



ALEX TORPEY
TOWN MANAGER

603.640.3210
ALEX.TORPEY@HANOVERNH.ORG

Memo on various traffic safety improvements for May 1st Selectboard

Over the last several years, issues have been increasingly raised with Town staff, the Selectboard, and on advisory committees, such as Hanover's Bike/Walk Advisory Committee, about the need for improvements in how we manage multi-modal access around Town. This is a great "problem" to have - it means more people are taking advantage of more types of transportation options, many of which have lower carbon footprints and provide a host of other benefits. Unfortunately, most roads in the US are not designed to accommodate modalities other than "cars," such as bicycles, ebikes, scooters and escooters (or walking), all considered "devices" versus "vehicles" for this discussion. Even where some roads allow them, many individuals still don't feel comfortable riding or using those spaces. Of course, this is not an issue that only Hanover is impacted by, and much of the Western world has been trying to find ways to re-organize roadways to better allow safe use of multi-modalities for the last decade or two.

In Hanover, stakeholders have so far identified some interesting ideas, and some progress has been made in a few areas as the community marches forward making transit more accessible and safe to all modalities, such as the "Advisory Lanes" project from 2016. But we still have a long way to go, and there are new dynamics that continue to make the conversation both more challenging, but also more necessary.

In this memo, I'd like to provide the Selectboard and public a comprehensive update, similar to the "Leash law" memo, but with fewer dog puns (because those were rough).

Agenda:

1. Process by which Town reviews safety issues/complaints
2. Proactive policy planning and integration between departments/plans
3. Policy constraints, existing standards and review of standards.
4. UCZ/Downtown Plan/Escooter
5. Review of state-owned roads
6. Conclusion and next steps

1. Process by which Town reviews safety issues/complaints

Throughout town, there have been a number of complaints that staff have received, even just since I've been here (though some of those are longer standing). Some of those have received enforcement attention from Hanover Police (such as speeding on Etna Road), but many issues persist (such as speeding on Etna Road). Although there was a comprehensive policy framework developed by the Town to address complaints more than 20 years ago, it has not been used in as long, and the process by which complaints are reviewed was ad-hoc. Meaning, there wasn't a uniform set of steps or timing, and each complaint was taken somewhat one at a time. We felt it was important to reevaluate this process by which the Town "intakes" issues related traffic/ped safety and recommend short, medium, or long term improvements. Thus we agreed and re-created a working group of key staff (Town Manager, DPW, Police, Planning) to create a more uniform, consistent, and formal way of 1) addressing complaints 2) being proactive and 3) re-evaluating the standards we have in place.

Conclusion: Now that we are past filling several key department head positions, union negotiations, the annual budget, town warrant, and town report, we are starting to work out the details of this plan, and hope to have a new process for intake of complaints in the next 1-2 months. This will include the schedule of internal staff working group meetings, what sort of information we need to review, what the timeline of a response is, and ways to solicit more information as needed, such as inviting groups in or visiting a location in the field to learn more. This will not significantly change the

substance of the reviews, per se, but rather the process, and we'll follow a similar (though not the same) framework in the past looking at enforcement, education, engineering.

2. Proactive policy planning

In much of New England, and in Hanover, we have a more 'distributed' system of evaluating and discussing policy than in many other states. This is great because it naturally helps involve more people in the planning process, but its downside is that often ideas never get connected between stakeholders or they sit on a shelf from a study, never to actually be implemented.

Regarding traffic and safety improvements, the most key stakeholders include:

- **Town staff:**

- Town Manager
- Planning and zoning
- Public Works
- Police
- Fire/EMS

- **Governing/legislative body:** (Note: In New Hampshire, the Governing body has more jurisdiction over roadways/public property than in many other policy areas typically reserved for Town Meeting)

- Selectboard
- Town Meeting
- Planning Board

- **Official Town advisory groups**

- Hanover Bike/Walk
- Sustainable Hanover

- **Local external stakeholders:**

- Dartmouth College
- School District
- Advanced Transit
- State of NH
- Federal Government
- Others

We believe that it is key these entities are aligned, and although this has happened relatively well so far, thanks in large part to informal, but proactive energy of staff, such as in the Planning Department, we would like to identify this as a need, and consider several mechanisms for collaboration going forward:

- **Ongoing:** Town Staff Traffic Safety Working Group
- **Ongoing:** Bike/Walk Advisory Committee
- **Ongoing:** Selectboard
- **New:** Community stakeholder goal-setting via new strategic planning/budget process for FY 24/25
- **New:** Every two-year standards review.

Conclusion: We feel confident that through the existing and proposed mechanisms identified above, we can ensure that stakeholders continue to work well together, improve upon that, and maximize the ability to identify policies ahead of time, or before something bad happens, that helps continue to move us in the direction of a safe/accessible multi-modal transportation community.

3. Review of standards

As complaints or issues come in and potential solutions are weighed, they need to be compared against the standards we have in place. Some of those standards we cannot change, for example ones from the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) from the USDOT. Going from federal, to state, to local standards, we are currently compiling a "table of contents" of all existing standards, who oversees them, and when they were last updated.

When reviewing issues that come in, we obviously need to compare them against the standards. The tricky bit, and the reason in part for this extended discussion, is that sometimes those standards are right, and we need to follow them, and sometimes they are wrong, and the standards need to be updated (or even in rare cases, ignored). But how do we know which is when?

To make that decision, we cannot approach it on an ad-hoc basis. Meaning, whenever an idea conflicts with a standard we can't at that moment just change the standard to suit what we want at that moment, because then the standards are meaningless, and we might as well just admit that each decision is weighed independent of any sort of uniform or outside criteria. But we also can't accept standards as dogma and never question them. So, we need a balanced and thoughtful process, proactively put in place, to review standards and update them as needed, because many are indeed outdated and don't have, for example, the best interest of alternate transportation or pedestrians in mind. So what do we do?

We're proposing formalizing a schedule for a standards review to take place every two years. This would mean that every two years over the course of likely 2-3 months, the appropriate stakeholders, such as Town staff, Bike/Walk Advisory Committee, and others, would come together, review the list of times when an issue/idea/solution conflicted with a standard, and review each of those, taking time to solicit community input, perform research of best practices that exist elsewhere, consult with other stakeholders, and eventually make recommendations, for example to update local policy, or to advocate to state or federal lawmakers for changes, or perhaps even in some rare cases, to decide a standard should be ignored. Although that last option must be taken with extreme care, and additional diligence is needed to ensure the Town doesn't create liability for taxpayers, or lose legal defense coverage from Primex, there are times when this is actually appropriate. For example, in a New Jersey town I worked in, the downtown main street was a state highway. During the spring/summer of 2020 from COVID we moved to quickly place parklets and expand our sidewalk width into street with barriers and flags so that people could safely use the downtown, etc. The NJDOT said did not allow this on state "highways." We went ahead anyway, feeling comfortable that their standard was just entirely outdated and wrong, inconsistent with almost all best practices that exist, and that we had the backing of a number of local stakeholders for providing safe outdoor dining and pedestrian access on a road that was classified as a highway, but was a low-speed, dense, heavily signalized, pedestrian-forward downtown street. This also has happened in Hanover, for example with the advisory lane. But again, those decisions need to be taken with extreme care and diligence, and should not be the norm.

Conclusion: To avoid making arbitrary decisions, or avoid accepting standards as dogma, we are recommending the creation of a formal standards review every two years, soliciting feedback and participation from various stakeholders, and using that time to address issues that may have arisen from mismatches in the prior two years.

4. UCZ Downtown Plan/Escooter

Beyond all of that, a specific issue has been identified that seems to have the greatest immediate risk. This is the significantly increasing use of "escooter" type of devices, in addition to bikes, ebikes, scooters, escooters, unicycles, tandem bicycles, even down to roller skates. Although there are somewhat comprehensive bike and ebike regulations some of these types of devices currently exist to some degree in legal grey areas, and even where there is clear law, often users of these devices don't know what the law is, or sometimes don't even feel safe following it (for example, in our downtown).

This is shown most significantly in Hanover's Urban Compact Zone (UCZ) where bicycles and scooters are often ridden on the sidewalk. This has created serious injury to pedestrians in the past, at least one fatality, increases the chance for motorized vehicle/non-motorized vehicle adverse interactions (crashes), and a host of other issues. We have received many complaints about these devices on the sidewalks in the downtown, but we need a better ordinance to regulate how they should be treated. We are currently drafting an ordinance that would require that they meet similar standards to bicycles in the street, following traffic laws as bikes do, requiring and/or recommending visibility (lights, reflectors) and similar. The draft ordinance will be provided in the next month for review by the Selectboard and input from stakeholders, such as Hanover Bike/Walk Advisory Committee.

However, moving devices from sidewalks to the street in Hanover does not solve the issue. Like many things, what seems like should have a simple solution, isn't. These devices are supposed to be ridden in the street, for example, but Hanover's Main Street layout, without any lane markings for shared use and with the dangerous use of pull-in angled parking, and the volume of traffic on the road, the streets are not particularly safe for any of these devices either. I've noticed this first hand riding my own bike and motorcycle down Main Street, and just waiting for someone to back out of an angled spot into me.



The problem is that these devices do have to go somewhere, and more broadly, people using them is a good thing. But literally they have to go either on the sidewalk or street - so which one? Most stakeholders and the best practices clearly support that riding in the street in most cases (above a certain age for example) is the safer option, and although I'm trying to avoid making a political joke, it's a bit like choosing the lesser of two evils. However, we can remedy this, both in the short and long term.

So if "devices" need to be in the street to protect their safety and the safety of pedestrians on sidewalks, what can we do?

Short term solution: Craft and implement an ordinance properly regulating escooters to similar standards as bicycles/ebicycles. Draft ordinance to be provided.

Short term solution: We are proposing to spend approximately \$15,000 - \$20,000 total (per year), with part of those funds coming from stakeholders such as Dartmouth College, to paint "sharrows" in the streets at locations proposed by our Planning Department (to get input from Bike/Walk), which are attached. At least this common visibility tool will help communicate to motorists that they need to share the road. Unfortunately, due to staffing shortages, we cannot do this in-house, in fact we cannot do barely any line striping in-house in 2023, so we're soliciting quotes from outside vendors to do it. We will likely have to continue to contract out the sharrows re-striping at an annual cost of ~ \$15,000 unless we make additional staffing changes at DPW to be able to take this on internally.

Medium term solution: We are proposing to expedite the reconstruction of Main Street that has been discussed since 2019. The Town hired a consulting firm that identified options, and a working group comprised of various stakeholders met and voted to recommend the following option, that would reduce the parking footprint by making spaces parallel, creating a protected lane, and widening sidewalks. This reconstruction has also been discussed in our Downtown Hanover Working Group, and businesses are interested in the ability for better access to the downtown as well as wider sidewalks that can support more public gatherings, outdoor retail and dining. There is a concern about losing some parking, though I think we can make that up through well-designed redevelopment that we are looking at separately. This plan (shown below) helps move forward a number of goals. The goal here isn't to pick a specific option or parking plan, but instead move forward with the agreement that we want to increase the sidewalk width, create a protected lane and redo the street in a way that helps us accomplish those goals. This plan will need to be integrated with others, such as with parking, redevelopment, and others.



The timing problem is that the Town does not have funds set aside for this in our Capital Improvement Plan. It would likely take up to a decade of tax increases to save the money to do enough of the Main Street area to make a difference. By that time, we'll have exposed countless number of people to greater risk than need be. Alternatively, we could make changes without reconstructing the road, but a) those don't work as well, as they rely on paint, not physical barriers, and b) we need to reconstruct our sidewalks anyway now, as was pointed out by several stakeholders in our budget process such as the Finance Committee, and we do not currently have enough funds set aside for that either, which means we'd have to start patching with asphalt to ensure the sidewalks are ADA accessible and safe, which is not a great solution for several reasons. We are recommending the Town discuss issuing debt (and have a broader conversation about how to pay for small/medium/large capital projects going forward, re-evaluating and discussing past policies), and planning on doing a significant reconstruction in 2024 or 2025.

Conclusion: In the short term, we have a solution of updating our regulations for devices such as escooters, and spending money to increase the safety of using these devices in the street. Longer term, rather than a patchwork approach, and considering the truly broad alignment of goals from multiple discipline and program areas right now, we are proposing a full Main Street reconstruction to be funded through a bond issue in next year's budget. We need to spend more time evaluating the costs and discussing the solution with community stakeholders, but many of those, as mentioned, have already been convened, and the strong preference of community members was to reconstruct Main Street in the way that we are suggesting. This would not only provide wider sidewalks, a more welcoming aesthetic, more green space, but would provide dedicated travel lanes for the safe use of all types of non-car vehicles/devices. I feel confident that we can address any lost parking through redevelopment that we need to do anyway to add some density and housing to our downtown, where we can increase the parking but decrease the footprint.

5. State roads

Many of the issues that have come up, have come up on the roads in Hanover that are owned and overseen by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation. Most state DOTs are not particularly inclined towards non-motorized vehicle or pedestrian access, more focused on measuring and moving volumes of vehicles through a defined area as efficiently as possible. Although some small improvements have been made, not enough has been, and ultimately like most state DOT's, NHDOT is not particularly aligned with the complete streets goals we have at the local level, and their standards do not give us the flexibility needed to make our roadways as safe and accessible as possible for things other than cars alone. Although we can, and have, made pushes for legislative change, that is slow moving and bureaucratic. A conversation that has come up many times, and since I've been here, is looking into the pros/cons of taking local ownership over state roads.

The state owns and operates six sections of road in Hanover:

1. Route 120 from UCZ border at "northern edge of Greensboro Road to Lebanon line
2. Route 10 from UCZ border 210 feet north of the centerline intersection of Brook Road to Lebanon line
3. Etna Road from Greensboro Road to Lower Dogford
4. Greensboro Road from Route 120 to Etna Road
5. Route 10 (Lyme Road) UCZ at the northern end approach island of the northern roundabout to the Lyme Town Line

6. Great Hollow Road from Greensboro/Etna Road to the Lebanon line.

Although I have been in touch with NHDOT and they are open, and perhaps even interested in having discussions about local ownership of these roads, this is a *major* decision to even contemplate, with *significant financial commitments* that extend permanently into the future. Taking over the roads, for example, would mean that we would be responsible for the costs of ongoing maintenance, including rebuilding the roads to updated standards, and doing the plowing, culverts, bridges, and more. Considering how short staffed DPW is currently in the Highway Division, this adds another layer of concern – can we take on more at a time when we are not staffed to keep up with what we already have on our plate? So there are staffing costs beyond the hard costs of materials and capital equipment. Of course there would be a major upside, which is that we would have local control of the roads and could reconstruct or repaint them in ways that meet our local standards and basically make sure the roads meet our local needs much better than we can now. This could be done in collaboration with the City of Lebanon, for example, extending our UCZ's to meet each other and create a much different roadway, for example on 120 or 10, though it may take a decade or more to see that fully realized.

Conclusion: Evaluating the cost/benefit of local ownership of these corridors is key to thinking about the future of accessible streets in Hanover. We would propose using leftover funds created from staffing vacancies in DPW to begin to bring in resources to perform this evaluation, and provide us information we can use to make decisions in the 2024 - 2025 budgeting process, laying out a plan for what we want to do over the next 5 - 10 years, understanding what the costs/opportunities of that plan are, and making sure our goals are responsive to those plans.

Overall next steps

I provide this memo to update to organize the multiple threads that we are working on here, make sure all the disciplines are properly connected and aligned, solicit feedback and discussion from the Selectboard, as well as members of the public and advisory groups such as Hanover Bike/Walk, and then to move forward with making these changes as described above in accordance with the goals laid out.