

Town Hall Highlights: Douglas

What would George Washington say about Douglas roads today?

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Town Administrator

In December 1998, a small local publication known as the Douglas Herald published a story by Peter Coppola relating the history of the Boston-Hartford Turnpike.

The story noted that the Turnpike was not the first road to cover the distance between the two cities, and that any number of notables from the Revolutionary War and early years of the Republic traveled

in the area across what was known as Middle Road. That road traversed Uxbridge and Douglas before entering Connecticut in Thompson.

As many know, none other than President George Wash-

ington, touring the area in 1789, made particular mention of road conditions in Douglas:

"Left Taft's before sunrise, and passing through Douglass wood, breakfasted at one Jacobs in Thompson, 12 miles distant... The first stage, with a small exception, is intolerable bad road and a poor, uncultivated country, covered chiefly with woods – the largest part of which is called Douglass."

So, long before there was a daily dose of social media from the White House, Presidents were forming opinions about various places around the country based on what could be seen, in this case, the roadway.

Fast forward to the present and the Town now has 82 miles of publicly accepted roads. After the completion of the last (hopefully) small bridge replacement on Cedar Street this coming year,

Douglas will once again be able to turn its attention to the maintenance of its roads, which fortunately are in a good deal better condition than they were in 1789. Let's face it, it does not take any one hours to go just 12 miles anywhere in town.

Best practices in Massachusetts include management approaches that cost effectively extend the useful life of each stretch of road based upon an assessment of pavement conditions at a detailed level. Some streets will need to be seal cracked, others, repaved. In some cases the road shows early signs of water damage and the most intelligent step to take would be to improve storm water management. Pavement conditions will need to be reconciled with settlement and usage patterns – for instance, a heavily populated road that carries a lot of traffic might be prioritized over

streets that are not under the same wear and tear. The Board of Selectmen will establish the policy that determines priorities.

The Town is out to bid for a pavement assessment study. We have every hope the study will be completed by fall and a plan formulated with public input soon thereafter.

As for the other condition noted by President Washington – the preponderance of trees in Douglas – the news is grim. Our roadways are lined with trees that have died as the result of insects and drought over the last four years. Both the Town and National Grid will be working to address those trees that pose the greatest threat to power lines and roads, but unfortunately there is a great deal of work to do. Citizens are urged to communicate with the Highway Department when hazardous dead trees are identified.