

ESSAY

The Sagamore and Bourne rotaries

Compromise for public benefit

BY THOMAS O'NEILL III

Compromise. The word comes from Latin roots and originally meant "a mutual promise." Edmund Burke, the Irish statesman, said that "all government – indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act – is founded on compromise."

Like many of you, I spent countless hours this summer sitting in traffic to and from Cape Cod. Much of that time was spent watching the progress of the construction of the Sagamore Rotary flyover. And while I sat and watched the project that may well be Gov. Mitt Romney's signature achievement, I thought about compromise.

We all hope that the Sagamore flyover will result in enormous public benefit. If the project succeeds as the governor predicts, thousands of travelers will save valuable hours traveling to and from Cape Cod homes, businesses and vacations. Commercial motorists and businesses will save money now lost to time spent in traffic congestion. Automobile emissions will decrease dramatically if thousands of idling vehicles are able to move efficiently from Route 3 to the Sagamore Bridge and on to Route 6.

The governor deserves credit for fulfilling his campaign promise to solve the Sagamore Rotary problem.

But the public benefits enumerated above come at great public cost. The flyover will cost more than \$58 million in public money. Private land was taken by eminent domain, displacing those who lived there. Businesses near the rotary will suffer through the construction of the project. These are costs routinely chalked up to "the price of progress."

Of course there remain still other needs to address the Cape's transportation challenges.

This past March, the Romney administration released a 20-year statewide transportation plan that included an overhaul of the Bourne Rotary. Secretary of Commonwealth Development Douglas Foy called the project "the biggest priority in the region" and estimated a cost of more than \$30 million. Just as was done for the Sagamore Rotary, the state has proposed extensive study, which will take time and effort. No doubt the project when finally undertaken will cost far more than \$30 million.

Public stewards and private businesses must find ways to work together through open discussion, with trust and respect from each side, with a commitment to achieve a "mutual promise" that solves problems, avoids protracted struggles and through that process achieves the highest benefits for our citizens.

So as I sat in traffic I thought about compromise – because we could have solved the Bourne Rotary already.

In the late 1990s, Len Cubellis, a Boston architect and Cape Cod native, whose parents have run two restaurants in Bourne since 1936, proposed an ambitious village-style, mixed-use development just off the Bourne Rotary called CanalSide Commons. Cubellis' theory was to build "where the traffic already was," a tenet of smart-growth principles.

The Cape Cod Commission staff immediately found fault with the project, likely because of its scale. Cubellis, often with Bourne town representatives backing him, battled back and forth with the commission staff over approval of the project. The state provided Cubellis with its environmental approval and the Massachusetts Highway Department approved the design as consistent with its long-range plan for the rotary, but the

commission and Cubellis were never able to come to an agreement that would have allowed the project to move forward. Compromise was not in the cards.

I'm not in a position to render judgment on CanalSide or the commission staff. The Cape Cod Commission plays a valuable role in protecting the Cape Cod that we all love. What I do know is that I agree with Edmund Burke about the benefit of compromise.

As part of his ambitious project, Cubellis offered more than \$7 million in traffic improvements to the roads in and around the Bourne Rotary – private money that would have been spent for public purpose.

When both sides were unable to find common ground, the opportunity to capture private investment in public assets was lost. Years later, the land sits undeveloped, yet far from pristine. The rotary congestion continues. If the Sagamore flyover works as advertised, businesses near the Bourne Rotary will likely suffer further as drivers will avoid that area in favor of Sagamore.

And now the state is proposing to spend at least \$30 million to address the situation, money that could be well spent elsewhere, had the solution in Bourne been realized in public-private partnership.

Compromise. One of my father's best friends in Congress was Gerald Ford. If you spent time in traffic at the Bourne Rotary this summer, think of Gerald Ford, who once said, "Compromise is the oil that makes governments go." You could have been moving a lot faster had compromise been achieved in Bourne. ■



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