where most of the problems arise," Witt said. "It's the medium- and small-sized events that no one anticipates, especially when there are two or three at the same time, that can really snarl everything up."

In those cases, the report said, there are a number of opportunities to improve the situation on area roads, with communication again being at the forefront.

Standardized accident reporting and removal procedures for emergency services in Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth could help speed up the process and reduce tie-ups, the study suggested. Better use of social media, including Twitter and Facebook, could help spread the word about accidents and other emergencies more quickly.

Portable signs placed in strategic locations also would help motorists to avoid problem areas and get other important information in a timely manner, the report said.

In the long term, a communications center that monitored traffic in real time and sent out notifications could assist drivers through posted message boards, social media and the Highway Advisory Radio system, the study said.

The 56-page report also encouraged increased use of mass transportation and satellite parking.

"One of the good things about the plan is that many of the recommendations can be implemented at a low cost,"

Witt said.

A spinoff of the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study, which was funded by \$500,000 in state and federal grants, the traffic management program was developed by consultants Vanasse Hangen Brustlin Inc. and funded by a grant from the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program.

Using the traffic management plan instituted for the 2006 U.S. Women's Open golf tournament as a model, the goal of the recent study was to help ease traffic across the island, particularly on the major north-south corridors of East Main and West Main roads, which handle a total of about 60,000 vehicles a day.

In addition to representatives from local municipal police departments and State Police, members of the state Department of Transportation, Emergency Management Agency, Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority, Newport & Bristol County Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Preservation Society of Newport County served on the steering committee.

"The fact we're able to bring together a diverse number of agencies that are trying to formalize a plan to manage traffic is exciting," Witt said.

Dolen said America's Cup World Series and Ocean State Tall Ships Festival 2012 organizers have not yet signed on to the traffic management program.

Representatives from the planning commission will brief municipal officials and other stakeholders on the findings of the traffic management study in coming weeks, Dolen and Witt said.

The Middletown Town Council received a presentation about the traffic management program last week and is expected to endorse the study, possibly as soon as its next meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 3.

"The document serves as a good source for recommendations and is a valuable tool for dealing with traffic," Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. "I think the concept of planning for each event on the island makes a lot of sense because each brings its own characteristics."

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Daily News file photo

Traffic is backed up along America's Cup Avenue in Newport after Fourth of July fireworks in 2005.