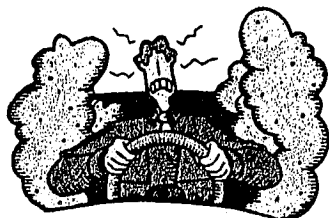


January 2003

# Driving Us Crazy

## Why Westford Traffic Is So Bad & How To Fix It



*The League of Women Voters of Westford*  
presents a Forum on Traffic  
**Saturday, January 11 from 9:30 – 11:00 a.m.**  
**Police Station Training Room, 53 Main Street**

Getting around Westford is becoming more and more frustrating as an increasing number of cars drive on our roads. How will a large office complex that is being proposed off Powers and Concord roads and a new middle school and recreational facilities opening off Groton Road starting next fall affect traffic? A recent study showed that over 28,000 vehicles travel on Boston Rd. between I-495 and Rte. 110 daily.

Hear what our local and Mass Highway officials have to say. Panelists will give different perspectives on the issue and present important background information and studies. They will also discuss plans and ideas for dealing with the problems. Residents are invited to ask questions and provide their own input as well.

To raise a question prior to this event that you would like to have addressed at the Forum, call 978-692-9643 or email [lwv@westford.com](mailto:lwv@westford.com).





# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTFORD

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## Summary of the report on the forum:

### **“Driving Us Crazy: Why Westford Traffic Is So Bad & How To Fix It”**

The League of Women Voters of Westford presented a forum on Westford traffic concerns on Saturday, January 11, 2003. The forum was held in the Police Station training room. Over 70 residents attended. The League's goals in sponsoring the forum were to educate citizens on an important local issue, traffic, and to provide them with the information they need to have traffic concerns heard and addressed by the Town of Westford.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the information presented at the forum and to make it available to the forum attendees, the panelists, town committees, boards and officials, and town residents.

The forum opened with presentations by a panel of local experts. The panelists were:

- Highway Superintendent Chip Barrett
- Planning Board Chair Peter Fletcher
- Town Engineer Mark Hamel (who took part in the question-and-answer period)
- Deputy Police Chief Tom McEnaney
- Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) Assistant Director Beverly Woods

League member Ellen Harde moderated the forum.

The panelists gave informative overviews of their department's, committee's or organization's responsibilities regarding traffic and roads. They also summarized their organizations' concerns for Westford's growing traffic and suggested short- and long-term improvements. They shared information about the state's authority over specific roads and regulations.

A lively and wide-ranging question-and-answer period followed the presentations, with the panelists responding to thoughtful questions and constructive suggestions from the audience. Ellen Harde also conveyed questions and comments that had been submitted by town residents via email prior to the forum. Several suggestions were made on how residents can become more involved with traffic improvements in Westford.

The forum ended with Ellen thanking the panelists and the audience for their positive contributions to the forum's discussion and offering the League's help in following up on the dialogue begun at the event.

The forum was videotaped by Channel 8 and will be rebroadcast in the coming weeks. Check the program listing on Channel 8 for day and time.

A detailed report on the forum follows.

February 6, 2003

**Report**  
**“Driving Us Crazy: Why Westford Traffic Is So Bad & How To Fix It”**

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## Report

### **"Driving Us Crazy: Why Westford Traffic Is So Bad & How To Fix It"**

A forum presented by the League of Women Voters of Westford  
Saturday, January 11, 2003, Police Station Training Room

#### **FORMAT**

The panelists gave five- to seven-minute presentations on Westford traffic. The presentations included a description of the panelist's responsibilities, recent accomplishments, and concerns. The talks also highlighted areas in which the various departments and boards had no authority, but were subject to state regulation. The panelists then addressed questions and concerns from residents. The forum was moderated by League member Ellen Harde.

#### **PRESENTATIONS**

##### **Westford Highway Department. Panelist: Highway Superintendent Chip Barrett**

**Responsibilities:** The Highway Department maintains and improves roadways and street signs within the Town of Westford's jurisdiction, as directed by the Board of Selectmen, Police Department and public policy. The Highway Department maintains and improves all intersections. It assists the Planning Board and other boards and committees to ensure traffic flow and pedestrian safety. The Highway Department serves as the contact with Massachusetts Highway Department.

The Westford Highway Department has no authority to maintain or improve Routes 495 or 110, Boston Road or Powers Road. These fall under the authority of MassHighway.

**Accomplishments:** The Highway Department added traffic lights to the intersection of Route 40 and Depot Road. They have improved the flow of traffic into and out of the Greystone Estates development by adding left-turn lanes. Several traffic islands in town have been improved to ease flow. The line-painting program has been brought back to improve roadway safety.

**Concerns:** The concern areas highlighted by the Highway Department include the north to south flow of traffic through town, particularly Tadmuck, Boston and Concord roads, while maintaining the historic character of the town. Sight distance in and around schools are a safety concern. Emergency assistance response time, as traffic increases, is a constant safety concern. The traffic lights at the intersection of Routes 27 and 225 are outdated and unable to handle the flow of traffic. Traffic along the Route 40 corridor is increasing.

**Future:** The Highway Department sees a need to study traffic flow and parking in the town center. The study would be used to make improvements to relieve traffic flow during commuter hours, facilitate emergency response time while maintaining town character and avoid pushing the traffic flow problem to another part of town.

##### **Westford Planning Board. Panelist: Chair Peter Fletcher**

**Responsibilities:** The Planning Board has responsibility for residential, commercial and industrial development in Westford. Its members act as overseers for all local, state and regional regulations. Traffic concerns arising from new development are incorporated into Environmental Impact Reports. Based on these reports, the Planning Board directs development according to state rules and local bylaws and regulations and may require mitigation from developers.

**Accomplishments:** The Planning Board has attempted to maintain the rural qualities of Westford by using left-hand turn lanes, rather than traffic lights, wherever possible. They have also acted to ensure that developers install curbing and sidewalks in all new development.

**Concerns:** The main concerns of the Planning Board as traffic increases are pedestrian safety and the volume of traffic along Route 110 in the morning, at lunch and in the evening.

**Future:** The Planning Board will continue to work with the Police Department, Highway Department and Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) to provide safer pedestrian routes and alternative transportation. There are improvements planned at Route 110 and Boston Road, as well as a goal to put a sidewalk along Route 110.

**Westford Police Department. Panelist: Deputy Police Chief Tom McEnaney**

**Responsibilities:** The Police Department is the chief regulatory agency enforcing state laws and local bylaws.

**Accomplishments:** In April 2000, the Police Department instituted a Traffic Management plan that matched local traffic safety bylaws to state regulations. A message or speed board has been purchased with the intent of slowing traffic and determining if road speeds are appropriate and safe. The Police Department has a Safety Committee, which meets on an as-needed basis, to involve the community. The Police Department has worked cooperatively with the Westford Initiative for Traffic Safety (WITS), a public hot line to report traffic safety violations. These violations include but are not limited to, speed, stop sign violations, tailgating and crosswalks. The Police Department sends a letter to the offender, recognizing a violation has occurred. Overall, arrests and citations are up and accidents are down.

**Concerns:** The Police Department sees increasing traffic on Routes 3 and 495 as a major concern.

**Future:** The Police Department would like to have an integrated approach involving all boards and departments to solving traffic concerns.

**Northern Middlesex Council of Governments. Panelist: Assistant Director Beverly Woods**

**Responsibilities:** NMCOG is an agency serving Lowell and surrounding towns. NMCOG is responsible for highway and transit planning for the region.

**Accomplishments:** In the summer and fall of 2002, NMCOG completed a study, funded by Mass Highway, to determine the impact of traffic in and around three schools: Westford Academy and the Crisafulli and Robinson schools. Eleven intersections were studied, especially during the start and the end of school days.

**Concerns:** Several concerns were identified in the study. The accident rate at the intersection of Cold Spring Road and Patten Road has increased. A four-way stop sign is recommended. Patten Road traffic is a safety concern, which will not be alleviated by making Patten Road a one-way street. Widening, straightening and keeping Patten Road a two-way street is recommended.

The study found additional traffic concerns. Sight distances need to be improved at the intersections of Country and Patten roads and Forge Village and Cold Spring roads. The intersection of Forge Village and Flagg roads need improved warning signs and a T configuration. The island size at the intersection of Robinson and Flagg roads needs to be reduced. All schools areas need improved sidewalks. The complete NMCOG report is available from the Westford Highway Department.

**Future:** The NMCOG study projects worsening traffic as development continues in and around Westford. Completion of the Route 3 project will reduce some of the traffic on Depot, Main and Tyngsboro roads. NMCOG will be encouraging employers on Route 110 to provide transportation options and recommending that Westford be a destination for public transit service. They are also recommending that there be van-style public transit among Westford neighborhoods and the town center.

- Put in four-way stop signs, which are an annoyance and make drivers both slow down and seek alternative routes.
- Reduce the speed limit on narrow, winding roads from 30 mph to 25 mph.
- Enforce the speed limit.
- Violations reported to the WITS hot line at 978-392-3477 generate a letter from the Westford Police Department (though not a citation) that the violation was noted. This can include speeding, passing on a solid line, school bus violations, etc.
- Additional suggestions are available on [www.trafficcalming.org](http://www.trafficcalming.org).
- Some frustration was evident that several of the traffic calming suggestions made (signs in crosswalks and four-way stop signs) said to be prohibited by the state are in fact done in other towns, Concord being cited several times.

### Vehicle restrictions

- Regulate the size of vehicles allowed through Westford Center.
- Establish a weight limit on Depot Street bridge across Stony Brook.
- Introduce a truck exclusion on Tyngsboro Road/Depot Street/Boston Road since Routes 3 and 495 can meet the requirement of a "reasonable alternate route."

### Crosswalks

- Two crosswalks need to be painted on Boston Road.
- Place crosswalk cones like the one that used to be in front of the Town Hall in the crosswalks.
- Crosswalks needed on Littleton Road and on Concord Road.
- Can the town add additional crosswalks? Are there any plans currently for more crosswalks?

### Sidewalks

- Building a sidewalk on an existing road costs \$1 million per mile, based on a Chelmsford sidewalk project near their schools. The high cost is due to regrading, obstacles, right of way, engineering and planning. Westford currently has 70 miles of sidewalk. There are no sidewalk projects in the pipeline. (Chip)
- Require residents to clear the sidewalks in front of their property and to shovel out any fire hydrants in front of their property.
- Are there grants for sidewalks that could be pursued? Is there one person in town who could facilitate/lobby for sidewalks?
- The town should purchase a sidewalk plow.

### Other Concerns, Questions & Comments

- Concern about the ability of fire and ambulance equipment to get to emergencies due to traffic congestion.
- When Route 3 is completed in fall 2004, what percentage decrease in traffic can Westford expect?

- Instead of accommodating traffic growth, limit traffic growth.
- Walkers, joggers, runners and bikers are a hazard, especially at night without reflective clothing and on both sides of the road.
- Maintenance of line and lane painting a concern as there are more turning and special lanes created. A plan to improve road painting is needed.
- Investigate public transportation alternatives.
- Please, no more studies.
- Install the speed indicator sign stored in the Police garage.

#### **How residents can get involved with the solutions**

- Make use of the WITS (Westford Initiative for Traffic Safety) hot line: 978-392-3477
- Join WITS by contacting Gunars Zagars at [gzagars@aol.com](mailto:gzagars@aol.com) or 978-692-6019.
- Join an NMCOG traffic safety committee.
- Volunteer to serve on the Safety Committee by contacting the Westford Police Department.
- Borrow the speed indicator sign from the Police Department and take responsibility for setting it up in front of your home (needs to plug into an electrical source).
- Check the listings on Channel 8 to find out when the tape of the forum will be rebroadcast so you can watch it & learn all the information shared on January 11.

#### **CONCLUSION**

- Residents are encouraged to use the WITS hot line to report traffic safety violations. WITS invites all residents to join.
- The Board of Selectmen has the ability to authorize changes in local roads and signage to improve traffic flow and safety. The Board of Selectmen and town departments need to work together to improve traffic and safety in town.
- Changes and improvements to state-operated and -maintained roads can be addressed by lobbying elected officials, including state Representative Geoff Hall and state Senator Steve Panagiotakos.
- The League of Women Voters of Westford is willing to help follow up on the dialogue begun at the event.



- Tadmuck Road and Route 110 is a problem intersection. What are the criteria for improving an intersection?
- A police officer is needed at Route 110 and Tadmuck Road.
- A master plan is needed to accommodate the 7600 vehicles trips to be generated if Technology Park West is permitted as planned.
- Design plan for lights at both exit ramps from Route 495. There is no money available from the state. It costs \$250,000 to put a traffic signal at an intersection.
- Request new exits from Route 495, one at Route 225 and another between Boston Road and Route 4 in Chelmsford (perhaps directly into Technology Park on the former Michelson land.)
- Enforce the U-turn prohibition at Boston Road and the power lines and Boston Road and Blake's Hill Road.
- Ask either the businesses on Route 110 or the State Police to pay for/provide the officer at Boston Road and Route 495 during rush hour rather than tying up a Westford patrolman and cruiser.
- Better signage is needed at the bottom of Route 495 exit ramps so tractor-trailer trucks don't head up Boston Road when they mean to go to Route 110 and 225. Once they are in the Center, there is nowhere to turn around until they get to Cold Spring Road.

#### **Other problem spots**

- It is very dangerous for pedestrians on Depot Street. Sidewalks are not maintained. Traffic does not slow down even at crosswalks.
- Cars traveling toward the Center on Depot Street cause gridlock when trying to turn left onto Vinton Place because traffic traveling on Depot toward Stony Brook won't stop to let them turn.
- Make Lincoln Street two-way again.
- Put in a three-way stop at Boston Road and Main Street.
- There are many crosswalk, traffic flow and parking issues in the center of town.
- Four-way stop and crosswalk requested at Cold Spring Road and Forge Village Road.
- Improve the blind intersection at Town Farm Road and Forge Village Road.
- Improve Hartford Road.

#### **Parking restrictions**

- No parking within 5 feet of a driveway.
- No parking 15 feet from any intersection is a bylaw on the books. Could it be enforced?
- No parking in front of the J.V. Fletcher Library or the First Parish Church.

#### **Traffic calming measures**

- Notify & remind Westford residents to drive the posted speed limits, which may frustrate out-of-town commuters so they will seek alternate routes.
- Place signs in crosswalks like the one that used to be in front of Town Hall.

## **QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS**

The question-and-answer portion of the forum gave residents the opportunity to voice their own concerns. It also allowed panelists to respond, based on their expertise, to these questions and suggestions from the audience and from those who submitted comments via email prior to the forum. There was not enough time at the forum to address many of the submitted questions and comments. All questions and comments are listed below. These items have been broken down into categories and relevant comments grouped accordingly. These include those discussed at the forum and those submitted but not addressed.

### **Who can do what**

There was much discussion on who has the authority to improve traffic flow and ensure safety throughout town.

- The Board of Selectmen is empowered to make regulations regarding vehicles and traffic including designating one-way streets, no parking zones, and placement of stop signs. The Police Department is responsible for enforcing these regulations.
- Littleton Road, Boston Road from the top of Drew Gardens' land to Minot's Corner and Powers Road are state roads where the town has no authority. (Chip)
- Regulations regarding truck exclusions on certain roads or weight restrictions on bridges in Westford and throughout the state are determined by the state. If use is excluded from a certain road, an alternate route must be available. (Tom)
- Signs in crosswalks have been deemed a hazard to automobiles and are not permitted by the state. (Tom)
- To establish a speed limit on a road, a 24-hour monitor must be set up to establish the speed of all vehicles traveling the road. The results are then submitted to the state, and the speed limit is set at 80% of the average speed. In some cases when a town has submitted this data in order to have a speed limit reduced, the speed limit has been raised. (Mark)
- The traffic officer at Boston Road and Route 495 during rush hour is there at the direction of the Selectmen. (Tom)

### **General information**

- 60,000 vehicles a day pass through the traffic lights at Minot's Corner (Route 110/Boston Road/Carlisle Road intersection). (Bev)
- Technology Park West, the new office park proposed at the intersection of Concord, Power and Littleton roads, will generate 7,600 vehicles trips a day. (Peter)
- Prohibiting or restricting traffic from one part of town merely moves it to another part of town. (Chip)

### **Routes 110 & 495 and Boston Road**

- Request for a light at Route 110 and Westford Valley Market Place II.
- Encourage employers on Route 110 to institute staggered work hours.
- Create a shuttle service on Route 110 so employees don't have to take their cars out to get lunch or run errands.
- Ask Route 110 businesses to help foot the bill for sidewalks on Route 110.

# Questions/Comments emailed

## The Common

What can we do to make the intersection at the common, Boston Road and Main St., safer? Is there a reason why we don't have a 3-way stop?

Can we please make Lincoln Street a two-way street once again?

## New Technology Park West

Town boards met this week on the Rt. 225 bypass. Do the bypass plans include considerations of new ramps on & off of I-495 at the intersection of Rt. 225?

How would exit ramps at Rt. 225 alter the traffic flow in the Boston Road/Littleton Road/495 area?

Is there a master plan for accommodating the large volume of commuters traveling to the 110 office parks?

I think the town committees are doing an admirable job of addressing the residential growth issue, but I am concerned that not nearly enough is being done to curb commercial growth. In my opinion, it is the thousands of cars per day getting on and off Route 495 that cause a large percentage of the traffic problems.

## Suggestions for curbing the number of cars that drive through town on a daily basis

1. Notify & remind town residents to maintain speeds within the posted limits at all times. I believe that if we all slow down, out-of-town commuters may get frustrated and seek alternative routes.
2. Let's get 4-way stop signs. They are inexpensive and look what happens in Chelmsford Center. (Who in their right mind would purposely take Rte 4 rather than continue on 495 or Route 3?) My point being, Stop signs are an annoyance. They make drivers slow down and possibly seek alternative routes.

## General comment on traffic

I live in Westford and commute to Lexington every day. The most exasperating logjam is at Minot's Corner during the commuting hours. During the week at other times is no picnic either.

Hope something is going to be done NOW! Please, no more 'studies'.

## Rte. 110 east of Boston Road

1. Will there ever be a traffic light at the corner of Rt. 110 and Tadmuck Rd.? There are times when people risk their lives making a left onto Rt. 110 or crossing it to the other side.
2. Are there any plans for sidewalks and crosswalks along Rt. 110 from Tadmuck Rd. to the office parks? There are many pedestrians along Rt. 110 during the day, walking from Nashoba Tech & the office parks to Westford Valley Marketplace in

one direction & Nashoba Pizza in the other. It's a dangerous walk!

3. The afternoon "rush" hour is terrible on 110. It can take 20 minutes to go from Tadmuck Rd. to the intersection of Boston Rd. Are there any plans for a Rt. 495 North entrance from Westford Technology Park (at the end of Nixon Rd.)? This would help alleviate some of the Rt. 110 traffic.

### Comments on Forge Village & Cold Spring roads

(though this write said he planned to be at the forum)

The traffic at Cold Spring Rd and Forge Village Rd is not only a school-day issue. School events, especially nighttime athletic ones, need to be considered. Foot traffic at this intersection is also a safety issue, especially during the early fall nighttime athletic events. Major events like the Christmas bazaar and Thanksgiving football and graduation have the advantage of police details and, while very busy, do not seem to be a problem.

While average speeds along Forge Village Rd are for the most part tolerable, it is a long straight section of road with good sight lines and the Cold Spring Rd intersection is right in the middle. Vehicles not observing a realistic speed tend to be well above the posted limits. To improve safety, pedestrian crosswalks and a 4-way stop at this intersection should also be considered.

Another somewhat related traffic issue at Cold Spring & Forge Village Roads is that of tractor trailer trucks that have become "lost". Now that no-turning signs have been installed at Flagg Road it may even get worse. This intersection is the first one that a tractor trailer driver can use to turn around if he takes the wrong turn off of I-495. It is my opinion that better signage at the I-495 off ramps is needed to reduce the number of lost vehicles at this intersection. My standard question to any lost motorist is "did you just come off of I-495", the answer is yes 99% of the time.

### Boston Road

Construction trucks are using the Boston Road - Depot Street - Tyngsboro Road route to Route 3.

Can we post Boston Road to prevent trucks from starting this route? The State road goes only to McDougal's.

*[Related question]*

Westford is becoming increasingly unfriendly to pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Our deference to cars and huge trucks over walkers is strange. Many of the vehicles that travel through the center, for example, are simply passing through. Why must we be so friendly to commuters, particularly out-of-state commuters, and why even allow the caravans of tractor trailer trucks that pass through the Center to do so? Is there a logical explanation for why a "no-thru trucks" policy has not been implemented?

### Traffic calming

Why hasn't Westford implemented traffic calming measures? Other towns, such as Lexington and Cambridge, have raised crosswalks. Many other towns in the immediate area (Chelmsford, Bedford, Carlisle) have cones in their major crosswalks. Is Westford entertaining these ideas? If not, why not?

(This link (<<http://www.trafficcalming.org/>>) provides some data, financial and otherwise, for traffic calming efforts that can successfully control traffic through densely settled areas.)

### Comment on Boston Road traffic speed

Several years ago, there was an effort to enforce speed limits on residential streets - and I'm thinking of Boston Road where I attempt to enter and exit a driveway. It has been a long time since I've seen any real enforcement of speed limits on this street. It is not only the sheer volume of traffic traveling through the main thoroughfares of Westford that drive us crazy - it is also the speed and recklessness in which those drivers travel.

### Fire Department/ambulance service concerns

Does the Fire Department/ambulance service have concerns about safety right now?

How does the Fire Department/ambulance service resolve their concerns?

### Speed

Are speed limits observed?

Are there any areas in town where speed is especially a problem?

What is being done to deal with these problem areas?

### Pedestrian safety

Are pedestrians safe?

Can the town add crosswalks?

Are there any plans to add more crosswalks, & where?

### Blind Intersections

There are many blind intersections in town, such as the corner of Town Farm Road and Forge Village Road. Can anything be done to improve them?

**Paying for traffic officers**

Who pays for the traffic officer at the Route 495 exchange?

**Traffic lights**

How much do traffic lights cost? What does it cost to operate a traffic light?

**Impact of Rte. 3 construction**

Has construction on Route 3 increased traffic in Westford?

Can we expect traffic to decrease upon completion of the Rt. 3 project?

**Boston Road**

How many cars travel down Boston Road every day?

Is widening Boston Road an option? (Remember it is the gateway to Westford.)

**Road safety**

Are Westford roads able to safely handle future traffic?

If not, what can be done today to ensure future growth is handled?