Island transportation study gains praise

By James A. Johnson
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NEWPORT — The final presentation of the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study brought few surprises Wednesday night for almost 150 people at the local campus of the Community College of Rhode Island.

Tina Dolan, executive director of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, said that’s because the project was a true community effort, based on more than 2,000 comments from area residents.

“This cohesive effort positions the island in a much better place than practically any other community in the state for transportation work,” she said. “We put forward this design with the help of local, state and federal agencies in order to address the transportation needs of this island.”

Michael Lewis, director of the state Department of Transportation, called it a “gem of a study” that represents the kind of effort that people can get passionate about.

STUDY A8

Two Mile Corner: Reconstruct the intersection either by upgrading the traffic signals or adding roundabouts on West Main Road at East Main Road and Coddington Highway.

Other roundabouts:
- Middletown: On Valley Road at Aquidneck Avenue.
- Portsmouth: Three of them on East Main Road from Middle Road to Turnpike Avenue, as part of the Town Center project.

Island-wide bicycle network:
- Build a 10-mile Shoreline Bikeway next to Burma Road.
- Create shared-use paths on the side of West Main and East Main roads.
- The network could extend from the Pell Bridge to the Sakonnet River Bridge and include multi-modal centers at the Gateway Visitors Center in Newport and Melville and Raytheon in Portsmouth.

The Newport (RI) Daily News traffic flow at Two Mile Corner are under evaluation, he said.

Although the overall study already had been presented in each community, changes were made since the last presentation in Portsmouth. A proposal to widen Burma Road to four lanes has been eliminated and two projects already under consideration — the Town Center in Portsmouth and the Broadway streetscape in Newport — have been added to the transportation study.

Ashworth cited the impact and cost of widening Burma Road as reason for its elimination. As a result, East Main Road will remain four lanes.

The Town Center project along East Main Road from Portsmouth Town Hall to Turnpike Avenue would include widening the road, adding roundabouts and installing sidewalks.

The Broadway streetscape would involve resurfacing Broadway from Equality Park Place to Farewell Street, installing bike lanes and angle parking and making Broadway one-way southbound between Marlborough and Farewell streets.

One resident called the intersection of Green End Avenue and Valley Road in Middletown “a bear and a half” and asked if any relief was in sight.

Ashworth said DOT is almost ready to award a contract to fix that intersection, which was listed in the study as one of the biggest bottlenecks on the island. He said he thought the project was slated for this summer.

In response to another question, Ashworth said the changes recommended in the study are designed to improve traffic flow on the island, even though no traffic lanes are being added.

“A lot of these improvements — adding left-turn lanes, synchronize traffic lights, adding roundabouts, improving bus transportation, making people less dependent on the automobile — everything together will improve the overall transportation system on the island,” he said.