



Summary of Public Meeting

As part of the process of gathering information and data to inform the Chincoteague Alternative Transportation Study, a public meeting was held in January 2009. Following two previous meetings in October 2008, these meetings provided an opportunity for the project team to describe the study, and offered participants a time to talk about their transportation concerns and ideas. The meeting featured presentations and remarks from the project team, small discussion or “break out” groups, and open dialogue among all participants.

The purpose of the study is to **gather information, identify transportation issues, and develop and analyze possible alternatives** that may be considered for implementation by the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and its partners, Assateague Island National Seashore, the National Park Service, the Town of Chincoteague, and Accomack County. The project partners are working together to address transportation issues in the study area, which includes the Refuge, local roads like Maddox Blvd., Rt. 175 and Rt. 13.

Who Attended?

The meeting drew several residents and interested individuals who had attended one of the public meetings held in October. Other residents included a local business owner and town council member, refuge and park staff, and others. The meeting was held at 2 PM on a Saturday afternoon in order to better accommodate second-home owners, visitors, business owners, and other stakeholders with commitments during the week. The meeting was scheduled to last 2.5 hours, and ran slightly longer than 2 hours.

Approximately 20 people participated in the meeting, including partners and members of the project team. Chincoteague Mayor Jack Tarr and Accomack County Supervisor Wanda Thornton remarked on the value of the study and contributed thoughts and ideas in break-out sessions. There were two break-out groups that consisted of approximately 7 to 10 participants, and included full-time/year-round residents, seasonal residents, business owners, local community leaders, elected officials, refuge and park staff, and others with general interest in transportation issues. There were about five participants who are National Park Service or Fish and Wildlife Service staff members.

Evaluating Proposed Solutions

After brief presentations by the Volpe Center, refuge staff, and elected officials, participants then broke into two groups. Attendees were provided with a review of the concerns or issues and solutions or ideas that were generated during both the October public meetings and the January 2008 workshop. The time in small groups was used to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats or obstacles associated with previously-mentioned solutions and ideas and to discuss additional ideas and concerns. This document summarizes the outcome of the discussions.

Ideas to consider

- Maintain 961 parking spaces
- Maintain ORV areas
- Community bike program
- Promote collaboration among agencies
- Widen NPS bridges linking Chincoteague and Assateague
- Provide as many options as possible (different users have different needs/desires)
- Access across causeway is currently sufficient
- Consider huge beach replenishment program
- NASA area for bike parking
- Better inform people about accessible wheelchairs

Concerns

- Conflict between the Refuge and Seashore missions
 - Need to allow access to Assateague while still preserving that which makes it unique and desirable (especially access to educational groups)
- There is a perception and mistrust that the premise of the study is that the Refuge and Seashore do not want to continue to pay the cost of maintaining the parking lots (even after trying emergency funding, then a new maintenance fee with entrance fee) rather than what if the parking lots are lost due to erosion
- Data
 - Bike and moped accidents: Bryan Rush (Coordinator of Emergency Management) / Eddie Lewis (Police Chief)
 - Visitor statistics
 - Number of visits known but not number of visitors
 - Other sources
 - Occupancy tax
 - Water usage in town
 - Surveys done by hotels/restaurants
 - No bicycle counts currently; could count bicycles that are parked at beach and could collect rental data from rental companies

Observations

- The natural beach and area are unique along the coast and are what attracts people (why they choose Assateague vs. places like Ocean City)
- Recently-announced funding for Wallops Facility expansion could lead to more visitors
- If increase number of visitors to beach, may have to expand beach area
- Improvements are happening in Town re: bicycling (Ridge Road just got wider shoulders)
- The new bridge will cause changes in traffic flow; Mister Whippy's drive-in on Maddox Blvd currently causes traffic jams
- Number of visitors have not changed dramatically over past 10 years; neither has capacity of Town (lodging) but tourism season has lengthened (more people visit during shoulder seasons)
- Bicyclists who are biking for exercise use Wilderness Loop
- Trolleys are well used, predominantly by visitors (90%+) but also by residents, especially kids and handicapped
- Chincoteague/Assateague benefits from not being expensive relative to other places in terms of cost of activities and proximity to large urban centers (reachable by a tank of gas)

SOLUTION	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OTHER COMMENTS
Express Lane at Fee Booth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quicker, lessens congestion ▪ Might sell more annual passes/Duck Stamps ▪ Easy to implement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited room, 1 lane from bridge ▪ Confusion over fee structures (parking pass – some bought, some not) ▪ Loss of control of what is in the vehicle (e.g., dogs) ▪ Confusion over which lane to use and how to differentiate between types of passes (need strong education component) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use system in MD District as example ▪ Retain separate, staffed booth and lane for information ▪ Back-up only occurs during narrow window of time 12-2pm for 10 weeks
Shuttle Bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alternative if beach parking is not available ▪ Good timing in terms of building a new, wider bridge ▪ Better for environment ▪ Allows opportunity to provide educational info ▪ Possibility of using trolley as shuttle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for early alert if beach parking is full ▪ Visitors and users have large amounts of gear and often have a number of children to transport – this would be difficult to impossible with a shuttle ▪ Not enough buses to accommodate demand ▪ Storms mean large demand for use that would strain/outstrip shuttle capacity and require crowd management ▪ Danger from lightning storms and the need for evacuation and shelter ▪ Limited road surface limits bus-only lanes. Buses would be trapped in current traffic ▪ Bus only useful as an alternative ▪ On-going cost of operations ▪ Riders would by-pass local businesses if parking off island ▪ Shuttles in National Parks elsewhere changed the visitor experience negatively (although may have been necessary to accommodate the numbers of visitors allowed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need shelters at beach ▪ Liability of using public (school) lots ▪ Combine with concessions program on beach?
Move beach parking north	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ORVs do not need stable parking surface ▪ Maintains parking (which in turn maintains tourism and economy of Town and County) ▪ More stable location (in terms of sand/land movement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost of new access road ▪ ORV/OSV access ▪ Service road would need to be upgraded ▪ Need to address new environmental impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mono-rail system ▪ Access via Wilderness Loop or Service Road

SOLUTION	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OTHER COMMENTS
Biking/Ped Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve safety ▪ Improve access ▪ Opportunity for education to promote use and promote safety through bike rental businesses and police ▪ There is a need/demand from tourism and from residents (especially kids and elderly) for Chincoteague to become more bicycle and pedestrian friendly ▪ Visitors can use bicycles to go to beach (carry gear on bicycles or have one person take gear in car) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Narrow roads ▪ Narrow Town right of way ▪ Funding (especially for Causeway) ▪ Difficulty in educating bicyclists about correct use of road (right of way, multiple bicyclists across, etc.) ▪ Limited ability for visitors to transport gear with bicycles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One-way streets are possibility ▪ Contrast/disconnect between bicycle facilities on Refuge and in Town is a problem ▪ Need designated, main E-W and N-S bike lanes/routes on Chincoteague ▪ Lack of bicycle/pedestrian routes on Causeway and in Town limits opportunity to bicycle/walk to Town and Refuge ▪ Kids use biking as main transportation ▪ Biking is very popular among visitors (see rental numbers) and residents and is increasing ▪ Need a brochure with map that shows best/widest streets in Town for bicyclists to use (could this be included in the current bicycle path extension grant?) ▪ Improve access via Route 175
Mopeds/electric cars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alternative to gasoline-powered vehicle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dangerous to themselves and others – education needed ▪ Traffic builds up behind them ▪ More enforcement of laws 	
Loading/unloading spot at beach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to use pony corral area for alternative/overflow parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Similar problems as with shuttle, but offset because gear can be dropped off 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider status quo – is what we have now ok? ▪ Move fee booths? ▪ Provide wagons to move gear?
Parking Garage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost ▪ Inconsistent with experience of Chincoteague and Assateague 	
Boat access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alternative to car and need for parking ▪ Increase access by more people to more parts of Assateague 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Control of visitation (fee enforcement) 	