

## More Truro Traffic: Speed Bumps or a Cliff?

by Ron Fichtner, PhD, retired CDC executive

June 4, 2023

Population, tourism, and development (for residential, commercial, and municipal use) all continue to expand on this slender finger of land we treasure. And there are now strident calls for more growth. Is there a tipping point, a point of maximum habitation, consumption of resources, and uncharted risk? A threshold beyond which there is no return when our local world becomes irreversibly maxed out and jeopardized?

Could **greater traffic** be a canary in the coal mine for this tipping point, as both an indicator and consequence?

### How greater traffic affects community wellbeing

- Traffic congestion increases vehicle emissions and degrades ambient air quality.
- More frequent traffic clogs and lengthy turgid backups interrupt routines and freedom of movement. They can encourage risky driving decisions spurred by impatience and anger.
- Emergency vehicles are halted or slowed.
- The seasonality of traffic poses challenges to emergency preparedness, response times, and local roadway policing.
- A greater likelihood of accidents elevates risks of loss of life and property.

### On the table for Truro's future

A looming proposal is suggesting 260 residential units, a majority of them rental, to be constructed and 40,000 sq. ft. of commercial space to be reserved, all on the undeveloped Walsh tract of land in Truro lying eastward from Route 6.

This community buildout is proposed to have but **one feeder road** (Walsh Way) to intersect with Route 6, with a single lane entering and a single lane exiting.

All vehicular traffic, including emergency, residential, maintenance, construction, and service, will be required to turn and funnel through the single feeder road to either (1) weave into and through traffic on Route 6, in order to merge onto Route 6; or (2) enter the proposed development.

When contemplating a left turn, who among us hasn't been tempted to shoot dangerously through a shrinking gap in rightward-flowing traffic?

## The state of play

A traffic study presented recently by the Cape Cod Commission to the Walsh Property Community Planning Committee reported there were 21 crashes in five years (2018-2022) on a stretch of Route 6 in Truro. These crashes occurred in the heart of Truro, in the one-mile span between Castle Road and Bayside Hills Road/Andrew Way.

Yet, even more perilous may be the Route 6 strip continuing to the north between Route 6 intersections with Parker Drive and Castle Road. That strip, Truro's "danger artery", is home to:

1. Truro Central School,
2. the Public Safety Facility that houses Truro's police, fire, and emergency response capabilities,
3. multiple commercial establishments,
4. multiple residential subdivisions,
5. and, conspicuously, the Route 6 intersection with Walsh Way.

The report also assesses the current summertime "level of service" for the intersection as "F" or poor, a measure of the quality of prevailing traffic conditions, including safety.

## A strategic fork in the road

Is worsening traffic, as both a contributor to and consequence of growth, a mere speed bump to endure on the road to community "sustainability"?

**OR**

Is worsening traffic a sign of an imminent cliff, integral with other warnings, that Truro is nearing a maxed-out limit on the amount of growth it can sustain without compromising its future and community wellbeing?