

TZB-158E

Heather Cuffel
210 Martine Ave, Apt 5E
White Plains, NY 10601
914-720-8995

March 30, 2008
Michael P. Anderson, P.E., Project Director
Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Environmental Review
660 White Plains Road, #340
Tarrytown, NY 10591

RE: Tappan Zee Bridge Replacement Project: Corridor Transit Alternatives
– Comments on Transit Alternatives through White Plains

Dear Mr. Anderson:

As a participant in the SAWG process, I want to commend the project team on the work accomplished on this project. While I originally joined the SAWG out of personal interests, as a member of by condominium building’s Board of Managers, we have a keen interest in this project, particularly the alignment alternatives through White Plains and the impacts on City residents. I have also talked to many other residents of White Plains to gather their opinions on the proposed transit corridors. While nearly all agree that the Tappan Zee Bridge is in need of replacement and offering cross-corridor public transit is a positive approach; there is equally strong concern about the impacts on the City of White Plains.

A tunnel alternative through White Plains should be considered for all transit modes under evaluation. Realizing that this adds considerable capital cost to these project alternatives (as tunneling is a more expensive construction method), the capital cost is only one factor among a myriad of issues. To achieve a realistic transportation solution, the route must pass through downtown White Plains; however, there are some serious flaws with attempting a surface transit solution through the City.

The concept of elevating the BRT or LRT through White Plains was mentioned, which clearly reflects recognition of the difficult challenges to achieving a surface solution. This concept is a really bad idea. Long viaduct structures would be required to achieve acceptable grades. In addition, the elevated structures would require support columns as well as station structures with stair and elevator access. This would not only impact surface streets and sidewalks, but the aesthetics of a city that has invested in beautification and re-development. Finally, construction of elevated structures would place White Plains on the path of investing untold dollars undergrounding the elevated eyesores at some point in the future (a, albeit smaller-scale, Big Dig comes to mind). The reduction in travel times proffered in the SAWG’s BRT presentation seemed terribly unrealistic to those who actually drive the corridor, unless vehicular traffic is eliminated. Thus, while the specific the traffic counts, analysis and model data was not reviewed, the reality of mobility in White Plains seems to be lacking from the evaluation based on the concepts arrived at to date. It seems nearly impossible that a BRT route passing through

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the City Center, which is necessary to accomplish the transit objectives, would reduce travel time significantly to move people from their cars to a bus.

The streets of White Plains are heavily congested and a public transit alternative would benefit the City, assuming people would use it. Beyond questioning the data used in evaluations, there seem to be issues that the project team is unaware of and therefore the models would not account for. These are:

- Development over the past five years has dramatically affected the City’s congestion. The difference from when I moved to White Plains in 1999 and today is like night and day. What was once a relatively quite central business district is now a bustling city center. Given that the developers’ objectives are to turn White Plains into a “mini-Manhattan”, it would seem likely that the developments to date will generate continued growth and redevelopment for some time to come. This speculative growth is by definition unpredictable, but will continue to increase congestion on the surface streets of White Plains.
- Valet parking has become a standard offering of restaurants looking to accommodate patrons who not only insist on driving, but refuse to park their own car and walk only one block to the restaurant. During dinner hours, this shuts down one lane of traffic for half a city block and exacerbates the already congested streets. Main, Mamaroneck, and Broadway are impacted on a regular basis –beginning during the commute hours.
- Downtown streets host the City’s celebrations and parades. Numerous times a year, Mamaroneck Avenue, Main Street and Broadway (Route 22) are shut down for public events – Juneteeth Celebration, Columbus Day Parade, St Patrick’s Day Parade, New Years Eve Celebration, Cinco de Mayo, every holiday on the calendar and then some. Traffic is an absolute nightmare on these days. Residents attend the event, head for the mall or movies, flee from the city or hunker in for the day. Recently, the City has been closing off streets, either partially or entirely, without notice for marathons and other downtown events. It is worth pointing out that Martine Avenue (one of the proposed LRT routes) is totally blocked off during these parades.
- Double parking and Bee Line Bus Service already impact the City streets, causing severe congestion. When people are unable to find on-street parking and do not want to walk one block or pay \$1 for parking to “run in quickly” they just double park. The Bee Line Buses seem unable to pull into their bus stop lane and routinely block lanes of traffic while at their stop. To further exacerbate the issue, the Bee Line drivers use the “bigger than you” philosophy when navigating through the City and go where they want causing traffic jams.
- November and December are nightmares for congestion. Development has exponentially increased holiday shoppers in downtown. These shoppers are likely to continue using their cars as hauling packages on public transit is inconvenient and suburban residents (outside metro NYC) behavior is unlikely to be changed.

The City simply does not have enough room for a surface solution. For a major City, the streets are incredibly narrow, carrying two to three lanes of traffic on one-way streets. The few bi-directional streets carry two lanes in each direction. The only valid routes for

public transportation (ones that would generate ridership) are along the major through-streets (Hamilton, Main or Martine). Reducing capacity on these streets to create dedicated BRT routes or provide LRT right-of-way, even if eliminating street parking on these streets, would remove one-third to half of their traffic capacity causing detrimental impact to the residential and business community.

Continued growth and development will add vehicular traffic, like it or not. Without a realistic public transit solution (one that people will actually use to get to White Plains, both mode and alignment), congestion will progressively get far worse. Thus, it is in the community's best interest to find a public transit solution; however a surface solution seems the worst alternative.

While I hope the study team will seriously consider a tunnel solution for the BRT and LRT options, the CRT option appears to be the best long-term solution in terms of offering interconnectivity and growth. From the perspective of someone who actually uses the current rail system, it is definitely the preferred mode. CRT offers interconnectivity to the existing transit mode, the most flexibility to meet future ridership (that will hopefully increase over time) and ease of fare payment if you need to travel north or south on Metro North. Furthermore, CRT would be maintained by an existing agency (Metro-North) and is a technology they are very adept at operating and maintaining. Who would operate and maintain an LRT system?

Thank you for the considering these comments and your continued efforts on this project. Sincerely,

Heather Cuffel

cc: The Winton Condominium Board of Managers
Cameo House Board of Directors
Mayor Joseph M. Delfino, White Plains

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