

Beacon Hill Byline by MARY ROGENESS

November 11, 1998

Polling the voters

The title of this week's Byline refers not to the endless pre-election opinion polls, but to an informal poll taken from my personal observations. We have all heard enough about the other kind of poll.

Last Tuesday I stood at the north end of Longmeadow Street, reminding drivers to vote on that election day. I have heard that 25,000 or more cars pass that corner each day and, seeing the unbroken bumper-to-bumper pace of cars over a two hour period, I believe the estimate. While greeting drivers with a wave and a smile, I also noticed that some drivers were engaged in more activity than simply steering their cars.

Rather than conduct a random sample, I observed those thousands of drivers, though I did not tabulate results because one of my hands was holding a sign and the other was waving.

Most cars carry single drivers who appear to be en route to work. Driving is the only activity of the vast majority of those drivers, but others were using their commuting time for other projects. Of those engaged in other activities, eating and drinking were the most common. They were likely to have a mug of coffee. A few were having a bagel or a donut. Or fruit. I thought I had seen it all when a banana-eater drove by, but he was followed thirty minutes later by another. When you think about it, a self-wrapped banana is both more healthful and easier to eat while driving than a jelly donut.

If the dual activity commuters were not eating breakfast, they might have been getting a start on the day at the office by talking on the telephone. One individual was tying his necktie. I did not see any women applying makeup, but did see a man shaving. Nobody was reading the newspaper, but one individual appeared to be reading a report.

Some cars have pre-school children strapped into car seats, most likely being driven to a day care center by working parents. As one who was at home when my children were young, I have tremendous respect for the mothers who can organize life well enough to have their young children in the car by eight in the morning.

One type of passenger remains a puzzle to me. The dog. I have tried without success to understand why large dogs are in the car in the early morning. Maybe small dogs just could not be seen through car windows, but drivers who looked like they are going to work were accompanied by large pets. If I hear from any of those drivers, I will pass the information along.

It may appear the drivers are not paying attention to safety, but that is not the case. Traffic moved smoothly, and the vast majority of those going by had their seat belts fastened. It was reassuring to see that so many people are safely belted up as they approach the interstate highway.

This concludes my poll of Longmeadow commuters. I will check up on our drivers again when another election approaches.