1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Study Overview

The Route 35 Corridor Study was conducted to develop recommendations for the future improvement of this state roadway through Ridgefield, Connecticut. Route 35 is a two-lane roadway serving local traffic as well as traffic passing though town. The purpose of this Route 35 corridor study was to improve safety, traffic flow and roadway conditions while maintaining the character of this historic corridor which is rich in aesthetic features.

The study corridor extends approximately six miles along Route 35 in Ridgefield, between the New York state line and Route 7. The study included an analysis and evaluation of existing and future traffic operations, an active public involvement process, and development of recommended improvements. This *Route 35 Traffic Improvement Plan* documents conditions, issues, and opportunities in the corridor and presents recommended actions to achieve the project goals.

For the purposes of clearly presenting a wide range of proposed actions for the Route 35 study corridor, the corridor has been subdivided into eight logical segments in a south to north direction. Each segment is characterized by a localized development pattern and traffic characteristics. The following sections of this report discuss existing conditions, issues, and opportunities for roadway operations, and recommended future improvements for each corridor segment.

The discussion of existing conditions is a synopsis of key segment features including land use, roadway characteristics, traffic operations, transit service, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and notable historic and environmental resources. The presentation of recommended improvement actions includes not only options for roadway improvements, but opportunities for improved pedestrian and bicycle access as well as access management.

Access management is the process of managing the location, number, and design of driveways and cross streets along a roadway. Access management helps improve roadway safety and preserves roadway capacity by minimizing the number of potential vehicle conflict points and interruptions to traffic flow.

Tools that can be used to achieve access management include zoning regulations, a curb-cut plan, and physical changes to roadway design, such as medians and turn lanes. This report is supplemented by a separate curb-cut plan. A curb-cut plan is a conceptual arrangement of driveways for a roadway or roadway segment indicating the community's idea of the ideal layout for access points along that roadway.

Generally, a curb-cut plan is created for a roadway segment that has a need for improved access design and is in an area where future development and/or traffic

pressures are likely to occur. While the *Route 35 Curb-cut Plan* is a freestanding document, the curb-cut recommendations for each segment of the corridor are also included in this Traffic Improvement Plan.

1.2. Background

Route 35 serves as one of the primary roadways meeting diverse needs in the Housatonic Valley. The two-lane, six-mile state roadway is the main link between Ridgefield and Danbury. Route 35 serves local traffic as well as traffic just passing through Ridgefield. The Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO) and the Town of Ridgefield have long recognized that planning for the future of this state highway is critical to serving growing travel needs while still preserving and protecting the rural and historic character of the area. A 1985 traffic study conducted for the Town of Ridgefield identified a series of recommendations, some of which have been implemented.

As communities experience increased traffic congestion and development pressures over time, the need to address roadway capacity, safety, traffic flow, and parking needs is critical. Therefore, HVCEO, in concert with the Town of Ridgefield, decided to update the 1985 study.

This current planning effort, which began in the late spring/early summer of 2003, has resulted in a set of recommendations which will guide state, regional and local officials in implementing transportation improvements along Route 35 in the coming years.

1.3. Community Involvement Process

In order for a plan to be useful, relevant and implementable, it must be home-grown, rather than imposed from outside a community. To this end, one of the most important aspects of this Route 35 planning effort was the community involvement program. The outreach program had four major components:

1) Project Technical Committee (PTC): A study advisory committee was established at the beginning of the planning process to guide and oversee the development of the improvement plan. The PTC consisted of 22 members, invited by the Town and HVCEO, representing town officials, regional and state representatives, local business owners, and Ridgefield residents. The PTC's role was to represent the community in the identification of corridor issues and the evaluation of the improvement options. A list of the PTC members is provided in Table 1. The PTC met five times during the course of the study, often meeting long hours to hash through various improvement alternatives and reach agreement on critical issues.

2) Public Information Meetings: Three public meetings were held during the course of the study. These were held on November 20, 2003, March 23, 2004

and January 31, 2005. At these meetings, the project team presented study progress and findings to date and encouraged feedback from participants.

3) Newsletters and Publicity: Three newsletters were prepared by the project team and distributed by the Town of Ridgefield. Each newsletter was distributed several weeks prior to each of the three public meetings to encourage interest in the project, publicize project findings, and promote attendance. Newspaper and radio spots were also sought to increase the publicity of the meetings, further encourage attendance, and share more information and perspective on the study and its goals.

4) Project Website: Finally, a project website, linked to both the Town's website and HVCEO's website was developed to provide project information to the public and announce meeting dates. The final report, including recommendations for each of the seven roadway segments can be viewed or downloaded from the website. The project website can be reached from either www.hvceo.org or www.ridgefieldct.org.

Table 1: Project Technical Committee Members

Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials	Mr. Jonathan Chew, Director
Town of Ridgefield	Mr. Rudy Marconi, First Selectman Mr. Charles Fisher, Town Engineer Ms. Betty Brosius, Planning Director Mr. Peter Hill, Highway Superintendent
Connecticut Department of Transportation	Mr. Joseph Ouellette Ms. Kathryn Faraci Mr. Steve Martinsen
Planning and Zoning Commission	Ms. Rebecca Mucchetti Mr. James McChesney
Ridgefield Police Commission	Chief Richard Ligi Ms. Susan Craig Mr. John Roche
Chamber of Commerce	Mr. Larry Hoyt Ms. Betsy Weber
Copps Hill Common	Ms. Donna Metz
Parks & Recreation	Mr. Wayne H. Tinker
Downtown Ridgefield	Mr. Todd Rabin Mr. Simon Cooper
HART	Mr. Rick Schreiner
Ridgefield Design Council	Ms. Priscilla Holmes
Ridgefield Citizen	Mr. Peter Laqueur

1.4. Goals & Objectives: Why Carry Out This Study?

Traffic congestion continues to grow throughout Connecticut, not just in Ridgefield. As population in a region grows, so too does development pressure. Everyone knows what can happen when development runs amok and the character of an area starts to disappear while safety and convenience evaporate. The Town of Ridgefield and HVCEO undertook this planning effort to think ahead about planning changes, so that the character of Ridgefield can be preserved while still trying to make the necessary accommodation for travel by both local residents and business patrons as well as Route 35 through traffic.

The difficult task in this study, and along so many similar corridors throughout Connecticut, is that Route 35 must serve two purposes which are not always mutually supportive. As a state roadway, owned and maintained by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, it must be able to convey through traffic safely and efficiently, while as the Main Street and vital travel "spine" of Ridgefield, it must provide access to town businesses and residents. It is along Route 35 that many travelers get their first impression of the Town of Ridgefield, making it important that the corridor show off the Town to its best advantage.

The goal for this study, defined early in the planning process was as follows:

> *"To optimize the function of Route 35 through Ridgefield as both a local "main street" and a state roadway and to manage the future development of the corridor through improvements that optimize safety, recognize the land use/transportation interface, and encompass context sensitive solutions which maintain or enhance the character of the corridor."*

A series of objectives were identified subordinate to that goal relating to safety, land use development, preservation of visual character, traffic flow, and accommodation of alternative modes.

1.5. Planning Process

The study process for this corridor followed a prescribed set of steps germane to any planning effort:

- Determine the goal of the study
- Collect and analyze data
- Identify issues, problems and opportunities
- Propose a series of possible alternative solutions
- Evaluate those solutions
- Recommend a course of action

The study team collected an extensive amount of traffic flow and operational data during the late spring and early summer of 2003, including a small origin-destination survey to ascertain the amount of "local" versus "through" travel in the corridor. This information served as the basis for the identification of issues in the corridor and potential alternatives to address those issues.

The planning process is not linear, however. Throughout this study, input from the community was obtained and fed back into the process to inform each of the steps in process, and steps were repeated or refined as necessary. The recommendations resulting from this iterative process are laid out in the following sections of this report. Each proposed recommendation is discussed in terms of the identified issues and opportunities, the alternatives that were discussed for that location, if any, and the recommendations that resulted from the collaborative process.

The effort during the PTC discussions was to reach consensus on recommended alternatives based on all of the information, technical analysis, and community input gathered. It must be noted, however, that for some segments of the study corridor, no full consensus was reached. In those instances, some recommendations are offered as a series of alternative solutions to be examined in more depth with more detailed site-specific design studies in the future as the need for action at those locations becomes greater. One of these options, discussed in additional depth below, was the modern roundabout.

1.6. The Modern Roundabout

Although most of us are familiar with stop signs, traffic signals, and other conventional means of intersection control, it is appropriate here to mention the modern roundabout, as several were evaluated as part of this traffic improvement plan.

The modern roundabout is largely misunderstood by the American public, but is widely used in many other countries with great success. The modern roundabout has consistently demonstrated its ability to handle traffic more efficiently and more safely than traffic signals in certain situations, as it keeps traffic flowing, forces traffic to slow down, and minimizes vehicle conflict points as drivers have to look in only one direction when entering the intersection.

Crashes that do occur are typically less severe than at signalized intersections with less property damage and personal injury. It is also safer for pedestrians as they cross the roadway at narrower points and have to look in only one direction at a time. However, ConnDOT has commented that studies suggest that visually impaired pedestrians have difficulty negotiating the crossings of roundabouts and are opposed to their use in areas of high pedestrian activity. High pedestrian activity may cause the roundabout to break down as yielding traffic can back up into the roundabout.

The modern roundabout is rapidly gaining favor in the U.S. and many are being constructed. Many state departments of transportation in the U.S. which had previously

refrained from using roundabout solutions to intersection issues are now looking more favorably on the modern roundabout and are developing guidelines and protocols for their use. In addition, the Federal Highway Administration has recently produced a manual for the use of roundabouts entitled "*Roundabouts: An Informational Guide*" (USDOT, FHWA, June 2000).

For more information about the modern roundabout, see Appendix C for the reprint of an article entitled "Common Misperceptions about Modern Roundabouts" reprinted from the American Planning Association's Transportation Planning Division newsletter.

1.7 Curb-Cut Management Planning

A Curb-Cut Plan is a conceptual arrangement of driveways for a roadway or roadway segment indicating the community's idea of the ideal layout for access points along that roadway. It is presented in a similar fashion to a site plan for future development. Generally, a Curb-Cut Plan is created for a roadway segment that has a need for improved access design and is in an area where future development pressures are likely to occur. A Curb Cut Plan is primarily a tool for use by a Planning and Zoning Commission when considering applications for changes in land use, redevelopment of properties, or increases in intensity of existing uses.

The purpose of the Route 35 Curb Cut Plan is to offer recommendations for long-term changes to the existing arrangement of driveways along the segment of Route 35 from Farmingville Road to Route 33. The Curb Cut Plan also offers recommendations for suitable locations of new driveways to serve currently undeveloped properties. The purpose of changing the location and design of driveways along Route 35 is to reduce the potential for unsafe vehicle movements on and off the road, thus reducing or improving potential points of conflict. Improvements to the arrangement of driveways along Route 35 can also help limit stop-and-go traffic and better preserve the capacity of the road to handle existing and future volumes of traffic.

It is intended that applicants for zoning approval whose property falls within the geographic area covered by the Curb Cut Plan will consult the plan as they prepare site layouts for development. In addition, it is intended that the Planning and Zoning Commission use the recommendations shown on the Curb Cut Plan as a guide to making decisions about the adequacy of driveway configurations shown on site development applications made to them during the course of the formal zoning process. *Therefore, the changes to driveway configuration recommended on the Route 35 Curb Cut Plan will take place as part of and in the course of new development or redevelopment of properties along Route 35, rather than as a distinct and separate set of actions.*

The recommended changes to the arrangement of driveways and accessways shown on the Route 35 Curb Cut Plan were based on a specific list of design criteria. These criteria focus on improving the safety of vehicle movements as well as the safest

possible interaction of vehicles and pedestrians. The design criteria were developed based on nationally recognized access management design publications, professional judgment, and as a consolidation and consideration of standards for curb-cut design that are articulated in the following local documents:

- Ridgefield subdivision regulations
- Ridgefield zoning regulations
- Ridgefield Code – Chapter 13, Article V: Construction standards for streets
- Connecticut State Highway encroachment permit requirements
- Route 7 Corridor Driveway and Access Management Plan (HVCEO/Urbitran, September 1996)
- Ridgefield Center Traffic Study (WSA, 1985)