

**Vermont Traffic Committee  
Minutes of Meeting Held  
September 12, 2023**

The Vermont Traffic Committee met on Tuesday September 12, 2023. Committee Chair Joe Flynn called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm at the VTrans Dill Building in Berlin, VT, and online via Microsoft Teams. The meeting was adjourned at 2:57 pm.

**Attendees:**

Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation, Traffic Committee Chair

Wanda Minoli, Commissioner of Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Motor Vehicles

Ian Degutis, VTrans Traffic Operations Engineer, Traffic Committee Coordinator

Sharon Bousquet, Town Administrator, Highgate

Heidi Britch-Valenta, Swanton

David Atherton, Town Manager, Pittsford

Rep. Butch Shaw, District 8, Pittsford

Dan Steinbauer, Selectboard Chair, Underhill

Joy and Jeff Atherton, Westford Residents, Underhill

Kristin Driscoll, VTrans Traffic Operations

Alysha Kane, VTrans District 5 Project Manager

Joe Kelly, VTrans Traffic Operations

Steffanie Lemieux, VTrans Traffic Operations

Marcos Miller, VTrans Traffic Operations

Sarah Ramsay, VTrans Traffic Operations

Taylor Sisson, VTrans Traffic Design Project Manager

Josh Taylor, VTrans Traffic Operations

Brad Woods, VTrans Traffic Operations

## Agenda Items Discussed

- **Highgate, VT-78, Speed Limit**

Mr. Degutis explained the request is on VT-78 to extend the 35 mph zone easterly from the Swanton/Highgate town line into the town of Highgate to Airport Rd. The Missisquoi Valley High School is located in the study area.

As part of the engineering study three speed studies were conducted which showed that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speeds were approximately 45 in the 35 in Swanton, and 51 in the 50 which shows good compliance in the 50 mph zone but not in the 35 mph zone. Mr. Degutis briefly explained how speed studies are conducted and used as part of the engineering study for speed limits.

Traffic Operations' recommendation is to extend the existing 35 mph zone approximately 525 ft to the east which would move the transition location further from the school entrance and improve conspicuity. This is currently a marked passing zone which are not marked in slower speed zones so a double yellow centerline would be marked, this would not be an official no passing zone.

Ms. Bousquet, the new Highgate town administrator, and Ms. Britch-Valenta, the previous town administrator, stated their support of the request. The town of Swanton also supports the request.

Commissioner Minoli confirmed that the town requested to extend the zone to Airport Rd due to the future expansion of the airport. Mr. Degutis said that was considered but the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed near there does not support a reduction and speed limit changes for future conditions are not considered. The Traffic Committee can revisit this in the future should the road conditions change.

The Traffic Committee voted to approve Traffic Operations' recommendation.

- **Pittsford, US-7, Speed Limit**

Mr. Degutis explained the request is to evaluate a 25 mph zone that exists near the school on US-7 and the surrounding area from Plains Rd in the north to Bella Vista in the south. There is currently a 40 mph zone north of Plains Rd and a 50 mph zone south of Bella Vista with a 35 mph speed limit in between except for a short 25 mph zone in the middle near the school.

As part of the engineering study, seven speed studies were conducted which showed that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speeds were generally in good compliance with the 35 mph speed limit, except for poor compliance at the southernmost location near Bella Vista, but less good compliance in the 25 mph zone. The crash rate is well below the critical value. Traffic Operations' recommendation is to make no change.

Mr. Atherton shared a packet of information including speed and safety research as well as pictures of each crosswalk and their specific concerns. The town is considering adding rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs) to the crosswalk in front of Kamuda's Country Market, which the state would likely support.

Representative Shaw said people want to create a walkable village but don't feel safe on the sidewalks, so the town has invested in sidewalks that they have been waiting to be replaced along with this section of highway which is due for replacement and has been pushed out. It's

worth some thought to lower the speed limit until this project is finished then reconsider the speed limits.

The Committee asked clarifying questions and discussed existing conditions including crosswalks and current signage at the curve near Kamuda's. Secretary Flynn asked about speed enforcement, the town has a police department and a speed cart. Secretary Flynn says enforcement is necessary regardless of what the sign says but noted advisory signs are not enforceable and that he is uncomfortable going 35 mph around the Kamuda's corner. He suggested making this an enforceable 25 mph and that it makes the most sense to continue to the existing 25 mph zone.

Mr. Degutis doesn't think there will be strong compliance between Kamuda's and the school but is not opposed to it. He agrees that lower speeds are safer, but he is worried about creating a 25 that isn't complied with because the current one is already not complied with.

Secretary Flynn proposed extending the north end of the 25 mph zone to milepoint 4.03 near Keiths County Store and on the south end of town he is considering extending the 25 mph zone to VT-3. Mr. Degutis clarified there could be some flexibility in the changed limits based on where there is space to install signs, but the speed limit change should happen at a location where drivers perceive the need to change their speed. Making realistic and enforceable speed limits helps enforcement and there is currently very poor compliance near Bella Vista. Mr. Degutis also explained that speed limits are also used for determining other roadway factors such as stopping sight distances so having significant mismatch between posted and travel speed can create safety concerns. Joe's 19<sup>th</sup> Hole was suggested as the southern limit of the new 25 mph zone.

Secretary Flynn proposed to extend the 25 mph zone from Joe's 19<sup>th</sup> hole on the southerly end, past Kamuda's to a point just south of the Dollar General, with precise locations to be determined by Traffic Operations.

The Traffic Committee voted to approve Secretary Flynn's proposal.

- **Underhill, VT-15, Speed Limit**

Mr. Degutis explained the request is on VT-15 near the Westford town line to lower the speed limit or otherwise improve safety. As part of the engineering study, three speed studies were conducted which showed that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speeds were approximately 5-7 mph over the speed limit which is very typical for a 50 mph road in Vermont and the crashes are well below the critical rate. Traffic Operations' recommendation is to retain the existing speed limit based on the speed studies and road character. This curve doesn't merit an advisory speed based on ball banking but due to sight distance one is installed here on the curve warning sign. The hidden drive warning signs will be upgraded to fluorescent yellow, and an existing bent post will be fixed. This area has a lot of ledge but additional brush cutting may help improve sight distance. Secretary Flynn asked the District to look into brush cutting in the area and coordinate with the property owners as they do so.

Mr. Steinbauer says he appreciates upgrading warning signs and asked about convex mirrors and school bus stop ahead signs here in addition to suggested that moving the mailboxes may improve sight distance. Mr. Degutis says that there are existing up to date school bus stop ahead signs in both directions with good visibility. VTrans doesn't allow mirrors to be installed in the right of way due to driver confusion and glare issues. Mailbox locations are usually the

responsibility of the landowner and the post office. Mrs. Atherton shared her speed and crash concerns said the hidden drive sign needs to be more visible and the Underhill and Westford school buses both stop at Roy Dr.

Secretary Flynn suggested adding an advisory speed limit from the other direction and Joe Kelly recommended changing the hidden drive signs to fluorescent yellow and adding a 40 mph advisory speed signs to these signs in both directions instead of the curve signs. Commissioner Minoli said that signs don't change behavior but if we make the public more aware that is a good first step, if there are still issues after the sign upgrades and brush cutting we can always go back and look at this again.

The Traffic Committee voted to approve Traffic Operations' recommendation to retain the existing speed limit.

- **Westminster, US-5, Speed Limit**

Mr. Degutis explained the request is on US-5 to reduce the 50 mph zone on the northern end of town to 40 mph. It's about 1.1 miles and crashes near Faith's Toyota/Ford were cited.

As part of the engineering study, three speed studies were conducted which showed that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speeds were below the posted speed limit, which is unusual. There were 9 crashes and 6 were at the dealership driveway. There is active work at the dealership which will hopefully create better access control.

Based on the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed and roadway conditions, Traffic Operations' recommendation is to reduce the 50 mph speed limit to 45 mph. Commissioner Minoli clarified why the recommendation was not the 40 mph requested by the Town.

The Traffic Committee voted to approve Traffic Operations' recommendation.

#### **Additional Agenda Item:**

- **Essex, VT-128**

This is a minor adjustment; in working with the Town to improve signage at a trail crossing, the existing speed limit sign was relocated a short distance, the revised certificate reflects the new location of the sign.

Secretary Flynn adjourned the meeting at 2:57 pm.

Minutes prepared by Joshua Taylor, VTrans Traffic Operations, and submitted via Ian Degutis, Traffic Operations Engineer/Traffic Committee Coordinator.

These minutes were approved by email on 9/15/2023