



December 1, 2008

Michael Anderson
NYSDOT
Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor Project Director
660 White Plains Road, Suite 340
Tarrytown, NY 10591

RE: Comments on the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor “Transit Mode Selection” and “Alternatives Analysis for Rehabilitation or Replacement of the Tappan Zee Bridge” Reports

Dear Mr. Anderson:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the transit mode selection and bridge rehabilitation/replacement reports for the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor Project. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a nonprofit working for a more balanced, equitable, and environmentally sustainable transportation network. We have followed the project since its inception, and are represented on two of the project Stakeholder Advisory Working Groups.

We believe the selection of a cross-corridor bus rapid transit system and Rockland-Manhattan commuter rail is the right one for the I-287 corridor. As we have argued in the past, BRT has the flexibility to serve dispersed suburban markets and can do so cost-effectively. The analysis in the Transit Mode Selection report backs this assertion, projecting that BRT would attract more cross-corridor ridership than rail. The study team has made a convincing case for replacing the Tappan Zee Bridge with a new bridge accommodating transit, cyclists, and pedestrians as well as drivers. In addition, we applaud the project team’s decision to begin land use training in the corridor as a way to better coordinate land use and transportation planning.

It is clear that, since the Alternatives Analysis, the study team has refined its analysis of each transit mode – BRT in particular. As described in Chapter 2 of the TMS Report, several

350 West 31st Street, Suite 802
New York, NY 10001
212.268.7474
212.268.7333 (fax)

“enhancements” to the BRT alternative resulted from a meeting with international experts. These and other changes to the project, such as the selection of a transit mode combination which the team had previously dropped from consideration, likely could not have happened without the robust public discussion which has occurred around the Tappan Zee project. We hope that the study team will continue its public outreach efforts as the project moves forward.

We also have a number of specific comments and questions, listed below.

Transit and Land Use

In Chapter 5, the report states that bus rapid transit routes were modeled with flat fares because of limitations in the BPM. Has the study team determined whether a BRT system would have flat or distance-based fares? Will future revenue and ridership projections take into account the possibility of distance-based fares, and are there any plans to model a BRT system using distance-based fares?

The BPM projections also represent demand unconstrained by parking availability. How much parking would be required to support the levels of forecasted ridership?

Chapter 2 of the TMS Report correctly states that effective bus rapid transit should include “integration of the land use/transit considerations into both transit planning and land use planning.” The TZ project team has supported this by hiring consultants to perform land use training along the corridor. However, there is a question of whether TOD will be feasible around some stations, particularly some in Rockland County which are envisioned as park-and-ride stations. Would the study team be able to run ridership projections based on various build-out and parking scenarios (for example, a park-and-ride scenario versus a TOD scenario)?

The TMS Report does not indicate which entity will operate a cross-corridor BRT system. At what point in the study does the project team plan to address this question?

Finally, has the FTA cost-effectiveness criterion been calculated for each of the alternatives, and if so what were the results? If not, will this be calculated for the selected alternative or all of the alternatives?

Tolling

In Chapter 5, the report states that “a range of tolls on the HOT lanes was iteratively tested until traffic assignments reached target HOT-lane volumes.” What range was tested and how high did

tolls go until traffic targets were reached? How did tolls vary based on time of day (what were tolls during weekday peak hours, off-peak hours, weekends, etc.)?

Conclusion

The selection of a transit mode and a commitment by NYSDOT to work with communities in the corridor on land use planning are major steps towards ensuring that the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor project improves mobility, reduces automobile dependence, and supports sensible development in the Hudson Valley. We hope NYSDOT continues to work with all project stakeholders so that the project will achieve these challenging but vital goals.

Best,

Kate Slevin
Executive Director

Steven Higashide
Communications Associate