

# Richmond Transportation Committee

Meeting Minutes – April 9, 2024

Committee members present: Chris Cole (Chair), Cathleen Gent (Vice Chair), Jon Kart, Susan Wells

Others present: Keith Osborne (Town Planner), Jason Charest (CCRPC), Eric Maki (WSP), Anabelle Dally (WSP), Kevin McCarthy (WSP), Zachary Gavel (WSP), Allen Knowles, Lisa Kory, Andrew Bessette, Bailee, Tom O'Brien, Ann Naumann, Chuck Gilroy, OLM, Vicky LaPlante, JBM (Jeff), Martha Waterman, Jeanne, Mary Houle

All attended remotely.

A quorum was reached and the Chair convened the meeting at 5:32 PM.

**1. Welcome and Public Comments:** No public comments for items not on the agenda.

**2. Revisions to Agenda:** Gent requested that there be a brief update about the Selectboard discussion of the THBC intersection.

**3. Approve Minutes from March 26, 2024, meeting:** Kart offered a minor amendment. **Wells motioned, Kart seconded, amended minutes passed unanimously.**

**4. Share the Road Project Update:** Wells recapped that the Transportation Committee formed a Share the Road Subcommittee tasked with doing an educational campaign for road safety for walkers, bicyclists, and cars, focused on how we can all share the road in appropriate ways. That subcommittee came up with a town-wide yard display contest, to create and display a sign or a diorama on lawns to show how people share the road. There are three categories: cars and drivers; bicyclists; and pedestrians. There will be nice prizes (cash, gift cards, and bike light sets from Local Motion). A high school student designed a poster announcing the contest, which will launch May 1. Also, posters will be put up around town, and posts will be done on Front Porch Forum. Judging will be done from May 29-June 5. Wells added that the signs need to be on people's lawns, not on roads. Tom O'Brien asked via chat if there will be a category for horses. Cole suggested that should be added and Wells agreed. Wells will give the Selectboard an update about the share the road contest when they discuss the Cochran Road speed bumps.

**5. Cochran Road Scoping Study Local Concerns Meeting:** Charest introduced the project, which is a study requested by Richmond as part of the CCRPC annual work program. The Cochran Road Scoping Study has begun and this meeting is the first in the process of public engagement. CCRPC contracted with WSP to do the work on the project. Maki reviewed the agenda and introduced the WSP team members and said that WSP stands for William Sales Partnership, which was a British company in the 1800s. Maki said the WSP team is here to help the town and engage the public with the project. The focus tonight is to hear people's concerns about the roadway, the intersections along Cochran Road, or thoughts about safety or accessibility, challenges on the corridor, so that improvements can be made. Maki reviewed the elements of the scoping project: 1) a scoping study at either end of Cochran Road (where the speed limits are 25 miles per hour) - the Richmond village on the western end and Jonesville on the eastern end. 2) a corridor study will be completed for the 2.5 mile middle part of the road, building on the recommendations and some alternatives presented in the recent bike walk and trails plan; 3) traffic calming elements - WSP will offer final recommendations using the work that the town did last year with speed tables, and the evaluation reports from Dubois and King.

Maki reviewed some goals of the project: for the east and west village sections – to identify new infrastructure such as sidewalks and maybe trails or paths. Another goal, for the bulk of Cochran Road itself, is to identify on road and off-road improvements and multimodal strategies to address safety capacity and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists, and horses. He added that Cochran Road is a paved road about 22 to 24 feet wide, that there are no sidewalks and paths, and the speed limit is 45 miles per hour, a speed which makes pedestrians, bicyclists, and horses not feel safe. The third goal is to evaluate the study that was completed for temporary traffic calming measures and recommend permanent traffic calming solutions. Maki pointed to the bike walking trails plan as a really good starting point, and the WSP consultants will look at developing more detailed solutions, after bringing everyone together to talk about local concerns. They will also use the 2018 Town Plan and results from the recent ARPA survey which had a lot of good participation. Maki clarified that the study starts at the western end of Cochran Road where it intersects with Bridge Street, but the study does not include that intersection. The Richmond village area ends where the 25 MPH speed limit goes to 45 MPH, at the cemetery and trail crossing. The Jonesville 25 MPH section also includes several road intersections, and railroad tracks and ends at Route 2. The right of way is about three rods, which is 49.5 feet. Each travel lane is 11 feet. There are no sidewalks, pedestrian facilities, or dedicated bike facilities. The main area of Cochran Road is classified as a minor collector, and the average daily traffic in 2020 was about 950 vehicles on the road, which makes it just below a major collector. Charest looked up and found more recent data, for 2023, when the average daily count was almost 2,700 vehicles, a much higher number than the 2020 data. Maki pointed out that traffic sometimes is diverted to Cochran Road when there is flooding or accidents on Route 2, and that Cochran Road is a designated truck route. The vehicles per day data can be influenced based on the season. Kart added that, last year in 2023, construction was done on Route 2, and many drivers used Cochran Road to avoid that.

Public comments began with Ann Naumann commenting that she uses Cochran Road almost every day for walking or cycling. She thinks there is a large group of drivers who do not understand regulations or statutes with respect to what cars are to do around vulnerable users. She suggested that a major education program is needed in Richmond. O'Brien agreed 100% with Naumann. Although police say there is no enforcement that can be done, they could educate the public and look at specific ways of enforcement based on the laws. OLM(?) said parking is a problem. Cole pointed out that Overrockers is now operational, but did not know the status of Bombardier's meadow for parking. O'Brien said that parking was a temporary measure during Covid. Gilroy, who is on the parking committee, said that the Richmond Land Trust is considering Bombardier's meadow for drop off/pick up or for handicap parking. Gilroy said the parking committee is working on an option for parking on Route 2 along the railroad. Kory said that there is not enough parking on the western end, by the cemetery or the trail heads. When people park there (along the road), it is dangerous to walk along the road. Kory said she often feels very unsafe, that this year has been the first year that she actually sometimes ended up taking the car, for the half mile into the village just because she felt it wasn't safe to walk on the road. Kory added that daily usage is likely to increase more, as people come from all over for Cochran's bike trails, other bike trails, the river, Umiak tubing, etc. and that it is important to design solutions for the future. Kory said that, because of all the traffic and the fact that there are no shoulders for almost the entire length of Cochran Road, which she also walks regularly, that it is dangerous also. When there are guardrails, there is no shoulder between the guardrail and the road. Kory offered the idea to perhaps widen the road for shoulders.

Waterman, a neighbor of Kory's, said she can attest to the unsafe nature of the road for non-vehicular traffic. As a near daily pedestrian and occasional cyclist, Waterman agreed with everything said so far,

including education and enforcement. She said the road is used frequently by people who do not live in Richmond so education may go only so far in terms of mitigating the unsafe conditions. The most effective long-term solution is to create some type of alternative path (sidewalks, and/or bike path) to protect vulnerable users. She said she really hopes those can be explored, as separate paths would be a life-saving measure. Adding sidewalks and bike paths to promote pedestrian and cyclist use, and commuting, will be good for planning for climate change and moving away from fossil fuel dependency. Waterman said she walks with a stroller and kids, and drivers are sometimes distracted or aggressive, either don't realize they are speeding and not giving her enough room or do not care. Education will be limited in affecting drivers who continue to be rushed and distracted, or unlawful, so separate paths are needed.

In response to a question from Charest, Naumann said sidewalks may be good closer to the villages, but thinks in the general road corridor, a path that goes all the way through would be good, perhaps with both directions, like the Burlington bike path. Waterman said she would be thrilled with sidewalks or paths, thinking as a pedestrian. Kory said she would be happy with either. She added that it is even more dangerous walking on the limited shoulders on Cochran Road, adding there is not four feet of distance between the vehicles and walkers. Therefore, a sidewalk in the village ends is better because drivers will not mistake a sidewalk with shoulders. Sidewalks the entire length of Cochran Road are cost prohibitive. Also, regarding maintenance, Kory is concerned that a path may end up full of snow and slush, because then it is not usable. Sidewalks in town are well maintained and nice no matter the weather. People are using the sidewalks. Bailee said that sections A and B have enough density so sidewalks would be appropriate. On the remaining length of Cochran Road, a sidewalk would be very expensive, and it would not be appropriate because there is not the density of a village setting. Off alignment would be a good option there. For a sidewalk/path for the entire length between Richmond village and Jonesville, there could be a lot of land issues (ownership and what will the town do). Jeff said that there is enough road right of way within the 49.5 feet. He agreed with Waterman that there are a lot of vehicles not from Richmond or passing through, and everyone needs to be educated to share the road. It is sometimes difficult to pass cyclists on the blind turns in the road. He said he hopes we can do better for the community, and use the corridor more safely. Jeff offered several suggestions, perhaps straightening the road and improving visibility, widen the road, and add better shoulders. He said he observes a lot of distracted drivers constantly looking down at phones and it is frightening.

Houle thanked the consultants for the update. She has lived on Cochran Road since 1959, and has seen many changes on the road. She said the road was not constructed for bicycles and pedestrians and that kind of access. She said she will not be giving away her land for anyone to widen the road. She also added that she does not want to speed limit to change from 45 MPH. Houle asked where she can get a tape of the meeting and Cole suggested she reach out to the director of Planning and Zoning.

Charest said that a dedicated project web page will be added to the CCRPC web site, where materials will be posted and provide a central place for anyone interested in the study progress.

Gilroy said he lives on Dugway Road and travels Cochran Road regularly. He has seen many of the walkers at this meeting and is one of the people who goes out of his way to give walkers plenty of room. His question pertained to the part of the road toward Jonesville, where it narrows, whether that is in the floodplain and, if so, can there be infrastructure built there. Cole responded that it depends on

regulations in terms of what materials may be used for the type of path or sidewalk. Houle also commented on that question.

Naumann pointed out that there are a lot of different users and people may feel they are not getting what they want. Her question is how to make it truly work with pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers. For this project to work, she suggested that different users must increase our awareness, and look out for each other. Waterman added that the ways people use the road will not change, and we will likely see an increase in all types of users. Paths to promote the safety of non-motor traffic will also protect drivers since they will not have to swerve to avoid pedestrians or cyclists. All the measures we are discussing would serve to promote the safety of all users.

Cole said that there will be more opportunities throughout the study process. He encouraged people to stay involved, as the best way to design these projects is through the democratic process when everyone weighs in, and then try to develop improvements into a plan for infrastructure, an educational program, etc. Cole also reviewed the project calendar milestones. Charest discussed the traffic calming work done last summer and how this project will review the traffic calming measures.

Bessette offered a “radical” idea of turning Cochran Road into a one-way road. Several people agreed that could offer a safe solution, but questions remain about how that would work for local traffic, logistics, emergency vehicles, etc. Maki pointed out that the full width of the road right-of-way is available for infrastructure improvements. Houle said that the town does not own the land below the right-of-way.

Maki discussed the next steps and Charest thanked everyone for participating.

**6. THBC Update from Selectboard meeting:** Cole gave a brief update from the presentation he and Kart made to the Selectboard. Osborne noted that the Selectboard is inviting the public to attend their meeting on May 6<sup>th</sup> to offer comment about the two options.

**7. Agenda Items for Next Meeting:** Cochran Road scoping project, Upper and Lower Bridge Street. Osborne said he will send out sidewalk design documents for Upper and Lower Bridge Street for committee comments.

**8. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn by Gent, seconded by Kart. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:07 PM.**

#### **Minutes taken by Cathleen Gent**

Abbreviations used in RTC minutes: ARPA = American Rescue Plan Act of 2021; CCRPC = Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission; D&K = Dubois and King; GMT=Green Mountain Transit; PPL = Project Pipeline Document; RCC=Richmond Conservation Committee; RHC=Richmond Housing Committee; RTC = Richmond Transportation Committee; RVC=Riverview Commons; SB = Selectboard; TAP=Transportation Alternatives Program; THBC = intersection of Thompson Rd, Huntington Rd, Bridge St, and Cochran Rd; UPWP = Unified Planning Work Program; VDH = VT Dept. of Health; VPSP2=Vermont Project Selection and Project Prioritization; VTRANS=Vermont Agency of Transportation.