

## New group to address traffic gridlock

By Matt Sheley  
Daily News staff

MIDDLETOWN — A new group put together by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission is looking to put together a plan to deal with traffic gridlock on the island.

Known as the "Regional Traffic Incident Management Program," the volunteer board met Wednesday night at Middletown Town Hall to review what's been accomplished so far and to consider its next steps.

"Almost every one of the suggestions that came out of our work revolves around better communication," said Peter C.

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PETER C. CUSOLITO

senior security and emergency preparedness planner with Vanasse Hangen Brustlin Inc.

Cusolito, senior security and emergency preparedness planner with Vanasse Hangen Brustlin Inc., the consulting firm that conducted the study under the planning commission's direction.

"We have to do a better job sharing what's happening on

the island, and statistics show that 60 percent of all incidents can be dealt with quicker and many incidents take longer to deal with than they should because there aren't those measures in place."

The Incident Management Program is a spin-off of the \$500,000 Aquidneck Island Transportation Study, also sponsored by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission. Tina Dolen, the commission's executive director, said Chris Witt, director of planning & communications, obtained grant funding from the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program to pay for the yearlong effort.

Based on the presentation Wednesday night, there are many reasons why traffic backs up and causes headaches for local motorists, commuters and tourists. Sometimes road construction or an emergency like a fire or a serious accident is to blame. Special events can cause problems, but often it's something as simple as a minor fender-bender.

A number of proposals were discussed Wednesday night to improve traffic flow, including:

♦ Creating a process where motorists can get information about special events ahead of time, along with minute-by-minute updates on traffic. Cur-

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rently, no such system exists.

♦ Encouraging the use of public transportation.

♦ Training those involved in planning and organizing special events how to reduce their traffic impacts.

♦ Utilizing social media tools like Twitter and Facebook to get the word out about events and traffic conditions.

♦ Increasing the use of portable, electronic message boards to provide current information on congested roadways.

♦ Creating a \$300,000 central communications facility to serve as the hub of all things traffic on the island, and installing permanent, changeable signs at strategic locations.

Paige Bronk, Newport's director of planning, zoning, inspection and development, said the massive traffic snarl after the city's 2004 Fourth of

July fireworks display put the entire island on notice and spurred planning to try to avoid similar problems.

"I was caught up in it myself, and Fort Adams is half-a-mile away from my house and it took more than two hours to get home," Bronk said. "That was a real wakeup call."

Most people agree that traffic management for large-scale events like the U.S. Women's Open at Newport Country Club have been handled well, he said.

"It really comes down to money," Bronk said. "The larger events approach the municipalities earlier and they understand there needs to be a special system in place to deal with traffic. The busing alone for the U.S. Open cost \$100,000. That was something that they paid for and it worked really well, but I don't know if remote parking for smaller events is something that a private enterprise would typically want to cover."

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