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TZB-020E

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RE: Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Environmental Review

I would like to offer several suggestion sets for modified and new alternatives for the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Environmental Review. I am a former New York City resident, a journalist who has covered site selection and transportation for trade magazines, and a transportation advocate. In the latter role I had been vice president of the Committee for Better Transit (CBT), a New York/New Jersey transit advocacy organization, representing it on the Access to the Region's Core, East Side Access, and cross-harbor rail tunnel studies.

Here are my suggestions:

1. A new Alternative 4-D: Full Corridor LRT from Suffern to Port Chester with a branch to the under-study NJ Transit Northern Branch corridor rail service.

The NJ Transit Northern Branch line may be operated with diesel multiple units (DMUs) or be an extension of the Hudson Bergen LRT from Bayonne and Jersey City. If it is DMU then the trains would run to a transfer with the LRT at Nyack; if it is LRT then a track connection will be made with the Suffern-White Plains-Port Chester line for through operation. The tracks and the right of way from the planned terminus at Tenafly are still there; the line had reached Nyack before being cut back in the 1960s. Either the DMU or the LRT can be made compatible with the rail trail.

The Full Corridor LRT would generate significant ridership as it would permit direct connections with the Port Jervis, Pascack Valley and the new Northern Branch lines along with the Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven lines, and access to Rockland and Westchester employment centers. The Northern Branch extension would provide fast new access to employers at Englewood Cliffs and Fort Lee via bus shuttles and directly those at Weehawken, Hoboken, and Jersey City; it would bring residents there to jobs in Rockland and Westchester Counties. It would also connect to midtown, west side, and Lower Manhattan via PATH and New York Waterway ferries; there are also serious proposals to extend the Hudson Bergen LRT to Staten Island.

The Full Corridor LRT choice may have lower construction costs compared with commuter rail because the vehicles are lighter, can climb steeper grades, and require shorter and less elaborate stations. LRT could, depending if there is room for a second track, operate beside the Pascack Valley line from Nanuet to Spring Valley then utilize the Piermont Line. Yet it would retain the higher ridership of rail as compared with bus rapid transit (BRT), including the proven ability to attract transit-oriented development (TOD), which BRT have not been effective at.

On the subject of BRT it may be worth while in your evaluations to review the experience of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, which has North America's most extensive BRT network. The city has had mixed results on ridership and TOD and as a result is moving towards LRT and regional rail.

Also, should the Hudson Bergen LRT mode be chosen for the Northern Branch ridership and revenues would be greater than for DMU connections because it would allow for through service e.g. White Plains-Hoboken. There are economies of scale in operation and service. NJ Transit's contractor who operates the LRT could manage the entire network with financial participation from New York State, just as NJ Transit operates Metro North's West of Hudson service.

2. A new Alternative 4-E: CRT with branch to Northern Branch

This scenario examines the benefits and costs of the commuter rail if NJ Transit selects DMUs to operate the Northern Branch. An extended through DMU service can operate from Tarrytown, Port Chester, or Stamford to a connection with the Hudson Bergen LRT at North Bergen.

3. A new Alternative 5: Commuter Rail via Bear Mountain/BRT from Suffern, with commuter rail, LRT, and BRT options to Port Chester.

This alternative would feature a twin-track low-visual-impact moveable low-to mid-height rail bridge in the shadow of the Bear Mountain Bridge, plus reinstating a long-abandoned rail line from the Metro North Port Jervis line to CSX at Cornwall. The span would be sufficiently high to permit most motor craft to pass unimpeded; it would open for sailcraft and larger vessels. It would take advantage of the CSX West Shore and Metro North Hudson Lines being in close proximity to each other, at roughly the same grade, which minimizes construction costs.

This alternative has several key benefits. They include much lower construction costs compared with building commuter rail west of Tarrytown while attracting high ridership and greater flexibility. It would require a serious examination of Port Jervis line patronage trends and options as the demand appears unlikely to support separate Port Jervis-Hoboken and Port Jervis-Grand Central Terminal trains. One suboption would be if the DMU alternative is selected for the Northern Branch to extend it to Suffern for Middletown-Nanuet-Nyack-North Bergen service; DMU operation is less expensive than for conventional trains.

4. Adding railfreight into commuter rail operations

All commuter rail studies should take a look into accommodating freight from the CSX West Shore line to the Hudson Line, both northbound and southbound. While this addition would increase rail costs to handle taller and heavier trains, the benefits include new offsetting revenues from freight operators, reduced truck traffic and resulting lower highway demand, heavy road wear, and pollution, and economic development from improved freight rail access.

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This freight option would be an alternative to the long-planned multibillion dollar crossharbor rail tunnel between Jersey City and Brooklyn. Both routes would directly link New York City and New England with midatlantic and southern states, thereby providing a competitive, congestion-reducing and environmentally-friendlier option to medium-long distance trucking.

The Hudson Line is more suitable for freight than the Harlem and New Haven Lines near New York City as the right of way is wider and the route is less congested. There is an existing freight line from Beacon to Danbury, partially owned by Metro North, which connects with the New Haven Line at Devon, east of Bridgeport, which at that point is less congested and has more room to accommodate these trains. Alternatively there is a freight line west of Danbury to Hartford.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Yours truly,


Brendan B. Read

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TZB-022E

Attention:

Michael P. Anderson, P.E., Project Team Leader
Carrie G. Laney, Executive Project Manager
Martin Huss, PhD, Director, Industrial Engineering

Thank you for taking the time to review my earlier comments on the Tappan Zee/I-287 Environmental Review sent in by mail. If I may I would like to add two more, based on further review of the plans and New Jersey developments:

1. Modify Alternative 4-A with additional track connections to MNR Hudson Line

As CRT Alternative 4-A stands there are no connections or transfer options between the Metro North Hudson Line and the CRT from Suffern through White Plains to Port Chester. *This is a serious omission.* It misses opportunities for transit to capture travel such as commuting trips from Beacon to White Plains and personal journeys, such as to check out colleges, from Nanuet to Poughkeepsie. It also precludes using the rail portion of the bridge for future new New England-bound/originated freight trains from the CSX West Shore Line to the Maybrook Line via Fishkill and Danbury that could draw trucks off regional roadways.

There are several options, which include:

- (a) A new 'Tarrytown South' transfer station with the Hudson Line
- (b) Tappan Zee bridge-Tarrytown MNR and Tarrytown MNR-new Tappan Zee station links

The last option is likely to be the most expensive but would have the greatest utility as it would permit a wide variety of commuter rail routes e.g. Croton-Grand Central Terminal via White Plains; Beacon-Hoboken via the Pascack Valley. Tarrytown could become a freight intermodal hub that would lessen truck demand on cross-Hudson and cross-harbor bridges and tunnels.

2. Add a new Alternative, Alternative 4-F: CRT Suffern-Port Chester with LRT from Nyack to Tarrytown MNR

Alternative 4-F would be primarily dependent on whether the Hudson Bergen LRT is chosen for the Northern Branch, which is under study, in which case it can be extended to Nyack and then to Tarrytown to connect with the MNR. This option would enhance connectivity between the region's transit systems, thereby encouraging more people to leave their cars at home.

This alternative would entail a twin-level bridge for commuter rail/freight rail and for LRT. Note the word 'primarily'. To obtain maximum utility the LRT level should be

designed to permit shared use with buses and with bicycle lanes and pedestrian walkways. In this fashion that should LRT be deferred until the future, local transit, cyclists, and pedestrians can utilize the span, which would provide spectacular scenic views of the Hudson River and surroundings.

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Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Yours truly,

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