



TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE/I-287
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

**New York State Department of Transportation
Metropolitan Transportation Authority Metro-North Railroad
New York State Thruway Authority**

Meeting Minutes

***Stakeholders' Advisory Working Groups (SAWGs)
Environmental SAWG Meeting #2***

***Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor
Environmental Review***



July 18, 2007

Meeting Title: Stakeholders' Advisory Working Groups (SAWGs)
Environmental SAWG Meeting #2

Meeting Purpose: Exchange of information

Location Date: Crowne Plaza, White Plains, New York
July 18, 2007

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Attendees: **Name**

Hon. Tom Abinanti
Rick Beckerman
Renee Cohen
Richard Fagan
Melissa Guardaro
Klaus Jacob
John Lipscomb
Josh Moreinis
Marysue Robbins
Stephen Safran
Joan Schroeder
Marion Shaw
Jon Marshall (Alternate for Irene Ross)
Hon. Tish Dubow (Alternate for Richard May)
Dorice Madronero (Alternate for Melanie Golden)

Members of the agencies and consultant team.

Agenda Item 1

Introduction

Paul Plotczyk, Work Systems Affiliates International (WSA), the facilitator for this meeting, welcomed participants. Jim Coyle, of Earth Tech (the environmental consultant), briefly summarized the topics and discussions at the Traffic and Transit, Land Use, and Bridge SAWGs.

Tonight's meeting was divided into two parts. In the first part Mr. Coyle completed the remaining portion of the presentation on the environmental process that was begun at the last session. In the second part, architectural historian Allison Rachleff, also of Earth Tech, gave a presentation on the study of cultural resources within the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Agenda Item 2

Presentation

Mr. Coyle began the discussion by briefly summarizing the presentation that had been given at the previous Environmental SAWG (May 30, 2007). Due to the considerable discussion that occurred at that time, that presentation was not completed. Minutes of that SAWG were distributed and it was noted that all SAWG minutes would be placed on the project website for general public review.

The objective of Mr. Coyle's presentation (see below) was to present the framework of the environmental analysis being conducted for the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Project's Environmental Impact Statement.

Agenda Item 3
Questions and Comments

1 - Land Use

Question: What is the definition of the build year? Who determines for which years the analyses will be performed?

Response: NYSDOT's Environmental Procedures Manual (EPM) specifies the years for which environmental analyses are performed. The build year is the year in which the facility is complete and ready to operate. It is also referred to as the ETC, or estimated time of completion. For this study, we are assuming a build year of 2015. We are also analyzing impacts for 2030 and 2035.

2 - Socioeconomics

Question: Are zoning changes considered as part of the EIS analysis?

Response: Yes, zoning changes are considered under the topic of Land Use. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) specifies the method for analyzing transit projects. The FTA's approach does not consider changes in zoning regulations. However, the EIS will address possible zoning changes, in a supplemental analysis, as part of a general discussion on transit-oriented development (TOD). This topic will be explored in a future session of the Land Use SAWG .

Question: Could you clarify environmental justice impacts?

Response: The environmental justice analysis presented in the EIS will be based on a presidential order that was signed by President Clinton in 1994 and focuses federal attention on achieving environmental protection for all communities, including minority and low-income populations. The order requires federal project developers to determine whether or not their projects would disproportionately impact disadvantaged populations.

3 - Transportation

Question: Does the Best Practice Model (BPM) tell us where people are going?

Response: Yes.

Question: Does BPM consider the toll structure on the bridge?

Response: Yes, bridge tolls are an input to the BPM model as are numerous other factors such as gas prices. We have assumed the same toll structure as at the George Washington Bridge. Like the Tappan Zee, the George Washington Bridge has congestion pricing for trucks.

Comment: One attendee noted that trucks wait at Airmont until the toll is about to change on the Tappan Zee Bridge and then they get on the highway.

4 - Air Quality

Question: What happens to the carbon monoxide (CO) generated by auto traffic? Does it evolve into carbon dioxide (CO₂)?

Response: CO is an inert gas and does not generate CO₂.

Question: Who collects air quality data and why is there not an air monitoring station in Rockland County?

Response: NYSDEC collects air quality data in New York State. There is a monitoring station proposed for Rockland; currently there is no county-specific data. The purpose of conducting monitoring is to establish ambient air quality background conditions in a particular locale. The way most air quality impact assessments are conducted is to add project predicted pollution levels to these background levels and thereby obtain the total estimated pollution level.

There was a time when ambient air quality data was collected on a project by project basis. However, since it was possible to collect, at most, only a few months of data, the information collected for specific projects was not considered to have sufficient statistical validity. Thus, the practice of collecting project specific data has fallen from use.

Question: Will there be a third party review of the air quality analysis? The community believes this is necessary because of the lack of county monitoring data and experiences with other projects such as the I-287 connection from New Jersey.

Response: We do not know of a third party planning to review the air quality analysis for this project. Your suggestion will be placed on the suggestion list we are keeping.

Question: We believe that having one monitor in Rockland is ridiculous because of all the micro-climates occurring in the county. We suggest a minimum of three monitors for Rockland County.

Response: Your suggestion for additional monitors may be addressed to NYSDEC, which is now planning on installing an ambient air quality monitoring station in Rockland. Our analysis will, however, consider various micro-meteorological conditions such as wind speed, wind direction, atmospheric stability, etc.

Question: The model is no better than the inputs to it. How do we find a person at NYSDEC with whom we can discuss this matter?

Response: You can call the regional air pollution engineer in Region III or call the Air Resources Division in Albany.

Comment: It is incredible that there is no air monitoring for the communities along the Hudson River shoreline.

Response: Comment noted. Our analysis will compare future no build conditions to future build conditions. We are essentially comparing future to future, not present to future conditions. This is an important point.

Regulation of tail pipe emissions has become stricter and stricter. For instance, analysis of auto related carbon monoxide emissions had historically shown numerous violations of the ambient air quality standards. Today we would consider it unlikely to see any violations of carbon monoxide standards because of the limits placed on such emissions by USEPA.

- Comment: We need good ground truth. Consultants should consider requesting NYSDEC to conduct monitoring.
- Response: We are not in a position to do so since we are following the recommended analysis methodology used by federal and state agencies. Your suggestion will be placed on our list.
- Question: This also raises the question of social inequality for those folks who live near the I-287 corridor. They receive the negative impacts of traffic along I-287 while those living away from the corridor do not. Also, the connection of I-287 from New Jersey to the Thruway was undertaken without air quality analysis.
- Response: Comment noted.
- Comment: The current state monitors are located at Stewart Airport and at White Plains. This is insufficient coverage.
- Response: Questions related to ambient air quality will be addressed at a future SAWG session devoted to air quality.
- Comment: We need to make the study fit reality on the ground. Rockland needs to contact NYSDEC and take a lead on this matter. Both you and we want accurate data for the analysis.
- Response: Yes. We consider our approach to be conservative.
- Question: Is the ambient air quality a baseline for the study?
- Response: There are two contributions to the impact assessment. The first are the cars and trucks in the immediate vicinity where the study is being conducted. The second is the regional emissions that form the ambient background level.
- Question: Do you look at annual conditions or peak conditions?
- Response: It depends on the pollutant. For CO we consider the 1-hour and 8-hour levels. However, for other pollutants we estimate levels for 24-hour, annual, or other appropriate averaging period. The timeframe selected depends on USEPA regulations which are related to health impacts.
- Question: Will you do the analysis for each alternative?
- Response: Yes.
- Question: How do you analyze traffic that is standing still for each alternative?

Response: The models we use estimate emissions for vehicles moving at different speeds along various portions of the highway system in Rockland County. We will analyze emissions coming from I-287 and from arterials in the vicinity of I-287.

Question: One of the reasons for considering a bigger bridge is that in the future, traffic is expected to be bumper to bumper. Will you compare impacts of a wider bridge?

Response: Yes, we will compare future build to no build conditions and thereby analyze the issue of bumper to bumper traffic. In future SAWGs we will present the results of our air analysis.

Question: Have you ever done an analysis without any idea of the ambient?

Response: No, we would not make up a result. Keep in mind that there are two parts to the analysis: the background conditions and the local, project-specific impacts.

Question: What ultimately happens to carbon monoxide?

Response: It disperses slowly.

Question: Is scrubbing of ventilation shaft emissions feasible?

Response: Scrubbing of emissions would need to consider the large mass of air being moved through the tunnel shafts and the relatively dilute levels of pollutants entrained in the air stream.

5 - Noise and Vibration

Comment: It recently appears that noise levels south of the bridge are higher than those north of the bridge. There is a constant roar coming from the highway.

Response: This effect should have been picked up in our monitoring program, which included coverage in the south Nyack area.

6 - Hudson River Ecology

Question: During construction some dredging may be needed. Where will those sediments be disposed?

Response: We are conducting tests on the river sediments that may potentially be dredged as part of bridge construction. The tests include analysis for heavy metals, industrial organics, PCBs, pesticides, and herbicides, among other constituents. Based on results of the tests it will be possible to make decisions on options to dispose of any sediments that would be dredged. Dredging is occurring throughout the NY/NJ region and there are various ways available to manage those materials.

Question: What about analysis for radio-nuclides?

Response: We are not conducting such analysis. The tests we are conducting have been reviewed by NYSDEC and are typical of the analysis performed to assess sediments. Radio-nuclides are not included in the agencies' analytical requirements.

Comment: However, there are potential discharges from Indian Point in the Hudson River sediments, and Lamont uses radio-nuclide analysis to assess the sediment's depositional history. Lamont has data relevant to radio-nuclides in sediments.

Response: We have already sought Lamont's advice on this project and will discuss sediment issues further with them.

Question: There are sewage discharges into the Hudson. Is some of the analysis you are conducting assessing sewage impacts to water quality?

Response: Yes, when we acquire water quality data for conventional water quality parameters, such as turbidity and dissolved oxygen (DO), we are in effect sampling for the impacts of such discharges. In addition, our sediment analysis will also reflect the impacts of sewage releases to some degree.

7 - Corridor Ecology

Question: Which wetlands are being mapped and what mapping methodology is being used? Also, are you ignoring wetlands smaller than 12 acres?

Response: Our wetland mapping methodology is based on the Corps of Engineers methodology, which is found in a manual the agency prepared for that purpose. We have currently mapped all wetlands in the I-287 right-of-way (property lines) and will also map wetlands outside the right-of-way where project developments are expected to occur. Areas outside the highway right-of-way where impacts may occur would include, for instance, various station locations.

We have not addressed, at this time, the question of which wetlands are and are not jurisdictional. This question will come up later in the course of this project. Thus, the fact that New York State may not regulate certain wetlands that are less extensive than 12 acres has no bearing on whether or not the Army Corps will have regulatory jurisdiction over those habitats and, therefore, we have mapped such wetlands. There is also an issue that has arisen in federal courts with regard to small or isolated wetlands. This matter will also be addressed later in the project.

8 - Cumulative Impacts

Question: What is the study area for cumulative impacts?

Response: It depends on the discipline being considered. There is no one answer to this question.

Cultural Resources Presentation

Ms. Rachleff did not have adequate time to complete the cultural resources presentation and will return to the September Environmental SAWG with Nancy Stehling, an archaeologist from Earth Tech, to complete it. Questions raised during the cultural resources presentation follow.

1 - Federal Regulatory Framework

Question: How old is the Tappan Zee Bridge, and is it eligible for listing on the Federal Register?

Response: The bridge is now over 50 years old and it has been found eligible because of its unusual engineering design. More will be said about this later in the presentation.

2 - Local Regulations

Comment: Ramapo may have town regulations related to historic buildings. Check with Phil Tisi and Greg Lay.

Response: We will check with those individuals.

Question: Have you contacted the Rockland Historical Society?

Response: Yes, we have. We contacted them for research information and not because they are a regulatory body.

Question: What about the Village of Suffern?

Response: We visited the village historian.

Question: Have you considered the Appalachian Trail and the Long Path in your analysis?

Response: The Appalachian Trail is not in our study area. We will check into the status of the Long Path.

Question: You mentioned the Croton Aqueduct trail as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). Does the aqueduct still exist in the vicinity of I-287?

Response: Documentation for the Old Croton Aqueduct indicated that it has been breached in five places. These include Route 117 north of our study area. It also had been breached for construction of I-287/87. It appears that at the Thruway the aqueduct top and sides were removed, but the floor may still be in place beneath the Thruway. The aqueduct is considered a non-contiguous resource and, in spite of the loss of integrity, continues to be listed as a National Historic Landmark.

Question: How has the Natural Heritage status of the Hudson River been reflected in your analysis? Also, have you considered Piermont Marsh?

Response: The Natural Heritage status of the Hudson will enter our analysis in a general way when we consider the visual impacts of rehabilitating or replacing the existing structure as part of the alternatives

analysis, and when we conduct our ecological assessment. Piermont Marsh is generally beyond our ecological study area.

Since the cultural resources presentation was not completed at this session of the SAWG, the presentation will be continued at the next Environmental SAWG in September.

Parking Lot

The following matters were placed in the Parking Lot during the SAWG:

- Provide contact at NYSDEC who can address questions related to air quality monitoring in Rockland County

Suggestions List

The following suggestions were made by SAWG participants during the meeting:

- Need third party review of air quality analysis
- Air quality monitoring should begin now in Rockland County
- Analysis for radio-nuclides in sediments should be conducted