

CITY OF NEWARK
Newark, Delaware

TRAFFIC COMMITTEE MEETING
March 15, 2011
5:00 p.m.

Members Present: Chief Paul Tiernan, Carol Houck, Lt. George Stanko, Rich Lapointe, Dave Gula, Tom Parkins, Marvin Howard

Guests: Joseph Hofstee, Delaware Department of Transportation
Matt Goudy, Pennoni Associates
Tom Martin, Pennoni Associates
Jerry Clifton, District 2
Doug Tuttle, District 3
Ed Miller, 31 Blue Jay Drive, Newark
Lauren Stayton, 307 Dove Drive, Newark
Deborah Welch, 7 Shull Drive, Newark
Ed Wirth, 427 Arbour Drive, Newark

1. REVIEW AND DISCUSS DELDOT'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE/ROUTE 896 AND OLD CHESTNUT HILL ROAD INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS.

Mr. Joseph Hofstee introduced himself, Mr. Matt Goudy with Pennoni Associates and Mr. Tom Martin with Pennoni Associates. Mr. Hofstee thanked everyone for attending. Mr. Hofstee said this evening the following agenda would be discussed.

- Project History
- Highway Safety Improvement Project (HSIP) Goals
- Accident Data
- Proposed Safety Improvements
- Previous Public Feedback
- Open Discussion/Questions

Project History

Mr. Hofstee said prior to the jug handle, there were 2 lanes in each direction on S. College Avenue that had a 10' inside travel lane and an 11' outside travel lane with no left turn lanes. Mr. Hofstee said if a left turn was desired, a left turn could be made from an inside travel lane anywhere along SR 896. Mr. Hofstee said in 1982, the jug handle was installed and at that time also restricted a left hand turn from northbound 896 onto W. Chestnut Hill Road. In 1984, the medians were installed along SR 896.

Mr. Hofstee said in 2004, the intersection was identified by the Highway Safety Improvement Program; which is a federal program. The program conducts surveys of intersections in the state that considered to be the highest accident priority. The HSIP projects are 90% federally funded.

Mr. Lapointe asked why the jug handle was installed. Mr. Hofstee said reason for installing the jug handle was at that time there were no left turns and the jug handle was installed to provide a left turn movement.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP Goals)

Mr. Hofstee said he would explain the recommendations of HSIP and how the Delaware Department of Transportation would like to move forward.

Mr. Hofstee said the first goal was to examine the feasibility of installing a median on Old Chestnut Hill Road to restrict left turns out of the business. The HSIP recommended installing a median on Old Chestnut Hill Road so no left turns could be made exiting the parking lot of Mad Macs. Mr. Hofstee reason for not pursuing this recommendation was the patrons from Mad Macs would exit the McDonald's parking lot onto 896 and is unsafe due to the high speeds that are traveled. Mr. Hofstee said the thought of installing the median would not help and would create more accidents.

Mr. Hofstee said the next recommendation was to install pedestrian movements at the intersection. Mr. Hofstee said there are no striped crosswalks to get across 896, nor is there a crosswalk at the entrance to Mad Macs on Old Chestnut Hill Road. The Delaware Department of Transportation is proposing to add striped crosswalks across northbound and southbound 896, as well as at the entrance to Mad Macs. Mr. Hofstee said they would also improve the traffic pedestrian signals and bring the curb ramps up to ADA standards.

Mr. Hofstee said the next recommendation was to examine a protected left turn phase on westbound Old Chestnut Hill Road approach to SR896. Mr. Hofstee said it was decided not to pursue this because the traffic numbers do not warrant this type of protected movement.

Mr. Hofstee said the next two recommendations were to develop improvements to address the operation of jug handle and improve signage of jug handle and will be addressed later.

Mr. Hofstee turned over the meeting to Mr. Tom Martin with Pennoni to discuss the accident data. Mr. Martin said the HSIP study that was published in 2004, studied data from January 2000 to December 2002, and recorded 38 accidents. Mr. Martin said the Pennoni study that was conducted from June 2006 to May 2009, recorded 39 accidents which is a rate of approximately 1 per month. Mr. Martin said the recent data obtained by the Delaware Department of Transportation from July 2009 to December 2010 is an additional .6 per month. Mr. Martin said based on the accident data, some of the accidents were rear-end collisions occurring at the signals, however many accidents occurred in the middle of the intersection and were due to left turn conflicts from westbound Old Chestnut Hill Road as motorists driving through the intersection heading eastbound on Chestnut Hill Road.

Lt. George Stanko asked if the Delaware Department of Transportation has considered the fact that this project coincided with the I-95 project and has put additional traffic on S. College Avenue. Mr. Hofstee said from the initial HSIP which was a 3-year time period there may have been a slight spike in data due to the extra traffic, however the rate is still approximately 1 accident per month.

Mr. Joe Hofstee said during peak travel times, westbound Old Chestnut Hill Road traffic backs up and creates several conflicts. One conflict is traffic exiting Mad Macs is unable to get in the left lane onto westbound Old Chestnut Hill Road or is unable to cut across Old Chestnut Hill Road to access S. College Avenue. The vehicle at the stop sign in the jug handle is unable to make a right to get into the queue for the signal on Old Chestnut Hill Road due to the backup. As a result, this creates a backup onto S. College Avenue.

Mr. Ed Wirth suggested installing a right turn only for traffic exiting Mad Macs. Mr. Joe Hofstee said the concern with this, is traffic would use the McDonald's lot onto S. College Avenue and it was not recommended due to the high traffic speeds that are traveled on S. College Avenue.

Proposed Safety Improvements

- Provide a designated left turn lane on northbound S. College Avenue. Mr. Joe Hofstee said they are proposing to add a dedicated left turn lane that is 405' in length with a queue length of 16 vehicles. This design has a queue length longer than what the jug handle has. Additional traffic from Welsh Tract Road has also been considered in the storage length design. This will be a completely protected left turn lane which would be the same as southbound 896.
- Remove the jug handle that coincides with the dedicated left turn lane. This will reduce many of the conflicts and backing up that currently exists.
- Install median along Old Chestnut Hill Road. Mr. Joe Hofstee said this is from right turn island at Mad Macs all the way back to church entrance. Mr. Hofstee said this will prevent left turns out of the church.
- Install a channelization island designated right turn lane to Old Chestnut Hill Road. Mr. Hofstee said at this location the right hand turn lane would be installed to allow the movement onto 896. The right hand turn lane would be longer than the jug handle. A channelization island will be added to designate where the right hand turn movement is.
- Realignment of the left turn lane to increase sight distance at the intersection. Mr. Hofstee said westbound Old Chestnut Hill Road making a left onto S. College Avenue cannot see opposing through traffic. By aligning the intersections you will be able to see around the vehicle in front to reduce collisions.

Accident Reduction Based Upon Proposed Safety Improvements

- Provide a designated left turn lane on northbound S. College Avenue. Mr. Hofstee said it is believed that this improvement would have reduced 4 accidents between June 2006 and May 2009.
- Remove the jug handle. Mr. Hofstee said it is believed that with this improvement would have reduced 6 accidents from June 2006 to May 2009.
- Install median along Old Chestnut Hill Road. Mr. Hofstee said it is believed that this improvement would have reduced 1 accident from 2006 to May 2009.

- Realignment of the left turn lane to increase sight distance at the intersection. Mr. Hofstee said it is believed that this improvement would have reduced 3 accidents.

Mr. Hofstee said If all of the proposed improvements are installed it is expected that there will be a 28% reduction in accidents.

Public Feedback & Concerns Addressed

- Concern regarding an increase in traffic from motorists traveling to Maryland. Mr. Hofstee said there will be a slight increase in traffic on W. Chestnut Hill Road that can't be avoided. Mr. Hofstee said the safety benefit along would outweigh the 30% increase of Welsh Tract Road traffic.
- Safety concern with making a left turn from northbound 896 to W. Chestnut Hill Road. Mr. Hofstee said this will be a protected left turn with no opposing traffic. The only potential for an accident would be if a vehicle ran the red light. Mr. Hofstee said this is a concern at any intersection.
- Concern with increased travel time through the intersection. Mr. Hofstee said the cycle length is 150 seconds in both directions. Mr. Hofstee said the jug handle is much more likely to back up. Mr. Hofstee said the traffic on Old Chestnut Hill Road backs up and blocks vehicles from the jug handle making the right hand movement.
- Concern with the angled left hand turn movement and opposing vehicles clipping one another. Mr. Hofstee said this has been modeled and found that there is plenty of room to make this movement in this large intersection.
- Access to business on southbound SR896. This was a concern from the business owners that they would not be able to get delivery trucks or customers onto southbound 896 just south of the intersection. Mr. Hofstee said delivery trucks will not be able to make the u-turn, however they will be able to take 896 to Route 4 to Old Chestnut Hill Road to make a left onto S. College Avenue.

Open Discussion/Public Comment

Mr. Ed Wirth said he would like to listen to the feedback from the police department. Lt. Stanko said the police department receives many complaints in regard to the volume of traffic heading to Maryland on W. Chestnut Hill Road. By increasing the traffic volume, will increase the chance for more collisions. Lt. Stanko said the side streets that are not signalized, causing difficulty with the line of sight. Mr. Hofstee said the left turn lane will add an additional four to five vehicles every 150 seconds and there would not be a constant stream of traffic.

Lt. Stanko is concerned with the increase of traffic due to the many University of Delaware events throughout the year and is concerned with the backup of traffic this is going to create.

Mr. Ed Miller said he drives this road everyday including peak travel times and asked if removing the jug handle does not solve the problems would DeIDOT put it back to the way it was. Mr. Hofstee said the number one goal of DeIDOT is to reduce accidents throughout the state and is not to increase capacity. Mr. Miller asked Mr. Hofstee if he has used this road during rush hour. Mr. Hofstee said he used to go the University of Delaware and is aware of the traffic at this intersection.

Mr. Miller said that by adding a dedicated left turn lane is going to add a considerable amount of traffic onto W. Chestnut Hill Road. Mr. Miller said majority of the traffic heading into Maryland mainly uses the Route 4 intersection due to the shortened queue of the jug handle. Mr. Miller also stated his concern for adding more traffic to W. Chestnut Hill Road due the blind spot that exists to the left when pulling out of Arbour Park.

Mr. Miller said he does not feel that by installing a left turn lane that the queue will empty out all the vehicles. Mr. Miller also said that he feels there will be more accidents as a result of motorists trying to run the traffic light.

Mr. Hofstee said prior to the jug handle it was the answer in 1982. Mr. Hofstee said they do not want to take this back prior to the jug handle. Mr. Hofstee said when the jug handle was installed it could handle the queue, however over the years the traffic volume has increased. Mr. Hofstee said the goal is to increase safety at the intersection.

Mr. Wirth said he feels the jug handle is a smooth and efficient system. Mr. Wirth said he feels that the elimination of the jug handle will not solve the rear-end collisions. Mr. Wirth said even though it is a protected turn he is concerned that motorists will run the traffic light and there will be more accidents.

Mr. Wirth would like to see a no left turn pulling out of Mad Macs parking lot. Mr. Hofstee said this is not possible as vehicles would not be able to exit.

Mr. Gula said it was mentioned that one of larger problems is that the two intersections are within close proximity. Mr. Hofstee said they are looking to reduce half of those numbers to vehicles at that location. By removing the high number movement it will reduce the amount of vehicles coming into the jug handle.

Mr. Gula asked if DelDOT has considered shifting the left turns on Old Chestnut Hill Road and W. Chestnut Hill Road turning onto S. College Avenue without removing the jug handle. Mr. Hofstee said this specific improvement could be made without removing the jug handle. However, DelDOT's goal is to make the ultimate safety improvement. Mr. Hofstee said the jug handle is responsible for some accidents as well as motorists making a left from northbound 896 onto W. Chestnut Hill Road due to motorists not knowing what to do. Mrs. Houck asked if better signage or better curbing could be installed. Mr. Hofstee said most of the signage currently exists but the goal of DelDOT is to get feedback to make sure nothing was missed.

Mr. Lapointe said exiting Mad Macs to head northbound on S. College Avenue you would cross two lanes of traffic to make a hard left to make a hard right onto S. College Avenue. Mr. Hofstee said he feels it would be more safe to make this movement than how it is currently setup with the higher potential for side impact collisions that can occur exiting Mad Macs.

Mr. Gula said the accident rate is .9 to 1.4 for this intersection. Mr. Gula said based on the volume would like to know the national average of accidents. Mr. Hofstee said he apologizes for not having this figure, however in order to get into the HSIP the intersection has to rank within the top in the state based upon the number of accidents.

Mr. Hofstee said when one intersection is removed another intersection is added to the list.

Mr. Parkins asked what the 28% reduction in accidents is based upon. Mr. Hofstee said from 2006 through December 2010 there were 57 accidents and they are looking to reduce 28% of those accidents which is 15 accidents. Mr. Hofstee said it is to be noted this does not include non-reportable accidents. Mr. Wirth recommended adding a red light camera system which will reduce accidents by 24%. Mr. Hofstee said with the type of accidents that are occurring at this intersection a red light camera system would not be beneficial.

Mrs. Houck suggested closing Old Chestnut Hill Road at Mad Macs. By closing the road at this location, it would eliminate the majority of the issues that have been previously discussed. Mr. Hofstee said with the many facilities on this road that need to be serviced (church, school, etc.) he does not believe this would be an option. M/Cpl. Davis said he feels initially may be some pushback from Gateway Village residents. M/Cpl. Davis said one of the benefits is that it would no longer be an attractive option for motorists that use this as a cut through. M/Cpl. Davis said the police department has not been successful with speed enforcement on W. Chestnut Hill Road due to the hill and the side streets. M/Cpl. Davis feels it would be a good idea to consider cutting the road back to the park and ride. M/Cpl. Davis said he believes that will also help the backup..

Mr. Clifton said he travels this frequently and feels one of the most hazardous movements at this intersection is exiting Mad Macs and agrees with the neighbors that the jug handle operates efficiently. Mr. Clifton said this plan as mentioned earlier, does nothing that will help reduce the types of accidents that have previously been discussed. Mr. Clifton said south of I-95 at Old Baltimore Pike the westbound traffic get a green light to turn and straight as does the eastbound traffic. Mr. Clifton feels there are less impacted changes that could be made at the intersection without a total reconfiguration. Mr. Clifton believes the traffic will increase significantly.

Mr. Tuttle asked what the existing southbound 896 protected left lane capacity as compared to the new proposed left turn lane heading northbound on 896. Mr. Tuttle said northbound traffic has to wait through the protected movement and is a more rare movement. Mr. Parkins agreed that there will be additional queuing. Mr. Tuttle said with the protected left turns the timing will be adjusted to include more volume from the south will affect the straight through traffic movement in both directions.

Mr. Miller asked if he is correct that it was mentioned that red left turn arrows could not be added on Old Chestnut Hill Road and W. Chestnut Hill Road. Mr. Hofstee said it is not justified by a traffic standpoint. Mr. Hofstee said by lining up the intersections this will help at this location. Mr. Miller said if it eliminates all the left turn accidents at the intersection, why not try it. Mr. Hofstee said aligning the intersections will help reduce the accidents and in order to keep capacity and to keep traffic moving at the intersection from a traffic standpoint alone it is not warranted.

Mr. Clifton said this is not a 90 degree angle intersection which is not a natural angle to be making a left turn onto W. Chestnut Hill Road, therefore the turn is being made at an excess of 90 degrees. Mr. Clifton asked if the potential difficulties in making this left turn could be addressed. Mr. Hofstee said a nice benefit is that this is a large intersection. Mr. Hofstee said the stop bars and pedestrian crossing on W. Chestnut Hill Road have been moved back. Mr. Wirth feels there is not enough room for the vehicle to safely make this left turn. Mr. Goudy said the island will be removed and there is a wide shoulder. Mr. Miller doesn't feel tractor trailers should be able to make this left turn. Mr. Hofstee said left turn can't be restricted to certain types of vehicles.

Mrs. Houck inquired when the planning stage began and when the Traffic Committee was notified. Chief Tiernan said he was made aware by Mr. Tuttle. Mr. Tuttle said he knew because of the public workshop. Mr. Hofstee said he was contacted by Alicia Cash on the same day they intended to call to arrange a meeting with the Newark Traffic Committee. Mr. Hofstee said they were not expecting this much negative feedback. Mrs. Houck said her concern is the process and suggested DelDOT contact the Newark Traffic Committee earlier. Mr. Hofstee said the general process is they start with conceptual plans, survey then to preliminary plans. The reason for not soliciting for public feedback until the preliminary plan stage is at this point they feel comfortable that they have something substantial. Mrs. Houck suggested contacting the Newark Traffic Committee during the conceptual stage and that way there is a lot less money spent. Mr. Hofstee said a preliminary plan is only 25% complete. Mrs. Houck said as a way to cut costs in the future would be to meet with the Newark Traffic Committee during the conceptual stage.

Mr. Gula said he is not sure if there is another solution, however he is not completely sold on the proposed improvements. Mrs. Houck said she felt the project came up too quick. Mrs. Houck said during the twelve years she has lived in Arbour Park, when pulling out of W. Chestnut Hill Road the driver has to be on the accelerator in order to get out as cars are coming up the hill. Mr. Gula said a lot of traffic is being diverted off of I-95 and suggested waiting and obtaining the counts until the I-95 project is complete and traffic returns to normal.

Lt. Stanko said there is a significant amount of traffic southbound on this road due to the many special events throughout the year. (U of D football games, AG Day, Graduation, 4th of July, beach traffic, etc.) Lt. Stanko said by adding the left turn it will back up southbound traffic tremendously. Mr. Hofstee said during these special events the timing of the left turn could be reduced.

Mrs. Houck suggested that Old Chestnut Hill Road and W. Chestnut Hill Road be aligned. Mr. Gula said he would like to see improved signage at the jug handle. Mr. Hofstee it could be considered, although the new signage is larger.

Lt. Stanko asked if changing the radius of the jug handle has been considered. Mr. Hofstee said the problem is by expanding the radius he does not feel that the amount that would be gained could justify the cost.

Mrs. Houck suggested the realignment of the intersection for better visibility and would like to wait until the I-95 and Elkton Road projects are completed. Mr. Gula said if the left turn it not installed he would like to recommend improved signage. Lt. Stanko said there has been discussion regarding the signs on S. College Avenue to describe University of Delaware facilities better with Mr. Steve Truitt. Mr. Hofstee said he will look into the status of this.

MOTION BY DAVE GULA, SECONDED BY CAROL HOUCK TO DENY DELDOT'S PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS AT SR896/OLD CHESTNUT & W. CHESTNUT HILL ROADS.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 7 TO 0.

Mrs. Houck said in the future would like for the Delaware Department of Transportation to discuss any future improvements with Traffic Committee during the conceptual stage.

2. REQUEST TO INSTALL PARKING METERS UNDER THE S. COLLEGE AVENUE BRIDGE.

Chief Tiernan said this item was requested by Kyle Sonnenberg, City Manager.

Mrs. Houck said she believes the majority are rental properties. Mr. Howard said meters can be installed there; however he feels if it is metered parking free parking will be found elsewhere. Mr. Lapointe said on Apple Road there was a lot of parking, however once the parking meters were installed no one parked there. Mrs. Houck asked if monthly long term parking could be considered for this location.

Mrs. Houck said Ivy Hall Apartments have four tenants per apartment and are only given two parking spaces. Mr. Howard said he would look into this.

Mr. Parkins said if meters were installed would there be a problem with vandalism. Mr. Howard said it would not be patrolled and feels as a result they would get vandalized. Mr. Howard said he wouldn't recommend meters but would consider long-term parking for this area.

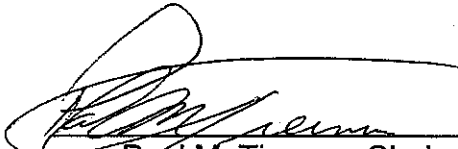
MOTION BY MARVIN HOWARD, SECONDED DAVE GULA, TO STUDY THE OPTION OF LONG-TERM PARKING UNDER THE S. COLLEGE AVENUE BRIDGE.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 7 TO 0

There being no further business, Chief Tiernan called for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION BY RICH LAPOINTE, SECONDED BY DAVE GULA, TO ADJOURN.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 7 TO 0.


Paul M. Tiernan, Chairman