

TRANSPORTATION

INTRODUCTION

To say that transportation issues are important to Easton would be an understatement. The various routes and terminuses that comprise the transportation system of Easton have a profound impact on Town residents, workers, and visitors. This system provides the means for all of these people to get from home to work as well as to reach shopping, entertainment, and cultural, attractions both within and beyond Easton. Ensuring that this system operates efficiently, yet in a manner that respects the numerous and sometimes conflicting needs of all who use and are impacted by the system, is the general theme of this chapter.

BACKGROUND

One of the major factors influencing the way in which land is used is the transportation system. This is certainly true in Easton. The earliest estates in Talbot County, including some in the Easton area, date back over 300 years to locations chosen out of the necessity to be located on the water. Much of the large industrial buildings which seem out of place in the middle of Easton, make more sense when one considers that they were once located on a thriving rail line dating back to the mid 1800's. Finally, Easton has grown eastward in the last 40 to 50 years, due in no small part to the presence of high traffic volumes on a major highway, U.S. Route 50.

Road System

Clearly one of the major factors shaping both the type and location of growth (particularly commercial growth) over the past few decades has been U.S. Route 50. With the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952 came the opportunity for

millions of Western Shore residents to easily travel to the Eastern Shore, primarily to Ocean City and nearby resorts. Over the years since that time, entrepreneurs have built a variety of establishments, particularly fast-food restaurants and gasoline stations, along the Route 50 corridor in an attempt to entice this large migrating market to stop in Easton.

There is little doubt that many business owners have benefited from Route 50 and its seasonal traffic. However, this same traffic carries numerous negative impacts ranging in scope from minor inconveniences to life-threatening dangers. In most basic terms the source of these negative impacts is two-fold: (1) too many points of direct access onto/off-of Route 50 and (2) Route 50 trying to essentially be two kinds of road at once, a local service route and a quasi-interstate highway.

While it is clear that improvements are desperately needed to Route 50, it is less clear what form those improvements should take. There is a concern among many local residents that the State Highway Administration will dualize the Easton Parkway and have it serve as an Easton Bypass. Some highway-oriented businesses located on Route 50 could see a decrease in business. However the larger concern is that such a change would essentially solve nothing and would cause new problems. With the growth of the Town toward and along the Parkway in recent years, numerous signalized intersections would be necessary, probably even more than exist now on Route 50. The alternative to signalized intersections is grade-separated intersections, but that would seem to be precluded at several locations (e.g. MD 33 & MD 333) by environmental constraints. In fact, environmental concerns make it seem unlikely that the Parkway could even be widened.

Another objection to such a major change in traffic patterns is based on the impact it would have on the western portion of Easton and Talbot County. When the Easton Parkway was constructed in the 1960's it was for the purpose of affording residents of Western Talbot County the opportunity to travel north or south without having to make the circuitous trip through Easton. Despite the growth in signalized intersections, the Parkway still serves that function well. However, it is doubtful this would still be the case if the Parkway became "Route 50 - Bypass".

With this as the backdrop, it is not surprising that the least supported option for the future of Route 50 through (or around) Easton, as expressed in the Visioning opinion survey, was to reroute Rte. 50 to the Parkway. This option received only 5.9% of the 446 responses. What is most interesting about this survey, are the next choices because they represent a clear and dramatic shift from the opinions expressed in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. In 1997, it was clear that the participants who helped draft that Plan felt that Route 50 should remain exactly where it is today, but with significant access and intersection improvements, as well as improvements/enhancements to the appearance of buildings along this corridor. During the public-input phase of this Plan, however, this option was not nearly so supported. Only 22.6% of the respondents said that Rte. 50 should remain exactly as it is today and almost the same amount (23.5%) recommended keeping it in the same location, but have it converted to limited access with grade-separated interchanges (a la Kent Island). The leading option this time was a choice that was generally considered unthinkable in 1997. That is to construct a bypass much further east [or west] of Town. This was supported by almost one-half of the respondents to the survey (48%).

There are attractive advantages to this option. For instance, it would in essence make the existing Route 50 in Easton a local road. Gone would be the waits through multiple signal cycles. There would be no more being trapped in places like South Beechwood, Clifton, or even Stoney Ridge because traffic is bumper-to-bumper and slow moving. If this scenario were to unfold, Route 50 could be reduced in width which would offer tremendous opportunities to enhance the design of this corridor. Those travelers who needed to stop in Easton for services would be directed down this new "Business 50" and those who did not would continue on around our community on the new bypass.

So how do we reconcile these conflicting realities/possibilities? At this time about the best that we can do is plant the seed of this idea and the best place to do that is here in this Comprehensive Plan. Thus it will be supported as a long-range option. In the meantime, we will continue to work with the State for landscaping enhancements, intersection improvements, and access management along the existing Route 50 corridor through Easton.

Another commonly expressed transportation problem in the Town is east-west access. This has been a long-standing problem and, as discussed above, was part of the reason for building the Easton Parkway. The Parkway does work well for travelers from the west who want to go north or south without having to travel through Town. However, for travelers who want to move between the East and West sides of town, there is no particularly efficient route.

This difficulty in moving in an east-west direction is largely at the root of many neighborhood-level traffic concerns. At one time or the other in recent years, residents in St. Aubin's, the East End neighborhood, and the Goldsborough Street

corridor have complained about inordinate volumes of traffic. The reason is that the current east-west path through Town routes through residential neighborhoods. If an alternative existed, these neighborhood complaints would lessen. Alternatives for East-West travel are discussed later in the Planned Transportation Improvements Map section of this chapter.

One proposed improvement that could provide significant relief to the east-west traffic problem is the relocation of MD 309 to the point where the former railroad crosses US Rte. 50. The new 309 would follow the rail line for a short distance before rejoining its current route.

This move is necessitated by a desire to get this intersection away from its current location immediately adjacent to the airport where a grade-separated interchange would pose a major aviation hazard. The State Highway Administration proposed this concept to local officials as a means to improve safety at the U.S. 50 and Airport Road intersection. The concept has since been endorsed by both Town and County officials as well as regional elected leaders, in that the SHA continue and advance further planning for this improvement. The benefit to east-west traffic in Easton is that the proposed interchange would also include linking the Easton Parkway with the proposed East-side collector via a grade separated interchange, thereby providing significant relief, for the East-West movement on the north side of Town.

Airport

Easton is fortunate to have air service within town limits. The Easton Airport is a County-owned facility located at the northern end of the Town just west of Old Centreville Road (MD Rte. 662) and south of Airport Road. Primary access to the airport is via U.S. Rte. 50. The County Council and an Airport Manager manage the

operation of the Airport with the assistance of a five member Airport Advisory Board appointed by the County Council.

Easton Airport is a general aviation airport that serves primarily corporate jets and private planes. East Coast Flight Services (jet) and Maryland Airlines (piston engine) provide charter service to destinations throughout the United States and adjacent areas. The airport presently averages between 240 and 250 operations per day (i.e. takeoffs and landings) with some peak days reaching 350 per day. Several air-services related businesses and industries are located at the airport.

With the growth of Easton Airport there have increasingly come conflicts between the airport and its neighbors as a result of the increase in traffic, noise, etc. In response to this conflict, Talbot County has instituted special zoning requirements for County lands surrounding the airport. In addition, the County has obtained several aviation easements on properties adjacent to the facility that essentially prohibit any use or activity that would interfere with flight operations. The County plans to acquire more aviation easements as opportunities arise in the future.

Much of the land surrounding the Airport lies within the Town of Easton. This area is not subject to any special airport-related zoning requirements at this time. This is an option that could perhaps be added in a future revision of the Town's Zoning Ordinance. In the meantime, all of the land immediately surrounding the airport is zoned for industrial uses. Provided that airport clear zones are respected and that uses are restricted to something like warehousing or storage on those properties potentially at risk to an aircraft accident, this should be sufficient to minimize future conflicts in this area.

In another area, the residential areas of North Easton and County land surrounding the northern part of Easton, the conflict is not the potential for accidents as much as it is the inconvenience created by the increased air traffic. This calls for sacrifice on the part of both parties. Residents of these areas must realize that they live in the proximity of an airport and that this does in fact create a certain amount of nuisance. On the other hand, the airport should do its part to minimize the impacts on these areas by channeling its growth and the associated nuisances towards the industrial and undeveloped neighboring properties.

Port

Port facilities for the Town of Easton are provided at Easton Point. Easton Point is a triangular-shaped piece of land surrounded on two-sides (and at the point) by water. The area generally referred to as Easton Point extends east to the Easton Parkway. Most of the land on Easton Point is not within the Town of Easton. The exceptions are the Town Public Works Facility, the Talbot County Public Works Facility, the Londonderry Retirement Community and a few small intervening parcels.

The present mix of uses on Easton Point is quite diverse. Right on the point is a small marina and a public boat ramp. Both are heavily utilized. There are also some industrial uses that still rely on the river for deliveries of bulk materials. There are a limited number of commercial uses including two gasoline stations. Nearer to the Parkway are the aforementioned Retirement Community and the County Public Works Facility. The intervening parcels consist of fairly low-end housing and the Town Public Works Facility.

The future role of Easton's port facilities is clouded. A great many people have suggested that this area has tremendous redevelopment potential, although no one has

come forth with a proposal to annex and redevelop it. If this ever comes to be, the future of the port is most likely more towards recreational uses such as an expanded marina, boat ramp, and associated uses with less emphasis on truly industrial uses.

Rail

Rail service in Easton and in all of Talbot County has been discontinued for several years. The remaining rights-of-way have generally either been retained by the State Rail Administration or reverted to private property owners. This makes the restoration of rail service unlikely during the planning period.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan

Transportation Plans often focus almost exclusively on the highways of a community, with perhaps a little attention directed to air, rail, and/or port service. What is often totally neglected is the most fundamental mode of transportation, walking, and the system to accommodate these pedestrians, sidewalks.

The older sections of Easton have long had sidewalks and recently some parts of this area have undergone sidewalk and streetscape improvement projects. Since the early 1980's, the Planning and Zoning Commission has required sidewalks as one of the elements of infrastructure necessary to approve a subdivision. The problem areas are those that developed in the interim, primarily during the 1950's, 60's and 70's. In these areas there are no sidewalks and pedestrians are forced to use the roadway.

Obviously this is not the safest situation. Areas such as these are prime locations for the Town to retroactively install sidewalks.

Bicycles

In recent years planning for bicycle travel has become more important. Bicycle path design and construction is one of the most frequently used projects for Federal Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) monies. Such projects may not be as high profile as a light rail or subway system, but they are imminently more affordable and can potentially be just as effective in spreading the total transportation demand among a wider variety of modes of travel.

The State is also interested in promoting bicycle travel. One of the mandates of the Growth Act is that Transportation elements of Comprehensive Plans must now address pedestrian and bicycle trails as potential modes of travel.

In that vein, the Town adopted the **"Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan"** in 1999 and is hereby referenced.

Public Transportation

Easton does not offer any form of Public Transportation. This is not expected to change during the Planning period. However, Upper Shore Aging offers a U-STAR transportation service to which the Town regularly contributes. This is a demand-response service which is available to residents of Kent, Caroline, and Talbot Counties, including the Town of Easton.

Recently, officials from Upper Shore Aging have suggested that perhaps Easton has grown to the point where a more formal system could be sustained in Town. To this end, a system with defined routes and regularly scheduled stops has recently started. Such a service should be a great benefit to Easton's residents.

TRANSPORTATION MAP

The Easton Town Engineer worked closely with the Planning staff to develop recommended transportation improvements. These are presented graphically on the **Transportation Map**. The proposed improvements can be summarized as follows:

- The rail/trail first described in the 1989 Comprehensive Plan should be fully expanded throughout the Town. In addition, the Town should work with Talbot County to develop a trail running west from Easton to St. Michael's along the old Claiborne Railroad right-of-way. Also the Town should work with the State Highway Administration to install crossings of Route 50 and the Easton Parkway in order to extend the Trail beyond the confines of the older, traditional part of the Town.
- A residential neighborhood collector roadway for the east side of Town began with the construction of Paper Run Road and Fisher Range Road as outlined in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. This road should be continued in conjunction with future development near the eastern boundary of Town. This is the continuation of a recommendation originally made in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. Since that time there has been some misconception concerning the purpose and need for this road. The basic purpose is to provide a second means of travel for residents on the east side of Town so that they can travel from their homes to other neighborhoods and businesses or to other destinations on the eastern side of Town, without the necessity to travel on Route 50. This is important because often times during the summer beach season, it is difficult to travel on Rte. 50 because it is at or near a standstill. One criticism of the road is that a

similar route already exists via Dover Neck Road and Black Dog Alley. This is a valid point; however, these roads are poorly suited for this type of travel. It is remotely located further to the east of town and would not encourage significant use in the short-term, as is the case currently.

Both roads have deep ditches on some portions. They have numerous accesses. And, these are County roads, thus the Town has no ability to correct these problems. The proposed East side collector will be a limited access road, with no direct driveway accesses. While it is now largely depicted across rural areas, it will eventually be surrounded by development and other roads that will create a grid that will ensure connectivity between the various neighborhoods in this area. Future residential development which abuts or incorporates this neighborhood collector road shall provide access to it as directed by the Town. Additionally, subdivision shall provide access to existing collector roads adjacent to the project. As such, an urban boulevard type of road is appropriate, as are other cross sections. A variety of cross sections may encourage slower vehicle speeds and create a sense of location, or identity unique to the area in which it exists as well as proposed improvements to the right-of-way behind the existing Moore's property which will be a continuation of this service road. In order to preserve the residential nature of this road, various traffic calming devices should be employed in order to reduce excessive speeds and to help ensure that the road is not an attractive alternative route for non-local traffic.

- One Roundabout is proposed at "Five Corners" (the intersection of Washington, Harrison, Idlewild, and Peachblossom.)
- A proposal to improve east-west access is outlined. It involves the extension of Marlboro Avenue to Creamery Lane. The traffic would then turn onto Aurora Park Drive, cross Aurora to Magnolia, which would extend across the RTC property and eventually over to Route 50 in the vicinity of the current Taylor Contractors property. It is shown as continuing across Rte. 50 to an extension of Elliott Road along an existing service road. It can also tie into Mulberry Drive via a service road system that will be constructed there in association with the development of Mulberry Commercial North and South.
- The completion of the streets at Chapel Farms is shown, including the connection of the two disconnected segments of Laurel Street.
- Improvements are shown on the Dudrow Farm. These include the extension of Marlboro Avenue across the Easton Parkway until it intersects with Brooks Drive, which is proposed to be extended from its present location down to the St. Michael's Road. A connection with Commerce Drive should also be included in this proposal.
- Finally, a number of intersection improvements are shown. By far the most important of which is the MD 309 relocation. This is vital to Easton's transportation system because this relocation also envisions that a grade-separated interchange be constructed linking the Parkway with the East-side collector, and MD 309 (which services eastern Talbot

and Caroline Counties) providing a much needed east-west travel option, allowing motorists to avoid U.S. 50.

Of all of the proposed transportation system improvements, the Easton Planning Commission has identified the construction of the East Side Collector, the East-West access road, the relocation of MD Route 309, as well as long promised improvements by developers and Talbot County to Dutchman's Lane as immediate priorities.

TRANSPORTATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL: To provide a functional road and street system for the safe, convenient and efficient movement of people, goods and services among places of residence, employment, shopping and recreation and to provide a circulation system which is compatible with, and promotes, the logical and rational development of the Town of Easton.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Work with State and County officials to expedite the MD 309 relocation.
- ✓ Maximize the capacity, safety, and efficiency of the existing street and highway system.
- ✓ Improve access to, and movement within, the Central Business District.
- ✓ Improve the Route 50 circulation system with an emphasis on a better separation of through and local traffic.
- ✓ Improve east-west access through Town.
- ✓ Reduce the growth in the number of commercial accesses on Route 50.

- ✓ Work diligently with the State Highway Administration to improve all roads that intersect with Route 50.
- ✓ Improve the appearance of uses bordering Route 50 and concentrate efforts on correcting functional problems on the existing Route 50 Corridor rather than on rerouting this traffic onto Easton Parkway.
- ✓ Support, in the long-term, any State plans to construct a Route 50 Bypass around the east side of Town. This would be coupled with the conversion of the existing Route 50 through Town to a boulevard-type road.
- ✓ Enhance the Town's "Public Transportation" system.

GOAL: To expand the Town's Trail system and create more and safer opportunities for people to walk and bicycle throughout the Town.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Work with the MD Department of Transportation and find whatever grants may be available to construct a bicycle/pedestrian grade-separated crossing of Route 50 at Chesapeake Avenue.
- ✓ Implement the Goals and Objectives of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.
- ✓ Include as part of any Route 50 or Easton Parkway intersection improvements, the addition of safe and effective crosswalks.

GOAL: To provide for the growth of Easton Airport in a manner that is least intrusive on neighboring residents.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Control development adjacent and near the Easton Municipal Airport so as to not allow incompatible land uses to develop which could possibly restrict the future growth of air service and facilities.
- ✓ Work with the Easton Airport, possibly in review of the Airport Master Plan, to encourage the use of whatever methods or policies might alleviate impact on all residential areas of the Town in general, and those adjacent to the Airport in particular.