

**CITY OF RYE
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Mayor and Council
ALSO TO: S. Pickup, C. Miller, G. Mottarella, W. Connors
FROM: Traffic and Transportation Committee
SUBJECT: Midland Avenue Traffic Issues
DATE: June 30, 2009

The Traffic and Transportation (T&T) Committee has been reviewing various traffic issues along different sections of Midland Avenue which have arisen from our own observations as well as from comments received from various residents, school representatives and the Council. In general, the issues mainly revolve around vehicular speed, pedestrian crossing, and parking. Midland Avenue has significant activity with residences, the school, the recreation park and some commercial establishments as well as varying roadway widths. The following is a summary of these issues and our findings to date. For ease of discussion, the issues discussed are separated into three sections of Midland Avenue, and one side street, although each section has some inter-relation with the other sections. The sections to be discussed are:

- (1) Midland Avenue in the vicinity of Midland School
- (2) Midland Avenue in the vicinity of Palisade Road
- (3) Midland Avenue between Apawamis Avenue and Playland Parkway
- (4) Goldwin Street and Cedar Street

(1) Midland Avenue in the vicinity of Midland School

Additional Crosswalk

Representatives of the T&T and the City met with the Midland School Principal and PTO President to discuss traffic issues in relation to the School. In regards to Midland Avenue, the main issue was consideration of a new crosswalk in the vicinity of the playground/Rye School of Leadership (former School Administration) Driveway. The school representatives feel that there should be another crosswalk located there, as many parents drop their children off there now since the older children go to the field/basketball court prior to school (The school has previously asked parents not to drop off students there.)

There are a few concerns with a new crosswalk at this location including its proximity to the existing crosswalk. Crosswalks can give people crossing a false sense of security, thinking that every vehicle will stop for them if they begin to enter the crosswalk.

One concern with this location is more detailed discussions will need to be held with the Recreation Department. With the additional crosswalk, even more vehicles will utilize the Recreation loop driveway to turn around and more parents may park their car there during pick-up time. In addition, this would cause some more interaction at the School-loop exit as more vehicles would be exiting the Recreation driveway at the same time.

The exact location of the crosswalk would have to be defined. A new crosswalk must meet ADA requirements including the provision of handicapped ramps. The Recreation entrance driveway and the former Administration driveway are slightly offset and thus do not allow for the preferred location for a crosswalk. In addition, there is a catch basin and trees which may need to be removed to provide for the crosswalk. If the crosswalk is added south of the Recreation driveway, then the students who are dropped off on Midland Avenue would have to cross this active driveway to reach the crosswalk. If the crosswalk is located north of the Recreation driveway, they would be required to cross the Administration driveway. Also, drivers destined north exiting the School loop driveway are looking to their left to exit and must be aware that children could be crossing a short distance away in front of them and that they may need to stop.

Another issue is who would monitor the crosswalk. It is recommended that if a crosswalk is added, then a crossing guard should be provided. An issue here is whether the crossing guard is provided by the City Police Department or the School District and the costs and liabilities associated with this. This should be looked at further by the City's Legal Department.

The existing crosswalk should remain as there are children who would continue to cross there to enter the school or the southern play area. A concern with the proposed crosswalk is that some drivers may stop there and then ignore the existing crosswalk.

Thus, more discussions are required prior to an additional crossing be added at this location.

Other Issues

The other school related issues in conjunction with Midland Avenue included parking, including parking too close to driveways/roadways and thus limiting sight distance and parking on the side streets and thus blocking residential driveways. The T&T and the City have added striped sight triangles to restrict some parking and increase sight distances at some locations and these can be added at the Administration driveway (and possibly at some other side streets as sight distance can be limited due to school parking and soccer Saturday parking – see below). The T&T and the City have restricted some parking on portions of the side streets (i.e. Billington Court) in the past. The latest situation along the side streets has been resolved through messages to the parents from the Principal/PTO.

Unrelated to the school parking issues, another parking issue that has been discussed with the attention of the T&T is the on-street parking on Saturdays in the spring and fall due to the youth soccer program at Rye Rec. Vehicles park on both sides of Midland Avenue along the Rec and school fields, narrowing the travel width on Midland Avenue. This results in drivers having to drive slowly through the area and can be very tight for two vehicles to pass each other. This could impact emergency vehicles. There are limited options for these people to park. However, an option that has been suggested is to have the parents park in the parking lots of Midland School and have the soccer program provide a crossing guard. A test of this could be performed.

Radar Speed Signs

One item that was discussed at the joint City Council/School Board Meeting that could be beneficial is the installation of permanent radar speed signs that alert drivers of the speed limit as well as their speed. These have been shown to have benefits in having drivers reduce their speeds and they are recommended by the T&T (the signs should be placed in each direction).

(2) Midland Avenue in the vicinity of Palisade Road

This stretch of Midland Avenue has been reviewed previously by the T&T and has been reviewed again at the request of the Council and a resident. Recently the T&T has been quoted in the Journal News, Rye Record, and Rye Sound Shore Review as well as Cablevision News12 regarding this issue.

At the intersection of Midland Avenue and Palisade Road itself, there have not been accidents recently but there is limited sight distance. The City Engineering Department and T&T representatives have performed a sight distance analysis at the intersection, which is summarized below and provided in a separate document.

The T&T is in receipt of the December 10, 2008 letter from Judy Myers and some of the various emails from a longtime local resident relating to that letter and we disagree with various aspects of the correspondence. In addition, previous discussions with the County Traffic Engineer do not reflect the comments made in the Myers' letter. (It should be noted that since the time of the letter and the emails, that representatives of the T&T have held various conversations with the resident and have come to some agreements on portions of these issues.)

The T&T understands the concern of the resident and has looked seriously at Midland Avenue as well as at other locations throughout the City. As Midland Avenue is a County Road, the T&T and the City have worked closely with the County regarding Midland Avenue, drawing upon their expertise, including performing speed measurements and field observations. The T&T has met with the County's Traffic Engineer at the Site (a member of the resident's family was present for a portion of that meeting) to review possible modifications. The County has also performed speed measurements during two different periods at the Site. While the New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law does give Cities certain jurisdiction on County Roads within the City limits, we have consulted with the County for their guidance based upon their experience and knowledge. Even though the City may have some jurisdiction on the roadway, it must still follow State regulations and Traffic Engineering Principles and Guidelines. Each of the previously suggested modifications has been looked at and has consequences, as described below. The T&T has taken a hard look at this location on various occasions including field visits, review of the data, and discussions with the resident. It is the opinion of the T&T, and also of the County Traffic Engineer, that some of the previously proposed solutions could actually make the condition less safe and most likely would not have eliminated the tragic accident that did occur.

Stop Signs

As stated in the letter, stop signs can be installed to regulate traffic (such as the right-of-way for turning movements), but they are not to be installed to regulate speeds (and studies have shown that stop signs actually increase speeds in some situations as drivers speed up to make up for lost time). It is the opinion of the T&T that installation of stop signs will not obtain the desired goals. In addition, installing unwarranted stop signs can lead to more accidents as well as disregard for other stop signs. It is the opinion of the T&T that installing a stop sign at the intersection of Midland Avenue and Palisades Road would increase the number of rear end accidents as drivers are not expecting to stop at that location. The County Traffic Engineer had a similar opinion. These signs will also increase noise and air pollution and increase driver frustration, leading to more aggressive driving.

Regarding the Stop Signs at Wappanoca referenced in the Myers' letter, another County roadway, the T&T does not feel that the stop signs there are effective. Vehicles drive through those stop signs often. The County Traffic Engineer was against the installation of stop signs at that location for the same reasons.

The City has a Stop Sign Policy that should be followed if stop signs are to be proposed/installed.

Crosswalks

The County and the T&T have looked at a crosswalk at this location. One of the concerns was the location of a potential crosswalk and how it would be aligned. For example, if the crosswalk was to be installed at the southern portion of the intersection of Midland Avenue and Palisade Road, which would be the desired location, it would end up being striped into a private driveway. The tightness of the houses and the multiple curb-cuts along Midland Avenue make it difficult to place a crosswalk at this location. Thus a crosswalk would need to be skewed. It would be easier to align a crosswalk at the intersection of Midland Avenue at Goldwin Street, but this is a less desirable location as drivers would not be as likely to expect a person to cross at this location as compared to Palisade, which is a more defined and active intersection. In addition, crosswalks do not necessarily provide safety and sometimes have the opposite effect as they can give people, particularly children, a false sense of security resulting in people not taking sufficient care in crossing the street. Even if there is not a striped crosswalk, by law, a driver must yield to a pedestrian that is crossing a roadway at an intersection. It is the opinion of the T&T that a striped crosswalk could possibly be installed, but it would have limited benefit and could do more damage. The County Traffic Engineer had a similar opinion. If a striped crosswalk is added, it would not be necessary to have a crossing guard as there is one present at the intersection of Midland Avenue and Grace Church Street/Manursing Avenue as well as at Midland School. Children walking to the School from Palisade Road can continue to walk along the west side of Midland Avenue and cross at the School under the supervision of the crossing guard.

Other Issues

To improve conditions at the intersection of Midland Avenue and Palisade Road, the T&T and the City previously removed some parking spaces along Midland Avenue to improve sight distance. The number of parking spaces removed was based upon a balancing of the neighborhood needs and the sight distance. If a stop sign is to be installed, more parking spaces may need to be eliminated to ensure that the sign can be seen. However, the existing parked cars do provide an advantage as they keep vehicle traveling speeds lower.

Based upon a review of the speed measurements performed along Midland Avenue, there is not a significant speed issue on this portion of Midland Avenue (not to say that no one travels above the speed limit). The accident that occurred was not a result of speeding. The portable speed signs could be installed in this area to remind drivers of their speed.

An overhead blinking light would be expensive and would have limited long term effect. Drivers tend to ignore these after a while. If one is installed, it would need to be essentially as a full traffic signal (three bulbs per direction) as those with only one bulb per direction can be confusing, particularly to color blind people who have trouble distinguishing whether it is flashing red or yellow.

As described above, representatives from the City Engineering Department and the T&T conducted sight distance analyses for this intersection. The report from the Engineering Department is contained in separate document. The findings of this analysis indicated that the recommended/desired sight distance for vehicles turning from Palisade onto Midland Avenue is not met, however, the minimum sight distance required, the stopping sight distance, is met. As the sight distance is limited for vehicles turning from Palisade due to parked cars along Midland Avenue, drivers on Palisade inch up to see better. While the parked cars do limit sight distance, they do provide a benefit as they act as a traffic calming device by keeping the roadway narrow and thus keeping traffic moving slower. The T&T had previously recommended the removal of some parking spaces along Midland Avenue at the intersection and thus striping was added to prohibit parking. The no parking striping was limited as the T&T tried to strike a balance between providing more sight distance and impacts on the residents. The residents utilize the on street parking. The on street parking is also utilized by patrons of the commercial establishments, a restaurant and a former deli. Eliminating more on street parking along Midland Avenue pushes more vehicles to park on the side streets (which is another complaint that the T&T has received). However, the T&T has recommended that the “No Parking” striping be extended by another one-two spaces in each direction to increase the sight distance.

One of the other factors limiting sight distance as determined in the Engineering Department analysis was the bushes on the southwest quadrant of the intersection. This is in the process of being rectified as the City has required the resident to lower the bush height.

A potential improvement at this location is a bumpout/bulbout or curb extension. This would narrow the distance a person would need to cross and would improve the sight distance for a pedestrian. A crosswalk could then be added, although it would have similar issues as described above, but to a lesser extent. This improvement would also help drivers move up closer to Midland Avenue, thus improving sight distance. Some negative factors that would need to be considered are costs, maintenance, who would be responsible for clearing snow (most likely the resident as it is part of the sidewalk), impacts on snow plowing of Midland Avenue, impacts to turning radius for fire engine and trucks, and impacts on drainage (would need to be reviewed). If funding is available, this could be a viable improvement.

Another resident mentioned that, particularly on soccer Saturdays, cars are parked right up to the corners on the southbound side of Midland Avenue at Goldwyn Street. The “No Parking” striped triangles should be considered for here as well as at some of the other side streets along Midland, such as at Ellis Court, as well as at the driveway adjacent to the former Administration Building.

(3) Midland Avenue from Apawamis Avenue to Playland Parkway

Another longtime Rye resident stated that his concern was the speed of vehicles and the running of the red light at the traffic signal at Apawamis Avenue by vehicles coming from Playland Parkway, particularly box trucks making deliveries in the morning. This section of Midland Avenue is very wide as it previous served as the location for the turnaround for the old trolley. Because the roadway is so wide, drivers tend to drive at a higher speed. The T&T has considered various options here including the addition of a raised median. However, because of the numerous residential driveways along this stretch, there either would need to be numerous openings or drivers would need to make u-turns. There are also the issues of costs and

maintenance of the median (including vegetation control), as well as added complications with emergency access and snow removal. A striped median could be considered.

Another possibility includes narrowing the section by relocating the curbs to be closer to each other. Who would own/maintain the additional property would need to be determined. Costs and drainage as well as the modifications of driveways would need to be considered.

On-street parking is permitted during the majority of the year but not permitted during the warmer months due to the Playland Parking rules. Permitting angle parking along the western portion of the road could have the effect of narrowing the roadway but would only probably be utilized during school hours.

The T&T and City Engineering Department are having speed measurements performed to review the travel speeds that are currently occurring in this section.

(4) Goldwin Street and Cedar Street

The resident who brought up the Palisade issue has also approached the T&T about the installation of a stop sign on Goldwin Street at Cedar Street. This is an appropriate location for a stop sign as Cedar Street is officially a “through” street, even though it only extends for a minimum distance. By law, vehicles traveling east on Goldwin Street are required to stop as they are approaching the “major” street from a smaller street. However, due to the minimum distance of the extension of Cedar Street, vehicles on Goldwin Street do not stop. Even if a stop sign is added, most drivers will continue to drive through it.

Follow up

The T&T is continuing to work with City Staff as well as with the residents and School representatives to improve conditions along Midland Avenue and we welcome input from the Council, Police Department, residents and others on ways to improve the corridor. Adding the stripe triangles at the side streets and increasing the “No Parking” area near Palisade will improve the sight distance and safety. A stop sign on Midland Avenue is not recommended. The bulbout could be considered, which will help pedestrian crossing at the intersection. If the bulbout is constructed, a crosswalk could be added.