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Mail: Letters to the Editor, The Newport Daily News
P.O. Box 420, Newport, RI 02840
Fax: 849-3306
Email: Editor@NewportRI.com

OPINION

The Newport Daily News

William F. Lucey III, publisher
Sheila Muldowney, executive editor
Gary Ruff, opinion page editor

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OUR VIEW

Traffic plan needs local cooperation

As excited as we are about what the promise the summer of 2012 holds — with an America's Cup World Series and Tall Ships Festival already looming large on the schedule — the threat of something less exciting also looms over the festivities: traffic jams. Couple that with parking headaches, and the prospect of tens of thousands of people descending on Aquidneck Island can send chills up the spine of most local residents.

Assuredly, the island has hosted such large-scale affairs before, most recently the last Tall Ships Festival in 2007, and before that, the 2006 U.S. Women's Open.

That means a blueprint of sorts involving satellite parking, shuttle transportation and traffic control already is in place.

That alone has come a long way since the Fourth of July in 2004, when a visit from the Queen Mary II luxury cruise liner — and an accompanying \$20,000 boost to the fireworks budget — attracted an estimated 200,000 people to Newport, resulting in the worst gridlock in decades.

The city immediately rebounded with a parking and traffic plan for the Tall Ships visit that followed about a week later, and has been refining the plans — with assistance from neighboring communities, the state and even the National Guard — ever since.

"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," said Tina Dolen, executive director of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission. "It's something we're getting better at, but we can still do more."

In fact, the regional planning commission is hoping to augment traffic management for upcoming large-scale events — as well as minimize the impact of road work and motor-vehicle

accidents — with its recently released Aquidneck Island Traffic Incident Management Program. The result of a study by consultants Vanasse Hangen Brustlin Inc. and funded through a grant from the Statewide Planning Program, the program is being presented to local councils and other agencies for their review.

The goal is to have the 56-page report endorsed and an island-wide plan in place by the summer, which should provide ample tests for the recommendations.

Those include: improving notification, such as through an online Aquidneck Island calendar and requiring public notice as part of the special-permit approval process; establishing standardized accident reports and procedures for emergency services in the island communities; and long-term, creating a regional communications center that monitors traffic and sends out notifications through portable message boards, social media and the Highway Advisory Radio system.

Traffic management certainly is an area in which all three of the island communities could — and should — work together, and the planning commission is the right agency to facilitate that coordination.

We hope this program will be well received and incorporated into the planning for this summer's events, to keep them — and us — running as smoothly as possible.