

Public to comment on traffic plans

The 21-month study represents a vision for Aquidneck Island's transportation future, planners say.

By Matt Sheley
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NEWPORT — The results of what has been billed as a groundbreaking study of traffic on Aquidneck Island will be released Wednesday night, and consultants will seek public input during a forum at the Community College of Rhode Island's local campus.

Spearheaded by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, the report by consultants Vanasse Hangen and Brustlin will include nearly 100 recommendations for improving transportation flow across Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth, said Tina Dolen, the commission's executive director.

Suggestions include reconfiguration of the on- and off-ramps from the Pell Bridge in Newport and installing roundabouts at Two Mile Corner in Middletown and the proposed Town Center area on East Main Road in Portsmouth.

There are plenty of low-cost, high-

impact ideas to make it easier to get from point A to point B, Dolen said.

The forum is scheduled to run from 6:30-8 p.m. in the auditorium at the CCRI campus at 1 John H. Chafee Blvd. This will be the last chance to comment on the proposal before it is finalized. An open house and refreshments at 6 p.m. will proceed the formal presentation.

"One of the best things for Aquidneck Island is that because we have a cohesive study of all these modes of transportation, we'll be better positioned than most other communities in the state for funding because we have a true regional transportation

center," Dolen said. "In the past, (the state) has been far more willing to fund projects when there's a comprehensive plan in place."

Launched by former Gov. Donald L. Carcieri in July 2009, the study cost \$500,000. The federal Highway Administration awarded \$400,000 in grant money, and the state Department of Transportation provided \$100,000.

Besides road traffic, the 21-month study also examined other modes of transportation, including bikeways, bus transit, ferries, railroads and pedestrian walkways. One of the Aquidneck Island Transportation

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Study's goals was to make the roads safer for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

More than 3,000 stakeholders have provided feedback on the process, through the nonprofit group's website or the community forums held in each of the impacted communities. Preliminary recommendations also have been presented to the councils in each municipality.

"I think everyone learned quite a bit going through this process," Dolen said. "One thing that stood out for me was how important the bus system is to so many people and the role it will play in the future."

The final report is expected to be released in June.

Dolen said residents can expect to see changes in the coming weeks, such as the retooling of bus routes and improved signs. Work is contingent on funding, she said.

"It's not as though we can sit around and wait for things to happen," she said. "There's already planning in place, and I know that we want to get moving forward on these projects."