
Update: Traffic and Speeding in Bayside

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To the NVC and Town of Northport-

Please do **not** install speed bumps or unnecessary stop signs on the straight sections of roads in Bayside. **By themselves they are not traffic-calming measures; they are traffic-interrupters.** More importantly, they are unlikely to improve overall safety.

Most vehicles in the village are already traveling well below the safe roadway design speeds. Are there outliers? Of course. But **the fundamental safety issue is summertime congestion created by today's larger vehicles, narrow roadways, the lack of sidewalks, more development, and inadequate parking, or in summation: many more competing interests for our roadways.**

As an engineer, I can say with confidence that speed bumps and unwarranted stop signs will not solve these problems. They may reduce average vehicle speeds, but **they will not consistently keep traffic below 15 mph on village streets or 25 mph on the main roads** for drivers who choose to travel faster. That conclusion does not require a study or a trial installation. The effects of speed bumps are well understood and highly localized. Drivers slow immediately before the bump and then accelerate afterward typically at rates of about 2 to 4 ft/s². As a result, **vehicles can return to speeds above 15 or 25 mph within seconds.**

Even when drivers are not intentionally speeding, they naturally gravitate toward what traffic engineers call the **"desired operating speed."** This is not a conscious decision, but rather a speed that feels comfortable based on roadway width, sight distance, roadside development, and perceived risk. **A speed bump forces a temporary reduction in speed, but it generally does not change that desired operating speed once the obstacle has been passed.** Likewise, unwarranted stop signs simply create another point of deceleration and acceleration without addressing the underlying factors that influence driver behavior.

The purpose of effective traffic calming is to subtly influence the desired operating speed over an entire roadway, not simply to force drivers to slow at isolated points. That subtlety is important because **a driver's primary focus should remain on the driving task itself, not on repeatedly braking for artificial obstacles.** Roadways that naturally communicate an appropriate operating speed through their design tend to produce more consistent driver behavior than those that rely on periodic interruptions to traffic flow.

True traffic calming seeks to reduce operating speeds continuously through roadway design. Speed bumps and unwarranted stop signs, by contrast, primarily interrupt traffic flow at discrete locations.

The fundamental challenge in Bayside is that the roadway environment changes dramatically during the summer. Pedestrian activity increases, parking becomes more constrained, and roadside activity is much higher than during the rest of the year. However, the roadway geometry itself changes very little. As a result, some drivers, particularly those who use the road year-round, may continue to travel at a speed that feels appropriate based on the physical characteristics of the roadway, even though seasonal conditions warrant greater caution. **That disconnect is a roadway design issue rather than simply a driver behavior issue.**

The same principle applies to stop signs. **Stop signs are intended to assign right-of-way, not to calm traffic.** Installing stop signs where they are not warranted often leads to poor compliance as drivers begin to view them as unnecessary. In a village like Bayside, where drivers are already watching pedestrians, children, cyclists, cottages, flowers, boats, and the waterfront, **introducing unexpected stop controls on long, straight roadways could actually increase the risk of crashes.**

Repeated braking and acceleration cycles from traffic interrupters introduce their own consequences. They increase vehicle noise, emissions, fuel consumption, and vehicle wear. They can also reduce travel efficiency, delay emergency response vehicles, and **create stop-and-go traffic patterns that are not necessarily more predictable for pedestrians.**

Another concern is the growing amount of roadside signage. Recently, there have been an excessive number of "Children at Play" signs placed. The NVC and the Town should reduce these to one or two strategically placed signs. Traffic signs are most effective when they are used sparingly. Beyond a certain point, repetitive signs simply blend into the background, encouraging drivers to ignore all of them. **A cleaner streetscape would better reflect the character of Bayside while making the remaining signs more noticeable.**

If the community genuinely believes there is a safety issue requiring action, then the first step should be a comprehensive traffic study. The Maine Department of Transportation can certainly help to evaluate any final study and proposed options, but **it is the Town and the NVC that understand the unique seasonal conditions in Bayside and therefore need to take the lead with a traffic study.** A locally sponsored traffic study would provide the DOT with the information needed to evaluate conditions throughout the entire year, including summer congestion, winter snowbanks, icing, parking constraints, pedestrian activity, and emergency access.

A study should evaluate all reasonable alternatives rather than focusing narrowly on speed reduction. Potential long-term strategies include constructing sidewalks where feasible within the existing right-of-way, creating alternative pedestrian pathways on NVC property, encouraging the use of smaller seasonal vehicles such as bicycles and electric low-speed vehicles (LSVs), reconfiguring the travel lanes, or evaluating whether selected roadways could function more effectively as one-way streets with dedicated pedestrian space during all or part of the year. Each of these alternatives presents challenges, but unlike speed bumps and unwarranted stop signs, they can **directly address the underlying issue of congestion and competing interests, while improving the separation between pedestrians and vehicles.**

Bayside's transportation challenges deserve thoughtful, data-driven solutions rather than unproven quick fixes. Let's focus on addressing the real problems instead of installing measures that are unlikely to achieve their intended purpose and may create new ones.

Thank you for considering these comments.

-Mike

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