

CIRCULATION

5.8.1 INTRODUCTION

The Circulation Element of the Comprehensive Plan studies the routes and modes of travel. The circulation network of the town affects the ease of movement through Foster for residents, visitors, and emergency vehicles. Important considerations include scenic roads, access, maintenance, and aesthetics. This element compiles information from the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT), Town officials, and site visits. State and municipal policies were determined from discussions with various officials.

The Element is organized as follows:

- Existing Conditions: Road network, traffic patterns, accidents
- On-going and Proposed Projects
- Issues and Concerns
- Approach; Goals and Policies for Action

5.8.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Road Network

Foster's circulation system consists of a relatively few major roads running north-south and east-west through the town, with local roads interspersed in between the major roads. The major roads provide access throughout the town and to destinations such as Providence, southern Rhode Island, and Connecticut.

Major Road Network

Including the roads mentioned above, Foster contains five numbered routes, which travel both east-west and north-south through the town.

East-West Routes:

- Route 101 (Hartford Pike) - branches off from Route 6 in Scituate, joins Route 44 in Connecticut.
- Route 6 (Danielson Pike).
- Route 14 (Plainfield Pike)

North-South Routes:

- Route 102 (Victory Highway)

- Route 94 (Foster Center Road/Mt. Hygeia Road)

Other Major Roads: In addition to the numbered routes, the following roads provide access to various areas in Foster and neighboring towns.

- Plainfield Pike (east-west, south of Central Pike)
- Central Pike (east-west)
- Cucumber Hill Road (north-south, in southwestern Foster)
- Moosup Valley Road (east-west from southern end of Cucumber Hill Road)

All of the above are State-maintained. These major roads provide the greatest degree of access to parts of Foster and through the town.

Major Town Roads: Several of the Town-maintained roads are paved and also provide good access through the town, including:

- Howard Hill/Walker Road (north-south in southern Foster)
- Johnson Road (north-south in southern Foster)
- North Road/South Killingly Road (east-west, south of Central Pike)
- Kennedy Road (north-south on western Foster)
- Old Plainfield Pike (east to Town border from Route 102 in southern Foster)

Other Town Roads

Many of Foster's roads are unpaved. Many of the paved roads are relatively narrow, which does not encourage rapid through travel but which is in keeping with the character of the town. Certain unpaved roads raise concerns of the frequency and cost of repairs as well as erosion control.

The Town contains 4 private roads and the following unopened mapped (public) roads:

- Tray Hollow Road (a portion)
- George Washington Highway (a portion)
- Luther Rd. (a portion)
- Howard Hill Rd. (a portion)
- Biscuit Hill Rd. (a portion)

- Weatherbee Rd. (a portion)
- Goldmine Rd. (a portion)
- Central Pike (west from Balcom Rd. to Cucumber Hill Rd.)
- Tom Wood Road
- Rickard Rd. (a portion)

Bridges

Foster contains 16 major bridges, 7 of which are maintained by the State. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) recently posted weight limits on many of the Town's bridges. The low weight limits of many have limited traffic by trucks, buses, and emergency vehicles.

Traffic Controls

With the exception of flashing lights at major intersections along Route 6 and 101, and Route 6 and 94, the only traffic controls in Foster are stop signs at various roads and warning signs on narrow or sharply bending roads. Generally, RIDOT has worked with the town to minimize hazards once identified, such as installing stop signs or other warning signs. The Town has requested a stoplight at the intersection of Routes 6 and 94 for many years with no success. The new flashing light at this location will improve the past problems; however, a stoplight is still the preferred solution.

Traffic Volumes

Table 9 presents historic and recent traffic counts for major roads in Foster. Route 6 is the most heavily traveled road, reflecting its role as a major east-west connector. Routes 101 and 94/14 are also heavily traveled, reflecting both regional and cross-town traffic. Traffic on all major roads has increased considerably over the past few years. The traffic counts also reflect patterns of residents traveling to their jobs. In response to a survey conducted for the Comprehensive Plan, 45 percent indicated that they work in Providence, and 10 percent indicated that they work in Connecticut or New York; most residents probably travel Route 6 or 101. Approximately 20 percent are employed in Cranston, Warwick, and southern Rhode Island and would tend to travel Routes 102 and 14. The rest of the residents (approximately 20-25 percent) work north of Foster, within Foster, or in "different communities," and travel other routes to their jobs. In 2003 a study of traffic volume along route 6 has been proposed following recent upgrades.

Table 9 - HISTORIC AND RECENT TRAFFIC VOLUMES - FOSTER, RI
1991 - 2001

FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - 2003 UPDATE

Road	1980's Traffic* (vehicles/day)	1991 Traffic (vehicles/day)	2001 Traffic (vehicles/day)
Route 6 (east of Rte 94)		8,200	7,400
Route 6 (west of Rte 94)	4,800	7,500	10,000
Route 101 (east of Rte 94)		4,600	4,428
Route 101 (west of Rte 94)	2,500	3,300	3,500
Route 94 (north of Rte 6)	460	1,200	1,500
Route 94 (south of Rte 6)	1,400	2,000	1,900
Routes 102 and 14**	1,200	2,000	2,100
Cucumber Hill Road		640	

* Representative historic records from the early 1980s; recent counts are from the late 1980s (1988-89).

** The traffic along Route 102 increased considerably after 1988, presumably due to road improvements.

Accidents

Generally the relative number of accidents reflects the amount of travel on the roads and the amount of traffic crossing the roads, with the largest number of accidents occurring along the most heavily traveled roads. The highest number of accidents occurs along Route 6, especially at the intersections with Route 94, Boswell, and Cucumber Hill Roads. Accidents occur at each of several intersections along Routes 101 and 94. Occasional accidents occur at intersections along town roads.

Public Transportation

Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) operates a commuter bus from Providence to the intersection of Routes 6 and 94.

On-Going and Planned Improvements

The Foster Department of Public Works has developed a five-year plan for maintaining and upgrading roads and bridges. A portion of plan sets priorities for paving certain unpaved roads to reduce maintenance costs and improve access in certain areas. The Planning Board and the DPW director will be responsible for reviewing and updating this plan annually.

The South Foster Fire Station has been moved to the intersection of Routes 6 and 94, providing improved access to northern Foster.

5.8.3 ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Rural Character of the Roads and Road Improvements

An important part of Foster's rural character has been its road network. The town's small dispersed population has not required many major roads. As a result, many of Foster's roads remain unpaved or narrow and winding.

However, several factors may bring about a change in the character of the town's circulation network:

- Unpaved roads require frequent maintenance, and a growing population will result in additional wear on the roads.
- The increasing population and traffic in the region will place additional strains on the road network.
- Development in the town is closely linked to the road network. Commercial and residential development is most likely to occur on easily traveled roads, and with development, the roads may need to be improved to handle additional traffic.

The Town must balance the needs of an expanding population with the preservation of the town's rural character.

The Department of Public Works is reestablishing a Five-Year Plan to improve and maintain many of the town's roads and bridges. The improvements have been assigned based on the importance of the roads for through travel and their condition. The Plan includes retaining certain unpaved roads.

The Town must carefully consider what improvements to make. The future improvements should reflect the land use plan, encouraging and handling growth where growth is desired, and discouraging through travel in areas the town wishes to preserve. The scenic nature of the roads should be preserved, as well.

Unopened Roads

The town contains several mapped (public) roads that are not open for travel. The town cannot afford the high costs of improving and opening them without prior planning. There are no plans for improvement of these roads.

Input into State Projects

The Town is extremely concerned that State projects be responsive to the community's goals to preserve rural character and its other needs. Specifically, the community (Town officials and residents) should be included in developing and implementing the following:

- Route 6 upgrade.
- Route 101 upgrade
- Route 102 upgrade - the road should respect the unique character of Clayville.
- Route 94 upgrade

- State maintenance or upgrade of roads and bridges in Foster - any maintenance or upgrade should preserve the rural character of the town and its roads to the extent possible,
- State decisions to turn State-maintained roads back to the town for maintenance.
- Placement of traffic lights and other controls on State roads in Foster, especially at high-hazard areas such as Routes 6 and 94.

Alternative Modes of Transportation

The Citizens Advisory Committee of 1991 identified the need to develop hiking and bridle trails in the Town, possibly along unpaved roads, in keeping with the town's rural character. The CAC recognized the need to encourage the use of public transportation to jobs in Providence. Bicycle routes and walking paths are under consideration in the scenic roads project.

5.8.4 APPROACH

The Town must plan for the future of its paved and unpaved roads to retain their rural character while ensuring that all roads are safe. Public transportation will be encouraged where it is appropriate.

Because adequate and safe circulation means more than vehicular use of roads, the Town will explore alternative and recreational circulation systems such as hiking, biking, and bridle trails, canoeing and cross country skiing trails.

The following are specific policies for action:

- Implement and fund the 5-year Road Improvement Plan for road upgrading and maintenance. This plan provides for the paving of certain important connector roads, allowing others to remain as unpaved rural and scenic roads. Ensure that scenic roads which form public linkages for the North - South Trail System are upgraded in a sensitive fashion following design standards which retain their scenic integrity and allow an appropriate trail function as well as vehicle use.
- Re-evaluate and update the 5-year Road Improvement Plan and projections for funding every year.
- Complete Scenic Roads project including bicycling and walking paths. Designate scenic roads itemized in the Historic/Scenic inventory. Nominate the most important of these roads for State Scenic Road designation using the RIDOT criteria for such nominations, including scenic roads that are scheduled for State funded improvement projects. Scenic roads, both those nominated for State designation and those chosen for local listing, should be protected through improvement standards implemented at the local level and through a

Farmland-Rural Conservation Overlay Zoning District.

- Identify for long-term planning which roads will be used by low density residential growth, where rural road widths and pavement type should be maintained, and which roads should become well-traveled connectors and be improved.
- Review the policy concerning private roads as public roads based upon the improvement of such roads to Town standards prior to acceptance.
- Protect the rural qualities of roads, paved and unpaved. Design standards should be adopted for the roads and nearby development that preserve the rural character and provide safe travel. Rural character can be retained with design standards related to road safety, width, geometry, drainage and roadside vegetation.
- Include traffic impacts in Town review of subdivision and new large scale development proposals including commercial and industrial projects. Expand the current Commercial Site Plan Review process and extend the developer's responsibility for Town road improvements should the expected traffic from new development adversely affect road conditions or safe traffic circulation.
- Coordinate with RIDOT design staff and discuss state projects in *public* forums with the Town Council, Planning Board, Conservation Commission and other Town agencies on a regular basis.
 - Town staff should work with RIDOT design staff on an ongoing basis and with state projects to ensure that the needs of the Town are met. Examples include Rte 94, Rte 102 and Rte 6 improvements.
 - Town staff should coordinate bridge reconstruction with RIDOT to make sure that the reconstructed bridges are compatible with the town's rural character and its ability to maintain the bridges over time. The current wooden bridge program includes compatible design and should be encouraged.
 - Town staff should maintain an updated list of improvements needed on Federal-aid roads (Transportation Improvement Program, TIP) in order to be able to respond to State requests for projects. This list should be updated and compiled through an open public process including review by the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Town Council.
 - Town staff should track proposed (TIP) improvement projects to be sure that the projects are still appropriate at the time they receive funding for design.
- Establish and promote a privately and publicly developed trail system utilizing alternative routes (hiking/ bridle trails) primarily along rural roads through Foster and connecting scenic areas, hamlets and neighboring communities.

This trail system would provide access to scenic and historic resources as well as an alternative mode of transportation. The trail system could incorporate important nearby destinations such as the villages of Scituate, Foster Center, Hopkins Mills, Clayville and Moosup Valley as well as recreational facilities. The North-South (hiking) Trail System is an example and could be used as a spine from which lateral routes through town could be designated. Establishment of these routes would also be an asset for promoting development of recreation and tourism based small business opportunities such as a craft trail, bed and breakfasts or country inns, sports equipment rental/retail, etc. Private sports enterprises such as cross country skiing, hiking, horseback riding and nature trails will be encouraged whether or not linkages exist to trail systems on Town roads or rights-of-way.

- Manage Rte 6 commercial development and other areas designated by the EDAC, including curb cuts and the location and character of development. Zone for nodal development along the corridor.
- Improve signage and safety features on major through-routes within and through the Town.
- Improve enforcement of traffic regulations on major through-routes within and through the Town.
- Explore the formulation of a Town Traffic Court.
- Explore designation and funding for Medivac Helicopter Pad.