TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REGULAR MEETING

Date: December 5, 2011 **Time:** 10:05 a.m.

Members Present: Bill Harkins, *Chairman*; Lee Edwards; Kim Likins

Members Absent: None

Town Staff Present: Darrin Shoemaker, *Traffic & Transportation Engineer*; Scott Liggett, *Director of Public Projects and Facilities/Chief Engineer*; Jeff Buckalew, *Town Engineer*; Charles Cousins, *Director of Community Development*; Brian Hulbert, *Staff Attorney*; and Lynn Buchman, *Administrative Assistant*

Others Present: Ken Heitzke, *Council Member/Mayor Pro-Tem*; George Williams, *Council Member*; Bill Ferguson, *Council Member*; Master Sergeant Jason Covington, *BCSO*; Joe Croley; Frank Babel

Media Present: Tom Barton, *Island Packet*

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1. Call to Order

2. Freedom of Information Act Compliance

Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and mailed in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and the Town of Hilton Head Island requirements.

3. Approval of Minutes

a. Regular Public Safety Committee Meeting of November 7, 2011

Motion to approve the minutes of the November 7, 2011 Regular Public Safety Committee meeting was made by Kim Likins and seconded by Bill Harkins. The Motion was approved by a vote of 2-0. Mr. Edwards arrived after the vote.

4. Unfinished Business

a. Speed Limit Treatment on the Charles E. Fraser Toll Bridge and Palmetto Bay Road

Darrin Shoemaker, Traffic & Transportation Engineer, noted that he had presented a staff recommendation at the November 7 meeting to increase the speed limits on the Charles E. Fraser Toll Bridge and Palmetto Bay Road. At that time no action was taken and further information was requested on additional steps that might be taken for the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists on the Toll Bridge. He noted that the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT)

maintains the Toll Bridge and has designed and designated the shoulders on the Bridge as breakdown lanes for motor vehicle traffic. As pathways leading up to the Bridge were proposed by the Town, the SCDOT reluctantly gave its approval for sharing those breakdown lanes with pedestrians, bikers, and motorists. However, he noted the SCDOT still sees the shoulders along the Bridge as being primarily breakdown lanes, and no physical separation on the edgeline between the vehicle lanes of travel and the shoulders used by the bikers and pedestrians would be allowed. He discussed with the SCDOT treatments that could be employed to improve safety for bikers and pedestrians, while not blocking access to the breakdown lanes. These were:

- Thermoplastic dot/stripe rumble strips - which is an edgeline of the same material as the pavement marking, with dots or domes every 10'. He noted the only current roadway treatment is Gum Tree Road, which was recently re-surfaced and the treatment added by SCDOT. A picture of the treatment was projected on the overhead screen for audience viewing. In response to Chairman Harkins' inquiry, Mr. Shoemaker confirmed that the SCDOT has no reservations for use of such a treatment on the Bridge.
- Raised reflective or "cat's eye" pavement markers – which is a similar treatment and Mr. Shoemaker showed an example of the marker. Spaced typical at 40' apart, they do make some noise when a tire runs across them, and would alert a drifting car. However, the primary benefit of the payment markers would be improved safety during low light or night conditions, as they show up well in headlights.

Mr. Shoemaker indicated that although both of these alternatives were approved by the SCDOT, no funds are available from the SCDOT. Cost estimates for the thermoplastic dots on the Bridge would be approximately $6,000, with the raised reflective payment markers estimated at approximately $1,600.

Mr. Shoemaker noted that a recent drive over the Bridge revealed that the pavement markings, including the edgelines, are in very poor condition and faded, and should be re-marked with a 6" thermoplastic line. He reported this to the SCDOT and was advised that while no plans were in existence at this time, when a future pavement marking contract was solicited, this segment could be included for consideration.

Mr. Edwards and Mr. Shoemaker discussed the spacing of the thermoplastic domes, which they agreed were probably 2'- 3' apart as shown in the picture rather than 10', and the $6,000 estimate being based on what SCDOT paid on a linear foot basis. They also discussed the $1,600 estimate for the 40' spacing for the raised reflective pavement markers, and the need for closer spacing to accomplish the intended purpose of a rumble strip. Mr. Shoemaker indicated decreased spacing would be atypical, and the SCDOT would probably not be receptive. Even if approved, he felt the spacing could not be decreased to a point where it would serve effectively as a rumble strip.

Chairman Harkins noted the three groups to consider were the jogger, the biker, and the distracted driver with numerous positive distractions when crossing the Bridge. With a possible increased speed limit and the fact that the jogger and biker are there during the daytime, he noted the thermoplastic domes were probably a better choice. He pointed out they do not affect the breakdown lane and do alert the driver who is possibly veering from the highway. Mr. Shoemaker pointed out that the domes are applied with the stripe at the same time, so an election of that treatment would result in the dual benefit of having the stripe refurbished and having the domes installed at the same time.

Mr. Edwards and Ms. Likins agreed. Ms. Likins pointed out that with the reflective marker spacing problem and the need for an effective daylight treatment, rather than night reflection, the domes would be better and would also provide an effective sound alerting a driver who crosses the line.

Chairman Harkins noted his concern for the introduction of another speed limit change so quickly within a short distance. Although he supported the speed limit increase to 45 mph over the Bridge, he felt that a sudden drop to 40 mph leaving the bridge was a jolt to the driver. He suggested that the 45 mph speed limit continue over the Bridge up to the existing 35 mph sign located before the Island Crossings Shopping Center back entrance, creating a seamless speed limit, which might also be better for safety. Mr. Shoemaker acknowledged that the Staff recommendation was for an additional speed limit transition, with an increase in the speed limit to 45 mph on the bridge, then decreasing to 40 mph, and again to 35 mph just in advance of Sea Pines Circle. Chairman Harkins noted that an alternative would be the use of flashing signs, which is another cost and another distraction.

Mr. Edwards stated that his concern was if the speed limit on the bridge was raised, then some sort of delineation was needed between the breakdown/bicycle/pedestrian lane and the roadway. He supported the increase in speed limit as long as better delineation is included, and he agreed that the thermoplastic raised domes would accomplish that.

Ms. Likins also stated her support for the increased speed limit on the Bridge, and asked Mr. Shoemaker to explain the reasons for the Staff recommendation of 3 different speed limits in that short distance. Mr. Shoemaker responded that the extra transition was to keep the 40 mph at the traffic signal on Palmetto Bay Road at Arrow Road and Point Comfort Road. He noted that left turn signals were installed off Palmetto Bay Road, but left turns are still allowed while yielding to opposing traffic, and sight distance issues remain because of the long horizontal broad curve. Mr. Edwards agreed that could be a problem with increased speed through that signal.

Comments from the public were elicited. Councilman George Williams noted his support for Chairman Harkins' suggested speed limit increase of 45 mph and the expenditure for the thermoplastic domes. He shared Mr. Shoemaker's concern for the left turn, but indicated that the natural speed coming off the Bridge is in the 45 mph range, which is not much different from the rest of US Highway 278 with traffic turns and everything else.

Mr. Frank Babel, a biking advocate, indicated his support, as well. His only concern was the feedback he had received from cyclists that the rumble strips hitting the bike tires the wrong way might cause them to lose control. He noted that Sheriff's Department vehicles occasionally block the breakdown lane, and requested that Sheriff's vehicles hug the side of the road allowing cyclists to pass by their stopped vehicles.

Steve Wilson, Chairman of the Transportation Committee for the Greater Island Council, expressed his support for the recommendations.

Ms. Likins moved that the Committee recommend that the Town Manager find the funds for the purchase of the thermoplastic domes at a cost of approximately $6,000, and Mr. Edwards seconded. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Mr. Harkins moved that the Committee recommend to Town Council that the speed limit be increased seamlessly to 45 mph from the Toll Plaza across the Bridge up to the existing 35 mph sign located before the back entrance of the Island Crossings Shopping Plaza.

Mr. Edwards noted his preference not to raise the speed limit through the traffic light intersection of Palmetto Bay Road and Point Comfort Road/Arrow Road and agreed with the concern expressed by Mr. Shoemaker, although he acknowledged that the natural feel of the road is 45 mph or 50 mph. However, he also noted that he was not a proponent for further signs.

Ms. Likins seconded the motion, noting she shared Mr. Edwards' concern, but also noting the confusion to motorists of the 3 speed limit changes in such a short distance and the support expressed by the biking community of the increased speed limit. The motion was approved by a vote of 2-1, with Mr. Edwards opposing.

5. New Business

a. Pedestrian Safety Comments – Frank Babel

Mr. Frank Babel, a biking advocate, spoke concerning the pedestrian safety problem, which he identified for the Committee, and for which he offered suggestions for collaboration and solutions.

He cited the similarities between the problem on Hilton Head Island and Tybee Island, and showed examples of solutions adopted by Tybee Island.

Mr. Babel encouraged the Town to experiment with new solutions, take control of selected streets from the SCDOT, work towards becoming a Complete Streets Community making it more friendly for bikers, pedestrians, mass transit users, and vehicles, and adopt a Master Plan for the future.

Ms. Likins acknowledged that with the exciting development going on in the next few years at Shelter Cove and Coligny, Mr. Babel's comments provided questions for the developers of these projects to consider. Representing the Forest Beach area, she noted her appreciation for the need of pedestrian safety measures and the suggestions presented merited further study. Chairman Harkins thanked Mr. Babel for creating a level of awareness for the Committee.

6. Adjournment

At 10:57 a.m. Ms. Likins moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Edwards seconded. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Respectfully submitted:

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Lynn W. Buchman
Administrative Assistant

Approved by: January 9, 2012

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Bill Harkins, Chairman