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Monday, June 12, 2006

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Group seeks to map out Route 113's future

By JUSTIN ELLIS, Portland Press Herald Writer

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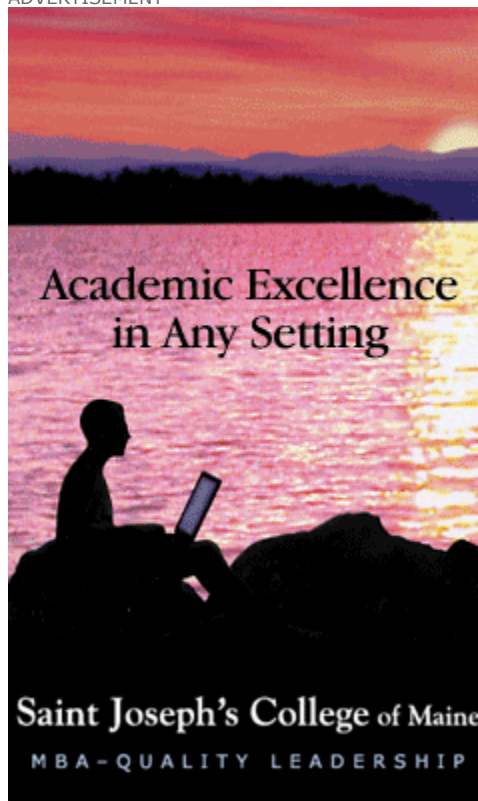
To get from Portland to Fryeburg, most tourists and even some Mainers would likely consider U.S. Route 302 the best option.

But people who live south and west of Sebago Lake - in Standish, Hiram, Baldwin and Brownfield - know you could just as easily take Route 113. It's the quiet, rural alternative, and it takes the same amount of time.

Residents in those towns want to find ways to attract more tourists and businesses to the sleepy corridor that stretches from Standish to New Hampshire and is easily accessible from Portland.

Starting this month, a special committee formed in 2004 will begin holding a series of meetings to discuss how Route 113 could help

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stimulate economic growth in the region.

The first session will be held at 6 p.m. Wednesday at Baldwin Consolidated School on Route 113, a road that now features old barns, farms and cemeteries.

Fryeburg Selectman David Knapp said the committee can look to U.S. Route 302 as an example of towns working together on regional planning. The corridor that skirts the eastern side of Sebago Lake is lined with malls, restaurants, resorts, shops and other businesses.

"Our aspirations for (Route 113) are similar to (U.S.) 302," he said. "We want a viable corridor that is attractive to tourists."

The towns have a better chance of spurring economic development by working together, Knapp said.

Caroline Paras, a community development planner with the Greater Portland Council of Governments, said the meetings are a chance to find out what residents would like to see along the route. The meetings will run until fall, she said.

The committee already is looking at possibilities, including a scenic byway that would reach from Standish to Gilead, Paras said. According to the state Department of Transportation, the Maine Scenic Byway Program helps communities work together to preserve corridors such as Route 113. In turn, the National Scenic Byway Program provides funding to highlight the cultural, historical or natural qualities of a region.

Officials of the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission also are working to get Route 113 designated as a scenic byway, which could have a number of economic benefits, Paras said.

Another possibility being explored by the Route 113 committee is re-establishing the rail line that runs parallel to the roadway. The project is connected to efforts of the Mountain Division Alliance, which wants to create a trail for pedestrians and bicyclists that mirrors the railroad.

David Kinsman, chairman of the Mountain Division Alliance, said "rail-trail" projects draw tourists because of the recreational opportunities. Trails can create opportunities for businesses such as restaurants or bed-and-breakfasts.

Hikers and riders already can use the trail from Windham to Standish. When it's complete, people will be able to travel from Windham to the New Hampshire border, Kinsman said.

Larry Seidl, owner of L E Seidl Jr. Trucking company in Baldwin, said the region has been overlooked too long.



"We're affiliated with (the Portland area), but we're a long way from Portland," said Seidl. "It's kind of a different world out here."

Seidl's business is off Route 113, which makes it one of only a handful of businesses that dot the road.

Seidl, who is a member of the committee and the Baldwin Business Association, said a little economic development, such as a restaurant, a bed-and-breakfast or a small business, could go a long way in the community.

"We live out here because we like the rural setting of Maine and country living," he said, "but you have to balance that with enough income to pay the bills."

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Reader Comments

What changes should be made along Route 113?

Erika of Saco, ME

Jun 13, 2006 8:08 PM

For serious help, if it comes to that, call on us: S.O.S./Save Our Saco. We can be reached at sossaveoursaco.blogspot.com or contact the Greater Portland Neighborhood Association. They can be found on any computer search engine. If you don't have a computer, the library does, with staff who know how to use it. There's also a fantastic national organization called CEDS. CEDS can be reached through a link at the Saco website, sossaveoursaco.blogspot.com. Good luck!

Earl of Hiram, ME

Jun 13, 2006 10:10 AM

I don't want to drive more than one mile for all my needs: fast food, strip malls, video rental,... I'm tired of driving all the way to 302. Somebody please hurry up and cut down all these trees so we can build. And while you're at it, erect some more cell towers. Driving is difficult enough without having to deal with poor cell phone reception. I don't know why a highway hasn't been built by now across Sebago Lake. That lake is just in the way.

Erika of Saco, ME

Jun 12, 2006 11:04 PM

I doubt this "plan" came from the people! Sounds like a classic case of media distortion to prop up the developers' plans, never the people's. Who in their right mind would want that kind of junk? God help them, they're being set up.

The only way they got away with it, in other areas, is because they disenfranchised the voters and wrote ordinance "exceptions" into law so that the voters were suddenly powerless and vulnerable. But there is a way to reverse that -- use the ballot to repeal their sleazy laws, and get rid of their exceptions that damage and erode and push people around. That's what Saco is doing, right now. Join us!

Jeannie of North Waterboro, ME

Jun 12, 2006 4:56 PM

I can certainly understand why these town would want some growth and make Route 113 a destination. However, why on earth would anyone who

lives in that area wish for it to be like Route 302? Have any of them driven on 302 lately? Route 113 is a wonderful way to get to Fryeburg - the only way in fact that is an enjoyable ride. We have too few roads in southern Maine that portray our beloved country life or "the way life should be." Let's not spoil Route 113 by even thinking it should grow to be another Route 302.

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