



# Vineyard's Transportation Is Examined by Planners

## *Metcalf and Eddy Report Concerned with Effects of Expanding Boat, Plane, Bus Service*

Transportation, to and from Martha's Vineyard, and on the Vineyard is among the many problems that have been examined over the past year by the Metcalf and Eddy engineering and planning firm for the Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission. The commission's objective is to project what the future may hold for the Island.

This is the second part of the most recent Metcalf and Eddy report. It weighs boat and plane facilities serving the Vineyard, and examines its highways and their repair and development.

The report follows:

The transportation systems of Dukes County are generally of two types—external and internal. The external modes of travel are ferry lines and airlines between the Islands and the mainland. As is the case with most islands, external transportation is the more critical of the two types for Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands. Internal transportation pertains mainly to the road system, and on the Vineyard, automobiles, trucks, tour buses, and bicycles mane important use of this basic system.

There is a distinct difference between ferry lines serving Dukes County—the Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority, and all the other private lines. The Steamship Authority has been set up under Massachusetts law as a year-round ferry service, and it carries the large majority of passengers between Martha's Vineyard and the mainland. There were at least three private seasonal ferries operating to the Vineyard during the summer of 1970, and at least one more is scheduled to begin operating into the Island this summer. In addition, there is a private ferry out of New Bedford that provides year-round service to Cuttyhunk.

The Steamship Authority was originally established by the State Legislature in 1948, and at that time, service was provided out of the mainland ports of New Bedford and Woods Hole. In 1960, new legislation enabled the Authority to operate solely out of Woods Hole. This move enabled the Authority to reduce costs and improve scheduling, primarily due to the fact that each round trip to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket was shortened by approximately 32 miles; the treacherous course through the

Woods Mole channel, between the mainland and the Elizabeth islands was also eliminated.

### **Only Year-Round Service**

The Authority's important public role is that it is the only ferry to provide year-round service to Martha's Vineyard. This means that Islanders must rely upon the boats of the Steamship Authority for almost all of their food and other basic necessities. Financially, however, the fact that year-round service must be maintained creates the threat of a deficit each year. It is clearly unprofitable to operate in the off-season when there is so little passenger demand. State law provides, that any annual deficit must be defrayed by the localities of Dukes County, Nantucket, and Falmouth.

From 1949 to 1962 the total deficit amounted to nearly \$2,725,000, of which about \$2,100,000 was met by taxes assessed from the local communities involved. In 1963, the Steamship Authority operated at a profit for the first time in its history, and each succeeding year since then, it has shown an annual surplus. According to the management of the Authority, it is the only public carrier in the county currently operating ferry service without a deficit. The profit made each year, along with new bond issues, are used to improve general service, floating equipment, and terminal facilities.

Both Island terminals of the Steamship Authority are located down-Island at Vineyard Haven and Oak Bluffs respectively. The former is the main terminal, being located behind the protective breakwater in Vineyard Haven harbor. Northeast storms can occasionally still be a problem, however, due to the Northeast-orientation of the harbor. The wharf at Oak Bluffs is much more exposed to bad weather, being located along the northeast shorefront on the Beach Road, just south of the narrow opening into Oak

Bluffs at its discretion. Thus it operates there only during the busy summer season from early June until late September. Since the pier and docking facilities were entirely rebuilt after the bad fire in 1965, Oak Bluffs has handled about 20 per cent of the yearly total number of passengers carried in and out of the Vineyard by the Steamship Authority.

### **Parking Seriously Restricted**

This operation has tended to take some of the pressure off the access and parking facilities at Vineyard Haven, which are seriously restricted due to the location at the foot of Union street, and the physical configuration of surrounding properties. The Authority does not have the power of eminent domain, and therefore it must rely on the cooperation of the town of Tisbury and private property owners to provide necessary parking and traffic control, as well as to meet the possible future need for additional land. In a physical sense, the operation of ferry service into Vineyard Haven may prove to be self-limiting due to the size and location of the present terminal facilities.

There are currently three boats of the Steamship Authority operating in and out of Martha's Vineyard, with a new boat to replace an existing one sometime in 1972. The Islander was built in 1950, and has a maximum capacity of approximately 700 passengers and 55 automobiles. In addition, it can carry up to 160 tons of freight, which is usually carried to the Vineyard on large trailer trucks and smaller vehicles (thus supplementing some of the automobiles). The Uncatena was built in 1965, and has a capacity of 200 passengers and 20 to 25 automobiles. The Nobska, carries only passengers to the Island in and out of Oak Bluffs in the summer. The Authority's other boat, the Nantucket, operates mainly between Nantucket and Woods Hole.

An important issue under continual discussion on the Vineyard is the advisability of somehow limiting the number of summer visitors. Basically there are three categories of seasonal persons—residents, vacationists, and tourists. It is the last group, the transient day-trippers, who seem to cause the most concern on the Island.

### **Day-Trip Policy**

It is estimated that there are now 200,000 to 250,000 people visiting the county during the summer season. Approximately 175,000 of these seasonal visitors are estimated to be day-trippers, and if recent trends continue at the same rate, it is expected that more than 300,000 day-trippers will be visiting Martha's Vineyard during the summer of 1990.

Whether or not it would be a good thing to somehow control the number of seasonal visitors to Dukes County in the future is a basic policy question. The idea of limiting the number of people visiting an island is not new. Of crucial concern in our form of democratic government is who would be kept out and for what reasons. Since Martha's Vineyard is not a separate country like many of the islands in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world, it is not simply a matter of enforcing the policy of a single government. Federal and state constitutional liberties are involved. If, however, it were generally concluded that the welfare of most of the people on Martha's Vineyard, and the Elizabeth Islands—and in fact the welfare of the islands themselves—would be improved by limiting the number of seasonal visitors, then there are several measures that could be considered.

The most drastic course of action would be to set maximum limits to the number of people permitted to visit Dukes County. Strict control of the passengers carried by the various ferry lines and airlines would be necessary to

implement such a policy. A high degree of voluntary cooperation among the Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission, the Dukes County commissioners, the several municipalities involved, the Steamship Authority, and the private ferry lines and airlines would be a prerequisite for such action.

The only apparently reasonable basis for this type of policy would be that the ecological limits for continued health, safety and welfare were being approached; in other words, it would be necessary to demonstrate that a basic commodity of life—such as the groundwater supply—is in danger of being depleted. The serious relationship between the number of people able to live on an island and its finite supply of groundwater has been stressed in previous reports. Only a detailed study of the available sources of groundwater in Dukes County will provide the information upon which to calculate a saturation point above which increased population and development would prove dangerous.

Seasonal residents and vacationists, presently comprising an estimated 84 per cent of the daily summer population, would be more difficult to limit through control of external modes of transportation. By definition, it is the tourist or excursion rates that would be the most easily restricted on a limited basis. There are basically three ways to accomplish such an objective, assuming of course, that it is considered a worthwhile goal to pursue.

### **Terminal Facilities**

One way would be to do nothing, and let the eventual inadequacy of terminal facilities render seasonal ferry service a self-limiting factor in the future development of the Island. Both the Steamship Authority facilities in Vineyard Haven and the ferry facilities in Oak Bluffs harbor are incapable of unlimited expansion; in fact, they are

congested now and should soon reach a level of saturation for daily seasonal use. Such, a state of affairs, however, would in reality take a concerted effort to ensure that neither private enterprise nor the Authority expanded their terminal facilities. Strict local zoning controls, as well as other legal restrictions, would be necessary to implement such a far-reaching policy.

A second and more conclusive way to change the existing situation would be for the state legislature to outlaw, or at least gain more legal control over, the private seasonal lines. An amendment to the present law which limits non-Authority ferry boats to under 100 tons, or an entirely new law, would be necessary. Perhaps a maximum number of passengers per boats would be a better way to control these summer only ferry boats. Another possibility would be to permit only persons with written and receipted evidence of a place to sleep on the Island to obtain passage to the Island. Also, the charging of mooring fees for use of public and private harbors is another possibility. However, the history of special Island-oriented bills being enacted in the Massachusetts legislature is not encouraging, so that this would be a most difficult measure to accomplish.

The third way would entail a modification of the existing policy of the Steamship Authority, where-by daily round-trip fares are now cheaper than, regular fares. The rates for day-trippers would thus be made more expensive than, or at least equal to, those for other passengers. It must be remembered, however, that in order to compete on a reasonable basis with the private seasonal ferries, the Authority must keep its fares competitive. The threat of yearly deficit continues to influence the policy of the Steamship Authority. However, if local sentiment was such that increased municipal tax rates were considered preferable to

increased numbers of day-trippers, then there is reason to believe that the Authority would be responsive to public opinion. After all, it was re-established in 1961 as a public service with local responsibility, which is better than having it administered from Boston.

#### **Public Opinions Needed**

The key in this proposal would be to get public opinion organized in positive fashion so that it truly represents the views of the majority of Vineyard residents. Letters to the Editors, while providing a valuable and highly articulate forum for public opinion, do not necessarily represent the way a vote might be decided at a local town meeting. By the same token, town meetings traditionally held in late winter preclude the views of almost all of the summer residents. Therefore, in order to even consider modifying the existing policy of the Steamship Authority concerning seasonal passengers on excursion rates, some method is needed to marshall [sic] public opinion so that the Authority understands a true concensus [sic] is involved. In addition, since the three board members of the Authority represent Nantucket and Falmouth, as well as Martha's Vineyard, any important policy change such as this would require the official agreement of at least two members.

With these ideas in mind, it is recommended that the Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission pursue this important matter. Of all the diverse groups on the Island, it is perhaps in the best position to represent a cross-section of all shades of opinion. A special committee should be set up to supervise basic research into just how a yearly deficit would presently influence local tax rates; perhaps the Authority's financial advisory board already has such information. Such a special committee of the commission should also consider

other measures to limit seasonal day-trippers, such as the other two ways outlined above. Most importantly, the central purpose of this committee should be to find out what people really think about this issue.

### **Air Transportation**

Although there are a number of private planes that fly in and out of Dukes County, it is the commercial airlines which constitute the more important element under this general heading of external transportation. But in comparison to the number of visitors brought each summer by boat, they carry very few passengers. In the 1969 vacation season, for example, 463,000 passengers, or 66.4 per cent of the June, July, August and September total of persons going to and from the Island, traveled on the Steamship Authority vessels; 194,200, or 29.6 per cent of the total took private ferries, and 26,700 or 4 percent, traveled by plane.

As the Island's population increases, its internal transportation problems, as well as external ones, increase. According to the Department of Middleboro, the following improvements are scheduled for 1971 under Chapter 90 financing, which amounts to 50 per cent state, 25 per cent county and 25 per cent municipal. In Chilmark, the Tabor House Road is to be reconstructed; in Vineyard Haven, Vineyard avenue, Vineyard avenue extension and West Spring street are to be reconstructed, and in West Tisbury, Indian Hill Road and Panhandle are to be relocated as well as reconstructed.

The recently completed widening and reconstruction of the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road under a secondary road, federally aided project naturally has many Islanders hesitant about additional improvements in the future. It should be emphasized that this was an unusual project in that federal money was involved which necessitated federal design standards.

The normal state standard of two 12-foot paved lanes which is generally reduced to two 10-foot paved lanes on the Vineyard (because of its decidedly country environment in comparison to the rest of Massachusetts), was upheld along the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. Two 10-foot shoulders were also required, although in this particular case, grass has been permitted rather than gravel on an even more impervious surface.

The chapter 90 improvements listed above should most probably not require shoulders, especially up-Island where the stone walls and roadside vegetation borders the existing paved roads to give the effect, in certain places, of the winding, country roads of Britain. Such an effect is experienced too seldom in this country and with safe driving speeds and proper enforcement, here is no reason why all up-Island roads cannot be up-graded in terms of a new surface (reconstruction), without having to widen them at the same time.

The sentiment just expressed has been voiced by personnel at the District Department of Public Works office with regard to the North Road through West Tisbury and Chilmark. The plan is to eventually reconstruct it using local aid money, without having to widen it under a federally aided project. While the latter type of project is acceptable in the more urban down-Island environment, it would be literally disastrous to the roadside ecology and aesthetic beauty of up-Island.

### **Number of Vehicles**

There are no meaningful traffic counts available for Dukes County; in the summer of 1968, but 71,500 automobiles were carried to and from the Vineyard, compared with 63,400 the year before.

As might be expected, the town centers of Vineyard Haven, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown are particularly congested during the summer season.

Menemsha is also becoming congested with automobiles, tour buses, and pedestrian traffic as is already the case in the three down-Island centers. One-way vehicular traffic on all three of their main shopping streets is a good indication that they are in fact becoming over-congested. Parking problems abound in conjunction with the increasing traffic congestion each summer.

The recent policy established by the all-Island Selectmen's Association to try and persuade the big diesel off-Island tour buses to stay in Woods Hole, and allow the smaller, school bus type tour buses on-Island to take all seasonal tourists around the Vineyard is an encouraging event. It means that not only will the larger diesels be encouraged to stay out of the already congested town centers, where they often have to ride over the sidewalks in order to turn corners, but it also means that there should be more business for the three existing on-Island tour bus companies.

#### **Future Transportation Policy**

Nevertheless, at some point, vehicular traffic can and will have a detrimental impact upon the luring environment of the Island. Noise, air pollution and similar factors in large amounts can literally destroy both the acceptability and the desirability of the Island as a living environment.

Certain policies that might be explored, if the Planning and Economic Development Commission desires to limit the future vehicular traffic on the Island, are:

1. Permitting only automobiles registered in Dukes County to use the Steamship Authority ferries. (It is even conceivable that vehicular transportation might be restricted to only publicly owned and operated automobiles and buses.)
2. Limiting the use of rental automobiles, on the Island.

3. Permitting only trucks registered in Dukes County to use Dukes County's roads,
4. Limiting all tour buses to a prescribed size and limiting the number of trips throughout the Island. Considering the possibility of the County Commissioners operating all buses on the Island.

Undoubtedly, the above would require certain actions by the state legislature. The constitutionality of certain aspects of the above are unknown. However, in our opinion, the above listed possibilities are certainly worthy of examination.

#### **Proposed Road Modifications**

If the Dukes County Planning Development Commission decides it does not desire to restrict substantially the number and/or types of vehicles using the Island, but improve the roads to accommodate continuously increasing traffic, the following road improvements, or modifications are proposed.

The major proposed modifications are the direct result of the proposals contained in the future land use plan. They are as follows. The proposed new community means that County Road should be up-graded from a secondary to a primary class. In addition, it may be necessary to up-grade the connecting link: County Road-Airport Road-Barns Road-Wing Road to primary status. The only other change in the primary system is that Eastville avenue and Towanicut street, rather than- the more accident-prone Temahigan avenue and New York avenue segment, ought to be in the primary classification system in Oak Bluffs.

As a result of more traffic to South Beach in the future, the Katama loop is proposed to be up-graded from tertiary to secondary status. Due to the fact that public access to South Beach is presently very limited, it is also proposed, that a new tertiary road be

built between the Edgartown-West Tisbury Road and the Tisbury Pond Club at Long Cove. For the same reason, it is also proposed that Chappaquiddick Road from the ferry, to the beginning of the Dyke Road be upgraded from strictly local status to a tertiary class. It is not necessary to pave the Dyke Road between the intersection with School Road and East Beach, which, is owned and maintained by the Massachusetts Trustees of Reservations.

Due to expected increased traffic between Vineyard Haven and West Tisbury, and to give an alternative route to the State Road, it is also proposed to up-grade Old County Road to at least tertiary class in West Tisbury.

The only proposed changes up-Island involve an up-grading of the Menemsha Crossroad and North Road between Chilmark Center and Menemsha from tertiary to secondary to accommodate expected increased seasonal traffic to Menemsha Basin for recreational purposes. The Moshup Trail and Lobsterville Road in Gay Head will no doubt also be expected to handle more summer traffic, and so it is proposed to up-grade them from a local to a tertiary status.

One of the most important transportation recommendations concerns the establishment of bicycle paths on the Vineyard. Land should be acquired within an easement along-side the main roads, and such paths constructed of a durable hard surface. Where appropriate, existing public lands (i.e., State Forest) should be used for such a purpose. Scenic easements on either side of the major up-Island roads such as are currently proposed by the Vineyard Conservation Society, could also be designed in association with the proposed bicycle paths. The reason they are considered to be so important is as things stand now, the bicyclist must compete with all other

vehicular traffic (including automobiles, trucks, and tour buses). On the narrow, rolling roads up-Island such a situation is exceedingly dangerous. If public funds and private money, too, are used to design and construct such bicycle paths so that they blend into the roadside environment, then pressure for widening up-Island roads might be eliminated. In addition, people will be able to view and enjoy the Vineyard under extremely pleasant and healthy conditions.

(To Be Continued)