

8. TRANSPORTATION

Introduction

This section of the Plan deals with transportation issues such as roads, traffic impacts, railroads, pedestrian links, water transportation, aviation, and public transportation. Mobility is an essential ingredient in ensuring the community's quality of life. Although Wiscasset offers a variety of transportation options, motor vehicle transportation remains the primary means of traveling.

This section affects and should be read in conjunction with other chapters of this Plan, particularly: Future Land Use Plan, Regional Issues, Economy, Municipal Facilities, and Capital Improvement Plan. Road data including replacement and maintenance data is contained in the Municipal Facilities section.

The information within this section was primarily gathered from the following sources: Maine Department of Transportation, Maine State Planning Office, Stafford Business Advisors Rail Station Studies, Dufresne-Henry, Inc. Airport Master Plan, OEST Associates, Inc. Airport Improvement Project, and the Waterfront Master Plan.

Overview

In Wiscasset the primary mode of transportation is the automobile. The town is served by a rail line that connects Brunswick with Rockland and provides both freight transportation and seasonal passenger service. A municipal airport with convenient access to Route 1 and Route 144 offers a variety of aviation related activities. Wiscasset Harbor, once the busiest port east of Boston, is currently home to commercial fisherman and recreational boaters. Wiscasset is well connected to the nation and the world. There is easy access by road to the national interstate system, by water to the Atlantic Ocean and world ports, by rail to the Rockland Branch and all of North America, and by air to every part of the world.

Wiscasset is a jewel for travelers in Maine's Midcoast region. U.S. Route 1, the principal highway in the region, passes through the village center. Along with being the most important transportation facility for Wiscasset, this highway links Bath, Brunswick, Interstate 295, and points west with Damariscotta, Rockland, Camden, and points east. Route 27, which also passes through Town, links north to Augusta and south to Boothbay Harbor. Route 144 provides access to Westport Island. Route 218 connects to Alna, Whitefield and Route 17 to the north.

The Town has 57.49 miles of total road length. Of the total, 38.31 are classified local miles, 6.81 are classified minor collector miles, 2.84 are classified major collector miles, and 9.53 are classified arterial miles. Route 1 and Route 27 are classified as arterial roads. Alna Road and Federal Street are classified as major collector roads. Old Ferry Road, Birch Point Road, West Alna Road, and Westport Bridge Road are classified as minor collector roads. Churchill Street, Willow Lane, Gibbs Road, Old Bath Road, and Ready Point Road are a few of the numerous roads classified local roads. There are 9.53 miles of State Highway, 2.84 miles of State Aid roadways and 45.12 miles of roads that are owned and maintained by the Town.

Road System

A complete summary of the Town's road system is contained in the Public Facilities Section of the Plan.

Traffic Counts

The traffic counts or the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) numbers assembled by the Maine Department of Transportation show an increase in the amount of traffic throughout the Town. The traffic counts are taken at a select number of locations and are generally limited to state highways and state aid roads. Table 1 contains a summary of the AADT counts for some locations for 1997, 2000 and 2002:

Road	Description	AADT 1997	AADT 2000	AADT 2002	% Change 1997-00 or 1997-02
US 1/Route 27	Main St E of Federal St	16,770	20,020		19%
US 1	SW of Bradford Rd	19,380		21,300	10%
US 1	NE of Route 144	16,450	17,010		3%
US 1	SW of Route 144	15,610	16,670		7%
US 1	At Woolwich Town line	16,340	16,820		3%
US 1	NE of Ward Brook	15,990	17,510		10%
Route 27	N of US 1	6,100		7,230	19%
Willow Lane	.25 Mi NW of Churchill St	540	710		31%
Foye Road	W of Route 27	870	890		2%
Bradford Road	.57 Mi NW of US 1	1,070	1,030		-4%
Hooper Street	NW of Rt 218 (Federal St)	1,550	1,740		12%
Water Street	NE of Fore St	1,230	1,320		7%
Fort Hill Street	S of US 1/Rt 27	510	520		-2%
Fore Street	NW of Water Street	1,020	1,060		4%
Rt 144 (Birch Point Rd)	NE of Old Ferry Rd	1,430	1,570		10%
Rt 218 (Federal Street)	N of US 1/Route 27	1,090	1,190		9%
Rt 218 (Federal Street)	NE of Hooper Street	2,440	2,840		16%

General Traffic Effects

The general effects of traffic congestion in Wiscasset fall into four categories: access, economic, community character, and safety.

- **Access.** Seasonal access problems consist of delays and inconvenience both for residents conducting their daily affairs and for through travelers whether on business or pleasure, be they Midcoast residents traveling between coastal communities or long distance travelers. Inconvenience can be either difficulty making left turns, or time wasted in the bumper-to-bumper traffic that occurs in the ever-lengthening high traffic season.

- **Economic.** Economic effects relate to gain or loss of customers and costs of doing business. While a few businesses located right on the highway rely on the volume of traffic going by to provide them with customers, traffic volumes are often so high at certain times of the year that customers are reluctant to stop because of the fear of losing their place in line, or because much of their free time has been consumed by the traffic delays. Most businesses, however, are concerned with the pleasantness of their customer's trips or alternatively with the costs of receiving their supplies and the costs of delivering their products and services. The produce truck and the electrician's van stalled together in traffic both increase our cost of living. And the family stuck on their way to the Windjammer Days in Boothbay Harbor may choose to forgo the trip next year.

There are also public sector economic costs due to increased burden on municipal emergency and maintenance services because of traffic incidents and accidents, the high volume of trucks, and the spillover of traffic onto local roads and streets.

- **Community character.** There are effects on the character of the community. The constant traffic detracts from the village atmosphere, and makes it difficult for village residents to cross Main Street to visit friends or to go to the post office. This barrier effect is not limited to pedestrians, but causes local drivers to avoid trips at times of high traffic, and to take circuitous routes through residential streets to bypass traffic. The backups on Route 1 also cause through travelers to take shortcuts through residential neighborhoods or quiet rural roads. We need to preserve the historic and rural character of Wiscasset. The National Register of Historic District in Wiscasset is an important asset, and it is heavily impacted by traffic, by noise and vibration from trucks, and by air pollution.
- **Safety.** Safety also is affected by traffic congestion. Accidents put a strain on local emergency response teams. The heavy volume of traffic and congestion on Route 1 often delays police, fire, and ambulance vehicles. Morbidity, mortality, property loss, and law enforcement can be affected. Because many of the victims of accidents are from out of state, it is often difficult to collect ambulance and other fees. We need to improve response times for emergency vehicles.

Specific Traffic Problem Areas

The following areas or locations of the town have been identified as having particular problems with traffic due to volume, peak traffic volumes, road construction, seasonal tourism, and development pressures.

1. **Main Street.** Route 1 becomes Main Street in one of the three best-preserved New England villages in Maine. High traffic congestion results from many downtown businesses and attendant pedestrian crossings, traffic entering from numerous side streets, Main Street parking, and a 25 mph speed limit coming into conflict with high seasonal though traffic volumes. This is a high accident area with crashes primarily attributable to driver inattention and failure to yield right of way. The lack of traffic signals at major intersections to create breaks in the traffic makes it difficult for villagers conducting their daily affairs to make left turns onto and off of Main Street during peak traffic season.
2. **Main Street/Federal Street/Fort Hill Street Intersection.** In addition to the general Main Street conditions described above, the situation at this intersection is compounded by Federal

Street (Route 218) being a major collector road with higher traffic volumes than other side streets, and by the presence of the United States Post Office on the corner.

3. **Bath Road/Gardiner Road Intersection.** The importance of Bath Road as the primary access to and from the Midcoast region and its intersection with Gardiner Road, which serves as a primary access link to and from Augusta and points north, combined with the type of traffic (e.g., truck and passenger vehicle), results in traffic congestion in this area. These two arterial highways meet only a short distance from the Main Street problem described above, thereby compounding both problem areas. Left turns from each highway onto the other are difficult at times of high traffic. A left-turn pocket on Bath Road somewhat mitigates backups on Bath Road at the expense of more difficult left turns from Gardiner Road.
4. **Bath Road/Lee Street/Bradford Road Intersection.** This intersection presents to northbound traffic the first of five pedestrian crosswalks in the village, but the failure of traffic to slow down to the 25 mph speed limit endangers pedestrians. The traffic volume and proximity of access points increase the traffic problems at this intersection, as traffic is constantly trying to enter and exit commercial and residential locations and roads. Both Lee Street and Bradford Road are used as bypasses around Route 1 traffic. Safety at this intersection is further jeopardized by the misalignment of Bradford Road and Lee Street. MDOT Wiscasset crash data documents 14 accidents at this intersection between the years 2000 and 2003. The primary contributing factors to these accidents were driver inattention/distraction and failure to yield the right of way.
5. **Bath Road/Birch Point Road Intersection.** The volume of traffic entering and leaving Birch Point Road is substantial and growing. Not only does it serve the growing Birch Point residential neighborhood, but it serves the planned Point East Maritime Village and the expanding Ferry Landing Industrial Park, as well as providing one of only two exits from Westport Island. Increased residential development on Westport Island may directly increase traffic volume. In addition, numerous commercial and residential land uses are located or planned adjacent to this intersection. The increasing traffic volume exacerbates existing problems linked to speed limit, location of entrances/exits, poor sight distances, and the variety of traffic activity.
6. **Bath Road -** Bath Road, like the rest of Route 1, has in recent years experienced a steady rise in traffic volume, and this trend will likely continue. It serves as the northbound gateway to the town and was designated in the 1989 Comprehensive Plan as the commercial growth area. This section of road has numerous existing commercial and business land-use activities and continues to be an attractive location for new development. The primary issue in this area is whether road improvements and proper traffic access planning for all new development will sufficiently protect highway capacity and speed to satisfy MDOT requirements for permitting further development. Current conditions include uncoordinated mitigation expenditures required of developers that are non-conducive to economic development.

Regional Traffic Issues

1. **Augusta Bypass Project.** The recently-completed Augusta bypass and new Kennebec River bridge connects Interstate 95 in Augusta directly to state Route 3 to Belfast. It is hoped that it may cause a reduction in traffic volume on Route 1 in Wiscasset as a result of smart signs

MDOT plans to install on I-295 in Brunswick and the dissemination of educational material about the new bypass.

2. **Route 1 in the Midcoast Region.** Traffic volumes on Midcoast Route 1 present serious problems for several communities. The Maine Department of Transportation has spent considerable sums on a number of traffic studies over the years, and has undertaken several projects that have provided limited relief in certain areas. Currently Wiscasset is participating in Gateway 1 the Maine Department of Transportation's long-term initiative to integrate transportation and land use planning in towns along the Route 1 corridor from Freeport to Stockton Springs. Wiscasset joined many of these towns in signing a "Memorandum of Understanding" of the Gateway 1 goals in 2004.
3. **Ridesharing.** traveling through the Wiscasset area would be among those served by the program, which would facilitate the formations of carpools and vanpools for travel to work. The rideshare program is an alternative that might result in net savings in the capital and operating costs of the transportation system.
4. **Transportation Alternatives.** One of the goals of MDOT's regional transportation planning process was to promote the use of alternative transportation modes that would help meet the needs of the region. The study was aimed at promoting alternative transportation modes such as rail, bus, car pools, bike trails, and walking as a means of addressing the town's traffic issues.
5. **Rail Transportation.** Wiscasset is currently served by a 55-mile rail line known as the Rockland Branch that connects Brunswick with Rockland. The Rockland Branch is owned by the State, which contracts with Maine Eastern Railroad to provide freight and passenger rail service. Although the primary use of the rail is freight transportation, summer excursion service has been offered off and on for ten years. Amtrak currently provides passenger service between Portland and Boston, and Amtrak service has been targeted for extension to Brunswick by 2008. This would permit Amtrak passengers to make connections at Brunswick with the Rockland Branch operator, thus recreating passenger rail connections between Wiscasset and Boston that had ceased in the early sixties. Commuter rail service may provide a reduction in traffic congestion.
6. **Bus Service.** Concord Trailways currently provides twice daily service from Wiscasset to Bangor and to Portland. The bus stop, located at Huber's Market on Bath Road south of the village, is quite informal and offers no structure to support associated facilities. There is a need to consider returning the bus stop to the village after the bypass is completed. Bath Iron Works provides commuter bus service for its employees working in Bath and Brunswick. A regional bus service would benefit riders to access nearby areas such as Bath, Brunswick, Damariscotta and Augusta for shopping and commuting to work, particularly considering the aging population and increased cost of fuel. Such a bus service may be worthy for the town to consider.
7. **Air Transportation.** Wiscasset is fortunate to have its own municipal airport offering fuel, service and hanger space. The Augusta Airport is the closest full-service airport that offers regularly scheduled flights to several cities. The Portland Airport, approximately one hour from Wiscasset, has an international flight schedule and regular service to Boston.

- 8. Water Transportation.** Wiscasset currently offers two public water access points for boat launch and retrieval: one beside Memorial Pier in the Village, and the other at the Old Ferry Landing on Back River. Point East Company plans to provide marina services at the Maritime Village being developed at the former Mason Station site. Both Memorial Pier and the Maritime Village offer excellent opportunities for small cruise ship and ferry terminal facilities. The deep-water harbor with adjacent rail lines provides options for the development of rail-to-barge and other ocean-bound transportation of goods and services.

Rail Transportation

Maine has spent ten years and invested some \$80 million in restoring passenger rail service to the state, with most of the capital funding coming from the federal transportation budget. Daily passenger service now operates between Portland and Boston and has proven to be successful.

As rail service declined in Maine over the second half of the twentieth century, the Maine Department of Transportation began systematically to acquire and preserve unused rail corridors. Gradually, a shift in transportation policy has led to the rehabilitation of tracks in some of these corridors. At the same time, MDOT has put forward a specific and detailed plan to invest in rail and ferry services as an alternative to highway construction.

Maine's passenger rail concept has three broad parts. The first is service between Portland and Boston, which is now operating. The second would be a link between Southern Maine and Montreal, which remains in the conceptual stage. The third piece, and most important to Wiscasset, is passenger service in the Midcoast and central regions.

The 55-mile long rail line that connects Brunswick with Rockland, the "Rockland Branch," is owned by the State. The tracks have recently been restored to standards that will support passenger rail service operations at speeds up to 59 miles per hour. In some places such as the Wiscasset Village, speed is restricted to 10 miles per hour.

The City of Rockland, terminating point of the system, offers ferry services in Penobscot Bay. Other ferry services have been discussed and are possible in the future. The linking of passenger and rail service with ferries, sometimes referred to as the marine highway system, is an important part of the rail development concept. The MDOT has contracted with the Morrissett and Erie Railway, doing business in Maine as the Maine Eastern, to operate rail services on the Rockland Branch. Although long-term decisions about scheduling, pricing and equipment types have yet to be made, the State plans to begin commuter service to Rockland beginning in 2008. Maine Eastern introduced summer and fall excursion service with a stop in Wiscasset during 2004.

Without a rail service linking Portland and Brunswick, the Rockland Branch would be an isolated railroad, forced to rely on the relatively small towns of the Midcoast between Brunswick and Rockland to provide its ridership. But work is underway to create this linkage, which will then connect the Rockland Branch to Boston and the national Amtrak network.

Currently, State planners see two markets, transportation riders and tourism riders, for the Rockland Branch. Transportation riders are those who choose rail over other modes (e.g., car, bus, air transportation) for ordinary trips. Tourism ridership is promoted by the State through offering "car-less" vacations in which visitors would travel through Maine on trains and ferries in a transportation

system somewhat similar to Alaska's. Although transportation and tourism ridership will continue to depend on connecting service through to Portland, bus or ferry service between Wiscasset and Boothbay Harbor could provide another dimension to the service in the future.

Air Transportation

The Wiscasset Municipal Airport is located in rural southern Wiscasset, with direct access to Route 144, then to Route 1. The primary feature of the airport is the runway, oriented southwest/northeast, with a paved surface that is 3,400 feet long and 75 feet wide. Other features of the airport consist of a paved 1,300-foot long by 35-foot wide parallel taxiway, 195,300 square foot paved aircraft parking apron, 10 hangers, terminal building and approximately 14,000 square feet of paved parking lots.

Wiscasset is in an ideal location along the Maine coastal route, midway between Portland and Rockland. Wiscasset Municipal Airport is the only public service facility between these two cities, and serves the growing communities between Brunswick and Boothbay Harbor.

As of 2004, Wicked Good Aviation is the only Fixed Based Operator (FBO) at the Airport. An FBO is a privately-owned business that provides services such as air taxi, flight instruction, aircraft servicing and repair. Wicked Good Aviation provides aircraft maintenance and inspections, supplies fuels, and offers general pilot product sales.

Wiscasset Municipal Airport is classified as a general aviation airport. General aviation activities encompass passenger and cargo charter, flight instruction, business flights, aerial photography, recreational flying, crop-dusting, and emergency life-flight service. The existence of an airport in Wiscasset offers opportunities to explore multi-modal movement of goods and services. Currently, Wiscasset Municipal Airport is ideally located to take advantage of intermodal transportation links between air, railroad, shipping and trucking. The excellent access to markets makes Wiscasset a prime inland port and distribution center for small- to medium-sized companies looking to develop their infrastructure in an area highly conducive to growth and quality of life.

As of 2004, the Wiscasset Municipal Airport has completed the permitting process for the extension of the parallel taxiway and construction of three hangers. During 2001, the Airport and Dufresne-Henry, Inc. completed a comprehensive Airport Master Plan. This Master Plan is serving as a guide towards future Airport development and expansion.

Water Transportation

The abundant natural features of lumber, fish and a deep water harbor played a major role in the development of Wiscasset, and ultimately led to its heyday in the early 1800's as a major shipping port. The waterfront prospered and changed dramatically during this time as areas were filled and several mills, warehouses and other buildings were built along its shores. As the elements of industrialization began to change with the introduction of new technologies, the resource-based economy eventually declined. Wiscasset failed to keep pace with these changes. The resulting decline in the economy and shipping lessened the importance of the waterfront as an area for commerce. This precipitated its neglect and decline, which was further punctuated by the construction of the rail line along the waterfront. As the Town depended less on the waterfront for transportation and commerce, buildings were vacated and eventually removed.

Wiscasset's waterfront is located on the Sheepscot and Back Rivers, approximately fourteen miles inland from the ocean. Few communities can boast of a deep-water harbor and a working waterfront, which has maintained significant areas of productive wildlife habitat and abundant natural and architectural beauty. The approximately nine miles of continuous shoreline offers a variety of economic, scenic, and recreational opportunities.

The Sheepscot River is an important waterway connecting Wiscasset with the Atlantic Ocean. Wide and deep where it joins Sheepscot Bay, the river runs straight north, narrowing gradually but maintaining deep, navigable water throughout. In the south, the river is 175 feet deep; approaching Wiscasset, the depth is in the 60-foot range, more than ample for ocean commerce. Near the Village, the river shoals up, with 13 feet of depth near the Main Street Pier.

The Town Landing, located in the village, is a well-developed marine center on the river's edge at the south end of Water Street. Both commercial fisherman and recreational boaters use the site heavily. The site offers 44 paved parking spaces, six stalls for storing boat trailers, public restrooms, two boat-launch ramps, and three substantial piers with floats. This site may offer facilities for small cruise ships and ferry service.

The Wiscasset Yacht Club operates from facilities that it owns and maintains adjacent to the Town Landing. Its holdings consist of a one-story clubhouse on pilings, on-site parking, and floats for members' use. There are approximately 165 members and 90 boats. This is a membership club that operates in the spring, summer and fall.

The Main Street Pier (sometimes incorrectly called the Creamery Pier) is immediately south of the point where Route 1 crosses the Sheepscot River in Wiscasset. Approximately 150 by 100 feet, it is a wooden platform owned by the Town on pilings over the river. Because of its ideal location on the river next to the business district it has strong potential for commercial and public access uses. The Rockland Branch tracks pass along its west side. Adjacent to the north is a paved parking lot owned by the Maine Department of Transportation and available for public use.

The Mason Station property is the only point between Portland and Searsport that combines access to deep water by rail. The site includes: a former power plant and associated switchgear; a deep water (35 foot M.L.W. depth) pier formerly used for fuel barge unloading; oil storage tanks; a rail spur; and a former coal storage yard. Recently, a majority of the land and buildings on this site were purchased from the former owners, FPL Energy. Potential compatible activities include port/terminal operations, and marine operations such as boatyards, chandlers and stevedoring services.

In the Back River area south of the village waterfront, formal access is available at the Old Ferry landing at the end of Ferry Road. There is limited public parking available at the Old Ferry Landing. This land adjacent to the landing is privately owned, while the landing facilities are owned by the Town. This lot is extremely undersized for the type and extent of use that it receives and effectively limits the number of people able to access the river from this location. The predominant use of this site is by commercial fisherman and recreational boaters.

Parking

Public parking lots are located in the village on North Middle Street, South Middle Street, South Water Street and at the municipal building. In addition there is on-street parking on most village streets. Most of this parking is regulated by signage; there are no parking meters. The parking on Main, Middle, and Water Streets is striped and signed with a two-hour limit. Railroad Avenue is unpaved and unsigned. The Maine Department of Transportation owns a paved parking lot beside Main Street Pier by the bridge that is generally available for free public use.

The following is a list of public parking locations an approximate number of spaces in the Village:

Location	Approx. Number of Spaces
1. Municipal lot on North Middle Street	13
2. Municipal lot on South Middle Street	12
3. Municipal lot on South Water Street	10
4. Main Street	32
5. North Middle Street	31
6. South Middle Street	27 plus 22 off-season
7. North Water Street	24
8. South Water Street	37
9. Lincoln Street	13
10. Railroad Avenue	No spaces are laid out
11. Main Street Pier	14
12. Memorial Pier/Town Landing	44
13. Municipal Building	50