

TZB-105E

The Legislature of Rockland County
HARRIET D. CORNELL



Chairwoman of the Legislature

March 31, 2008

Mr. Michael P. Anderson
NYSDOT
Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor Project Director
660 White Plains Road, Suite 340
Tarrytown, New York 10591

Dear Mr. Anderson:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor Scoping Update Packet dated February 2008. I believe that under your leadership as Team Leader and that of Transportation Commissioner Astrid Glynn, there has been a successful effort to convey information and to receive input from the public. I feel very satisfied that the study is being conducted objectively and with consideration to the views of community residents. I submit the following comments because I believe that your responses will contribute to community confidence in the project.

FINANCE STUDY:

As the Tier 1 decision looms on the calendar, we are reminded that an accurate financial outlook for capital resources is integral to everyone's consideration of transportation improvements in this Corridor and will be a significant factor in the ultimate determination of a Locally Preferred Alternative. A concomitant and transparent approach to public discussion of realistic funding expectations would be highly desirable.

The New York State Department of Transportation has undertaken a Phase 1 Finance Study; however the results of that important baseline study have yet to be made public. NYSDOT staff has promised to make a copy available as soon as executive review was complete. We – the public – deserve the opportunity to see the data and review the findings of that finance study. The public is owed considerable insight into the financial resources and possibilities realistically available to State government and its independent authorities for both transit and highway projects in the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor. As such, I believe that the findings of the Phase 1 Finance Study need to be

released by the NYSDOT concurrently with the Tier 1 decision, which you have informed us will be made public this spring.

In addition, I would note that if private monies are to be sought to help fund this project, there are short and long-term ramifications for the public, which need to be understood from the outset. The public needs to know how those funds would be generated, and how they would potentially be impacted by any attempt to generate the necessary capital to help fund the project.

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START-UP DATE MILESTONE FOR TRANSIT DEIS:

Public confidence in NYSDOT’s proposed sequencing of the Corridor study is another important issue at stake. Such confidence would be enhanced if the NYSDOT were to explicitly state its intent to begin a Draft Environmental Impact study of the transit mode selected in Tier 1. At this stage, the Scoping Update Packet is unclear as to when an appropriate environmental study will be undertaken to achieve a Tier 2 Record of Decision on the transit mode selected. The material describes that DEIS only as a “subsequent activity” to the achievement of a Tier 2 Highway/Bridge Record of Decision by the spring of 2010; no commitment to a specific date or milestone for start-up of the transit DEIS is offered.

I believe that in order to maintain public confidence in the NYSDOT’s oft-stated commitment to addressing the corridor’s travel capacity problems with a transit solution, the Department ought to modify the Scoping Update Packet to indicate a specific milestone by which the Department would start the transit DEIS. It definitively should not be held in abeyance until after receipt of the Tier 2 Highway/Bridge Record of Decision. A more reassuring undertaking would be for the NYSDOT to commit to initiate the transit DEIS no later than the completion of the Highway/Bridge DEIS and public hearings, in the fall of 2009.

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INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY:

In the Tier 1 decision the issue of institutional capacity of any of the lead agencies to conduct a DEIS study of any transit mode other than commuter rail should be addressed. To date, the only sponsoring agency that is involved in this study with a transit orientation is Metro-North, which is a rail-oriented provider. Metro-North’s sole mission is to provide high quality commuter rail service, which it has successfully done for more than 25 years. If the Tier 1 decision adopts Bus Rapid Transit or Light Rail in any combination as the preferred mode(s), the public needs to be assured that the DEIS for that mode (or those modes) will be conducted by an entity that has familiarity and expertise with them.

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LIGHT RAIL OPTION:

Another issue involves the preliminary decision by the New York State Department of Transportation to eliminate the cross-county LRT alternative for Rockland County. In

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the Scoping Update Packet, LRT is only considered for possible implementation in Westchester County. My understanding is that that decision is based on findings rooted in the Alternatives Analysis, when the state agency sponsors reported that the cross-county LRT alternative did not compare well in cost and ridership to the commuter rail alternatives.

Since that time new facts have been developed about those commuter rail alternatives, which might have rendered them less competitive to Light Rail for moving Rockland residents across the corridor. These factors include much increased capital costs for the commuter rail alternatives and the subsequent finding of diversion of Manhattan-destined ridership as soon as the Access to the Region's Core project has been incorporated into the No Build Alternative.

Considering DOT's stated intent to study in depth and comprehensively all of the possible alternatives – and Mr. Anderson's statement on March 27, 2008 at a League of Women Voters' panel in Westchester that light rail would not be limited to current technology but would be ready to adapt to future technologies – I would hope that in its Tier 1 decision, the NYSDOT seriously re-examines whether the alternative of LRT in Rockland that continues across the bridge and into Westchester should be revived and possibly incorporated into this decision.

CHANGES IN ASSUMPTIONS IN TIER I REPORT:

Building on my previous point, I hope that NYSDOT, in its Tier 1 report, makes transparent changes in assumptions since the Alternatives Analysis is shaping its recommendations, especially the effect of acknowledging the Access to the Region's Core project. First, the Scoping Update Packet should explicitly state that the Access to the Region's Core's project, as embodied in its Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement approved for public hearing by the Federal Transit Administration, has been incorporated in the No Build Alternative (*and therefore incorporated in all the other alternatives.*) Next, the Tier 1 report should explicitly show, in comparison to what was presented in the Alternatives Analysis, the effect of the Access to the Region's Core projected ridership on those alternatives designed to bring west-of-Hudson New Yorkers to Manhattan. That effect should also be demonstrated on Levels of Service on the Port Authority's Hudson River vehicular crossings.

In addition, the Tier 1 report should then show the effect of the alternatives, especially those oriented toward Manhattan travelers, on the Access to the Region's Core project, interstate bus service to Manhattan, and Levels of Service on the Port Authority's vehicular crossings.

PARTICIPATING AND COOPERATING AGENCIES:

Regarding the lists of Participating and Cooperating Agencies, I believe that because travel to Manhattan is a necessary part of this study, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey should be elevated from a Participating Agency to a Cooperating Agency. In

addition, since NJ TRANSIT operates the rail service emanating in Rockland County to Manhattan and is proceeding toward building the Access to the Region's Core project, that agency's omission from either list must be corrected, and I ask that it be included as a Cooperating Agency as well.

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REFINE PURPOSE AND NEED:

Another issue that is of concern is the need to refine further the Purpose and Need at this stage of Scoping, as I believe the current version of that section in the Scoping Packet Update is incomplete. There are several areas that I believe should be addressed in order to assist the public in understanding the transportation questions at play in the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor study.

For example, the New York State Department of Transportation should explain the demographic, housing and economic reasons that underpin the existing and predicted peak period travel surges between Rockland and Westchester Counties. The public is entitled to know if any of the fundamental factors that have caused these flows to grow are expected to continue, stabilize or reverse. Also, because weekend congestion is a serious issue in the corridor today and is projected to worsen, especially traveling eastbound on Sunday evenings, the Purpose and Need should explain what the underlying factors have been and will continue to be for these travel flows.

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In addition, since the issue of access to Midtown Manhattan has been made a necessary part of this study, the Purpose and Need should explain how west-of-Hudson New Yorkers now travel to various parts of Manhattan; using what modes; and through which river crossings. It should also explain the purpose of the Access to the Region's Core project; its improvements in travel time and convenience – for example, one-seat rail rides – for Manhattan-bound west-of-Hudson New Yorkers; and its anticipated effect on these travel flows.

I hope that you will take my comments under advisement as the NYSDOT moves forward with this project. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,



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