

SYNOPSIS

Weston & SampsonSM



September 2022



TOWN OF WESTERLY, RHODE ISLAND

Westerly Route 1 Corridor

Report

TRAVEL IN THE CORRIDOR Roadway and Traffic Flow

CURRENT CONDITIONS

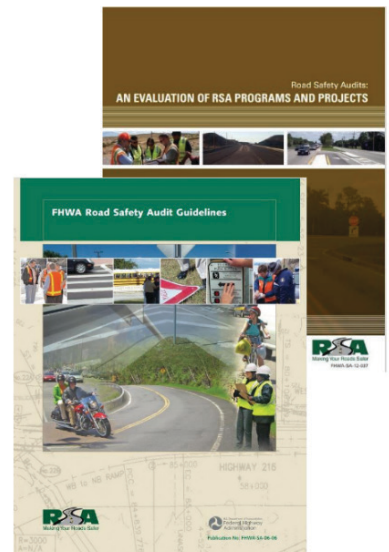
- Varying roadway widths, travel speeds, and intersection designs interrupt smooth travel in the Corridor and tend to confuse travelers.
- Inconsistent signal timing and sight distances aggravate motorists.
- Excessive curb cuts confuse motorists as they attempt to navigate in and out of parking lots for businesses.

GOAL

Travel through the Corridor will flow logically without delay and navigating as a pedestrian, cyclist, motorist, or passenger will be safe and convenient.

ACTIONS

1. Request a Road Safety Audit from RIDOT to determine issues related to safety and roadway conditions within and around the Route One Corridor Study Area.
2. Coordinate with RIDOT on priority short- and long-term improvements and schedule construction within the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).
3. Work with RIDOT to determine possible funding sources and schedules to implement proposed improvements determined through the RSA evaluation.
4. Adopt zoning requirements for cross-access easements (i.e., between properties) as part of new and re-development. Also promote good access management techniques and reduce curb cuts when practicable.



RSA guidelines and evaluation manual

TRAVEL IN THE CORRIDOR

Traffic Signals and Signs

CURRENT CONDITIONS

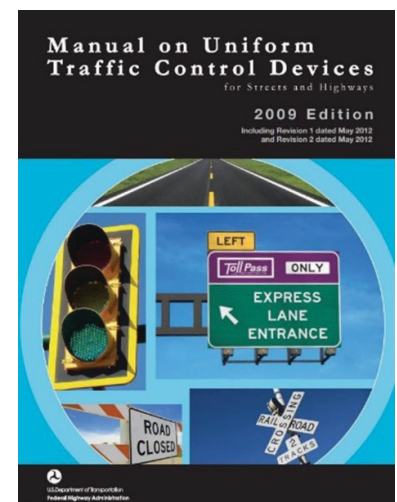
- An excess of traffic signals and signs makes travel in the Corridor unnecessarily challenging.
- Sign clutter as well obscured and hard-to-read signs make travel through the Corridor confusing.

GOAL

Travel through the Corridor is seamless. Wayfinding signage and traffic signals throughout the Corridor are designed and arranged consistently so that they are easy to read and follow.

ACTIONS

1. Work with RIDOT to conduct a Road Safety Audit to inventory traffic related and regulatory signs and pavement markings. Ensure signs and markings meet state standards and Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Ensure signs and markings are properly located, in good condition, and consistent throughout the Corridor.
2. Work with RIDOT to inventory traffic signal equipment. Ensure signal equipment meets current requirements, is properly located and in good condition. Determine the appropriateness of timing and phasing of intersection and pedestrian crossing signals.
3. Adopt zoning requirements for access to side streets from properties for new development and redevelopment to promote good access management and direct traffic to existing or proposed signalized intersections.



*Manual on Uniform
Traffic Control
Devices*



TRAVEL IN THE CORRIDOR

Parking

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Excess parking in many plazas along the Corridor prevents higher and better use of real estate, while lack of adequate parking detracts from business growth and sustainability.
- Lack of smooth or logical traffic flow in larger parking lots confuses patrons.
- Minimal landscaping with excessive areas of impervious surface detracts from visual appeal and generates unnecessary stormwater runoff.
- Internal circulation for cars and pedestrians is unclear and, at times, unsafe.

GOAL

*Parking areas in the Corridor provide an appropriate amount of parking.
Parking lots are well designed for parking, internal circulation, and walking.*

ACTIONS

1. Amend the zoning ordinance and off-street parking regulations to reflect parking maximums instead of minimum requirements and require parking-demand studies to reduce parking spaces allowed.
2. Incentivize shared parking to provide adequate parking for small businesses and better utilization of existing parking lots.
3. Amend the zoning ordinance to require a more robust use of landscape in the off-street parking regulations including, but not limited to, required buffers, berms, plant material, shade cover, and interior landscape requirements.
4. Provide for a review process for the updating of existing parking areas to meet performance standards and sites where existing underutilized parking areas are proposed to be converted to occupied commercial space.
5. During roadway improvements, encourage RIDOT to remove wide curb cuts, and to establish and maintain suitable curb reveal to create defined ingress and egress points.



TRAVEL IN THE CORRIDOR Pedestrian Access

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Pedestrian access is limited, inconsistent, and lacks pedestrian amenities, which makes the Corridor unwelcoming and at times unsafe.

GOAL

Safe and convenient pedestrian access to support residency, business patronage, and public transportation options within the Corridor.

ACTIONS

1. Work with RIDOT to conduct a bicycle and pedestrian safety audit to determine deficiencies using the FHWA Pedestrian and Bicyclist Road Safety Audit (RSA) Guide and Prompt List.
2. Coordinate with RIDOT to improve pedestrian and ADA access by removing obstacles such as sign poles, mailboxes, and other objects in walkways
3. Identify gaps in the sidewalk network as well as substandard pedestrian crossings. Use a pedestrian and bicycle RSA and work with RIDOT to plan for and install sidewalks and improved crossings in critical locations to provide continuous and safe pedestrian access through the Corridor.
4. Identify sidewalk areas where ADA required provisions (such as minimum four-foot wide sidewalks, curb ramps, and detectable warnings at crossing) are lacking and coordinate with RIDOT to upgrade these areas to bring them into compliance.
5. Use the site planning process to work with local business owners and require improved pedestrian access whenever businesses are updating or redeveloping.



TRAVEL IN THE CORRIDOR Bicycle Access

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Lack of designated bicycle accommodations, especially in high-speed areas, make cycling confusing and unsafe.

GOAL

Bicycle access in the Corridor that provides public health benefits, connection to adjacent residential neighborhoods and other areas of Town, as well as economic benefits to businesses.

ACTIONS

1. Work with RIDOT to conduct a bicycle and pedestrian safety audit to determine deficiencies using the FHWA Pedestrian and Bicyclist Road Safety Audit Guide and Prompt List.
2. Amend the zoning ordinance off-street parking regulations and use the site planning processes to require improved bicycle access and amenities such as bike racks whenever businesses are updating.
3. Work with RIDOT to install shared - and dedicated - lane markings and bicycle signage to increase awareness and safety around bicyclists on the Corridor.
4. Map any shared use and bicycle-only lanes. Ensure such information is available to the public and up to date.
5. Conduct a bicycle lane study along the Corridor to determine the appropriateness and feasibility of providing bicycle access and amenities.
6. Consider a complete streets program for Route One, to be phased in through future pavement resurfacing and road reconstruction projects and provide for long-term and continued reinvestment.

TRAVEL IN THE CORRIDOR

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

CURRENT CONDITIONS

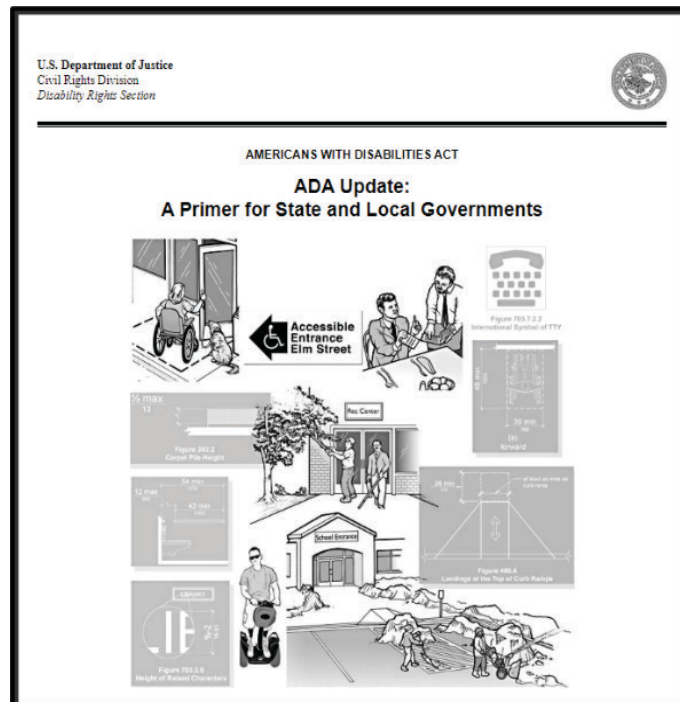
- Lack of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) makes the Corridor unwelcoming.

GOAL

The Route One Corridor is easily accessible to all, regardless of disabilities and impairments.

ACTIONS

1. Collaborate with Rhode Island Department of Transportation on a strategy to identify, plan, and address ADA compliance issues related to sidewalk access, signage, and other identified issues.



ADA Update: A Primer for State and Local Governments



INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CORRIDOR

Stormwater

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Little or no treatment of stormwater, which is substandard and results in adverse environmental effects, especially to receiving waters.

GOAL

Environmental resources in the Corridor are protected from contamination through best-available water quality controls and stormwater management.

ACTIONS

1. Work with RIDOT and conduct an inventory and analysis of the existing stormwater infrastructure in the Corridor. Revise stormwater management and site development regulations to require green infrastructure and reduce the amount of impervious surface in all new private and public projects.
2. Implement a program of incentives for green infrastructure and reduction in the amount of existing impervious surface and as part of redevelopment.
3. Develop a database of grant funding options for plan, design, and construction of green infrastructure and publish it on the Town website.
4. Analyze and then implement preferred funding options for Corridor improvements in the public realm.
5. Analyze the potential value of developing a public or private stormwater utility.

INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CORRIDOR

Water Supply

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Entirety of the Corridor is served by public water, which is withdrawn from community wells.
- Wood-Pawcatuck Aquifer is a sole-source aquifer and should receive the best available protection.

GOAL

High-quality water continues to be available in the Corridor from public sources to support the Town's preferred level of residential and commercial growth.

ACTIONS

1. Develop a water conservation program that is initially aimed at businesses.
2. Protect groundwater through use of appropriate stormwater and wastewater management.
3. Plan, design and permit improvements to, and extension of, water service as needed including the capital funding as part of an update to the Westerly Water Supply Management Plan.
4. Construct improvements and extension of water service as needed.



INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CORRIDOR

Wastewater Management

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Half of the Route One Corridor is served by sewers with the remainder served by onsite wastewater treatment systems, which may lack capacity for the desired level of growth.

GOAL

The capacity and maintenance of the wastewater treatment facility supports short- and long-term commercial and economic growth within the Corridor.

ACTIONS

1. Ensure that sewers within the project area are functioning properly and conveying flows without restrictions.
2. Plan, design and permit improvements and extension of sewer service to Dunn's Corners including capital funding as part of an update to the Westerly Wastewater Facilities Plan. Construct improvements and extensions of sewers to Dunn's Corners.
3. If funding for conventional sewers does not go forward, consider the use of a small-diameter system for parts of the Corridor.



INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CORRIDOR Broadband

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Broadband is sometimes spotty and may detract from otherwise strong development opportunities.
- Internet and wireless service is established through private providers (e.g., Verizon and Xfinity).

GOAL

Broadband capacity supports competitive and attractive opportunities for both business and families throughout the Corridor.

ACTIONS

1. Develop a telecommunications master plan for the Route One Corridor.
2. Establish a broadband advisory council.
3. Bring a broadband hub to the Route One Corridor.
4. Amend the zoning ordinance and development regulations and use the site planning processes to require broadband infrastructure as part of development proposals whenever needed.

INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CORRIDOR

Undergrounding Cabling and Electrical Infrastructure

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Communication and electric lines are all above ground on utility poles, which obstruct the use of sidewalks, especially for the wheelchair-bound, and detracts from the visual appeal of the Corridor.

GOAL

Use and visual appeal of the Corridor is no longer obstructed by communication and electrical infrastructure.

ACTIONS

1. Develop a plan for undergrounding utility lines along the Route One Corridor.
2. Amend the zoning ordinance and development regulations and use the site-planning processes to require underground utility lines as part of development and redevelopment proposals.
3. Develop an undergrounding process with the utility companies to ensure an orderly transition from aboveground to underground utilities.



Depiction of a streetscape where overhead utility lines have been removed.

Source: Goldstein, 2015



AESTHETICS IN THE CORRIDOR

Landscape and Streetscape

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Aesthetics, including landscaping, are inconsistent and look haphazard.
- Inconsistent landscaping contributes to a less safe pedestrian environment.

GOAL

Landscaping within the Corridor serves multiple functions. It treats stormwater, defines travel areas, provides directional guidance, supports parking-area navigation, and makes for a more visually appealing travel experience.

ACTIONS

1. Draft a set of design standards that provide guidance for landscape design elements. The guidance should address the character of each sub-corridor.
2. Develop local and state support for applying Complete Street principles to the Route One Corridor.
3. Create a façade or streetscape improvement program to incentivize businesses to upgrade their façade or streetscape.
4. Amend the zoning ordinance to consolidate landscaping requirements that are currently scattered throughout the ordinance, into a single section for ease of design and implementation.



AESTHETICS IN THE CORRIDOR Signage

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Inconsistent pattern of signage clutters and detracts from the visual appeal of the Corridor.

GOAL

Circulation and safety within the Corridor is improved with well-designed signage which coordinates signs for branding, advertising, site circulation, pedestrian paths, and access points.

ACTIONS

1. Amend the zoning ordinance to address sign requirements specifically for the Route One Corridor to create consistency within each sub-corridor.
2. Develop design standards for the Corridor that includes a sunset provision for existing nonconforming signage.
3. Develop a Route One Westerly brand to create design cohesion through the public realm and ensure that any public infrastructure improvements are also consistent with the Corridor Vision.
4. Develop a sign incentive program that encourages businesses to update and upgrade their signs to meet new requirements.



AESTHETICS

IN THE CORRIDOR

Building Design and Location

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Building design is varied in terms of type, age, and design giving a random appearance in many parts of the Corridor.
- Buildings are located in an irregular fashion, which tends to make them look out of place.

GOAL

Building location and design within the Corridor has a consistent look and feel while maintaining important characteristics of the neighborhoods it connects.

ACTIONS

1. Develop design standards for the Corridor that reflect the character of each sub-corridor and articulate the Town's preference for building massing, scale, and location.
2. Develop a tax incentive program to encourage property owners to implement new building design criteria as retrofits.



HOUSING IN THE CORRIDOR

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Houses are located sporadically, which gives the Corridor a random and disjointed look.
- The Corridor lacks multifamily and clustered housing, which limits affordability of the Corridor for middle-income residents.
- Higher proportion of residents who live and work in Town compared to Rhode Island and Connecticut neighboring communities.

GOAL

The Route One Corridor includes a broad range of integrated, inclusive, age friendly, and affordable housing options, leveraging opportunities for a live-work-play community.

ACTIONS

1. Amend Corridor zoning to allow increased residential density within the Corridor consistent with sub-corridor characteristics.
2. Create incentives for development of affordable-by-design housing through public-private partnerships.
3. Amend Corridor zoning to provide an appropriate mix of uses and to allow mixed-use redevelopment to take on various forms.
4. Establish sub-corridor zoning provisions to protect the existing stretches of single-family detached residential homes from commercial encroachment, inappropriate in-fill development, and changes of use.
5. Strengthen relationships with statewide agencies with access to funding and technical assistance resources for the Corridor and its businesses.
6. Actively pursue the construction of low-to-moderate income (LMI) qualified rental units within the existing sewer service area of the Route One Corridor.
7. Revise zoning regulations to allow family ownership units (of 1 to 3 bedrooms) such as those designed in 2 to 4-unit or 9 to 12-unit structures.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORRIDOR

Development Framework

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Many vacant and underutilized parcels in the Corridor detract from aesthetics and communicate disruption in development opportunities.
- Limited diversity of uses in the Corridor limits job opportunities and preferred development in the Corridor.
- Lack of flexibility with zoning, phasing, infrastructure needs, and financing.

GOAL

A development environment in the Corridor that encourages projects that benefit the Town and support growth that helps fulfill Westerly's vision to be a safe, resilient, and welcoming community.

ACTIONS

1. Use the Focus Areas identified in the Market Analysis to amend Corridor zoning to allow residential, retail, industrial, and manufacturing within the Corridor consistent with sub-corridor characteristics and infrastructure capacity.
2. Establish design districts along the Corridor with accompanying design guidelines, creating clear expectations for developers and a standard against which to judge proposed projects.
3. Customize the existing design review process for development projects within design districts.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORRIDOR

Incentives

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- No incentives exist to lower the barrier of entry for developers and property owners looking to undertake transformative projects.
- Zoning is restrictive but could be reset to allow a wider range of appropriate uses by-right.
- No financial incentives exist to counterbalance taxes and other costs of entry for developers.

GOAL

The Town of Westerly facilitates growth and development throughout the Corridor in a proactive but responsible way that benefits both business and the Town.

ACTIONS

1. Consider the implementation of one or more Tax Increment Financing districts at strategic locations along the Corridor, where large-scale development is desirable and infrastructure adaptations are needed.
2. Consider structured tax abatements for complex redevelopment projects, including those that require environmental remediation or other significant upfront costs that produce public benefits.
3. Consider a rent assistance program for a defined list of desired corridor tenant types.
4. Reduce building permitting and utility hook-up fees for non-formula (i.e., locally owned, non-chain) commercial uses.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORRIDOR Programming and Initiatives

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Few, if any, programs and initiatives exist to help Westerly provide publicity and attention to positive economic development success stories and opportunities.
- Limited focus exists to promote business and hiring through local events.

GOAL

The Route One Corridor's brand is recognized as representative of Westerly, communicates the wealth of business and other economic development opportunities available, and supports community-wide connections.

ACTIONS

1. Fund a staff position responsible for guiding businesses interested in locating in Westerly, identifying and marketing real estate and development opportunities, and proactively identifying candidates for startup activity (organizations and individuals).
2. Engage directly with local property owners, real estate brokers, and developers to understand the local marketplace and identify growth opportunities consistent with the vision for the Corridor.
3. Partner with local organizations to promote economic development by facilitating markets, festivals, and other short-term and tactical interventions in the Corridor.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORRIDOR Partnerships

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Partnerships with local, regional, and state business-development organizations have yet to be activated in a way that fully promotes economic growth.

GOAL

The Town is partnered with business and business organizations in a way that fully leverages economic growth opportunities throughout the Corridor.

ACTIONS

1. Create relationships with provosts, counselors, and advisors at higher education institutions such as Connecticut College, University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island Community College, and the Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of Rhode Island.
2. Create relationships with counselors, advisors, and teachers at local high schools, such as Westerly High School and the Chariho Career & Technical Center.
3. Strengthen relationships with statewide agencies that can improve the pipeline of women and minority business enterprises, such as the Rhode Island Black Business Association and Center for Women & Enterprise.
4. Build on the existing relationship with the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce to enhance connections to the local business community and improve understanding of their needs and concerns.
5. Strengthen relationships with statewide agencies with access to funding and technical assistance resources for the Corridor and its businesses, such as Rhode Island Commerce, Rhode Island Small Business Development Center, Ocean State Business Development Authority, Rhode Island Science & Technology Advisory Council.



REGULATION AND ZONING FRAMEWORK IN THE CORRIDOR

CURRENT CONDITIONS

- Ensure that zoning is clear and concise while promoting the Town's goal for the Route One Corridor.

GOAL

Clear and concise regulations, coupled with a streamlined approval process for development and redevelopment to attract economically sustainable investment to the Corridor.

ACTIONS

1. Develop a Special Corridor District within the zoning ordinance and apply it to the Route One Corridor, replacing the existing zoning.
2. Remove the Bed and Breakfast Overlay from the Route One Corridor area.
3. Remove the Granite Street Overlay.
4. Amend the Subdivision Regulations to create a streamlined permitting process for commercial development along the Corridor that complies with the newly adopted design guidelines.