



TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE/I-287
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Environmental Review
Meeting Summary

Stakeholders' Advisory Working Group (SAWG)
Kick-off Meeting

Tuesday, May 22, 2007 6:00 -- 9:00 PM
Best Western Nyack, NY

On Tuesday, May 22, 2007, at 6:00 PM, New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) met with members of all four Stakeholders' Advisory Working Groups (SAWGs). Discussions are delineated as follows:

Q = Question, **C** = Comment, **A** = Answer

Introductory Remarks and Discussion

Michael P. Anderson, NYSDOT, introduced members of the project team and gave a brief overview of the Tappan Zee Bridge /I-287 Corridor Environmental Review project status. Mr. Anderson introduced the concept of the SAWGs, explained what was expected of each of the groups, and encouraged the members of these groups to share opinions and speak their minds. Mr. Anderson explained that the project team wants to hear both the criticisms and the positive aspects of the project. He said that the study area is 30 miles long and affects at least 30 communities, necessitating the participation of and input from SAWG members.

Mr. Anderson stated that agendas will be sent out before each meeting and that all meetings will be adopting a workshop-style setup. He also emphasized that these meetings are a work-in-progress – format, membership, and direction can change over the course of the study. He stated that the project team is hopeful that the SAWG meetings will be an open exchange of information, as well as flexible to the concerns and interests of members.

Mr. Anderson went on to explain how the groups were formed, noting that the most important consideration was to recruit people who are both interested in and care about the project. Mr. Anderson announced that down the line there may be an opportunity and/or need to create subcommittees focusing on topics like river ecology and noise/air impacts.

Mr. Anderson briefly covered the topics that each SAWG would cover. In reference to the Bridge SAWG, Mr. Anderson stated that the project team has been carefully following three Fs, i.e., form follows fit follows function.

Mr. Anderson opened the floor up for questions and comments before the presentation got under way:

Q: Hon. Thom Kleiner, Supervisor of the Town of Orangetown, asked how the working groups are relevant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA)/ National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

A: Mr. Anderson answered that all the feedback and issues raised, both positive and negative, will be documented. He further stated that the project team will be taking minutes at every meeting

and meeting summaries will be circulated to the group and they will also become part of the official study record. Mr. Anderson said the project team also may have representatives from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) at some of the meetings so that they can see what the project team is doing and how the team involves the public. Mr. Anderson stated that this effort shows the agencies' commitment to fulfilling the requirements of the NEPA process.

- C. Hon. Harriet Cornell referred back to the three Fs that Mr. Anderson spoke about and offered that one of those F's should be finance. She further suggested a fifth SAWG be added to cover the topic of finance.
- A: Mr. Anderson responded that a parallel financial study is being done. Mr. Anderson added that the project team recognizes the topic of finance is an important part of the process, especially in order to gain support and consensus.
- C. An attendee pointed out the *Journal News* has a recent article stating that federal highway funds are dwindling. He then asked how this would affect this project.
- A: Mr. Anderson responded that he did not have an answer to that question but pointed out that the project team does recognize that these funds are dwindling. He also noted that the Tappan Zee Bridge project will not take money from other important projects already approved and that no alternatives would be eliminated based on cost.

Presentations on DEIS Alternatives

James Coyle, EarthTech (environmental consultant), gave a brief presentation on the six alternatives, introducing the characteristics of each to the group. He explained the No Build, Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and the differences among Alternative 4A, 4B, and 4C. He also briefly explained some of the proposed highway improvements in Rockland County such as high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, dynamic tolling, climbing lanes, and other Transportation Demand Management/Transportation Supply Management (TDM/TSM) measures.

Mark Roche, Arup (engineering consultant), explained to the group that he and Mr. Coyle would walk through the engineering plans for Alternatives 3 and 4A in an effort to cover most of the issues being faced at this point in the DEIS. Mr. Roche clarified the difference between *alternatives* and *options*, saying that the project team is now working with six alternatives, while within alternatives there are a number of options.

- C: An attendee pointed out that it seemed as though there are no transit stops in Rockland To him, it seemed as though the goal was to get workers across the bridge from Rockland to points east. The numbers of stops seem to be imbalanced between Rockland County and Westchester County.
- A: Mr. Roche responded that the numbers of stations are equal, but their positions in the counties are different. He explained that there would be a limited number of stops in Westchester so the service could be rapid. He further explained that in order for a transit system to be rapid, the number of stops must be considered. Mr. Roche stated that the service plans will be discussed further in the SAWGs and that all transit alternatives provide bi-directional (east-west) service.
- Q: Hon. Larry Lynn, Mayor of Grandview, proposed a hypothetical situation: if someone wanted to build a factory on Route 119 and no workers would be able to get there, could a deal be made to build a station near his factory?
- A: Mr. Coyle answered that there are no laws saying that the counties can't add more stations in the future. Mr. Coyle also added that the park-and-ride stops would be located near highway access.

He then explained the tradeoffs between different kinds of transit services (i.e., Bus Rapid Transit or BRT, Commuter Rail Transit or CRT, and Light Rail Transit or LRT).

- C: John Messina said he feels some issues are left “under the table” and not shared with the group. As an example, he stated that Metro-North Railroad has a very big part in the project and they are never mentioned. He also said that NJ Transit is never brought up in any meetings he’s attended.
- A: Mr. Anderson said that the agencies are working very closely with each other and other important agencies. Mr. Anderson further stated that the relationship between Metro-North Railroad and the New York State Thruway Authority is not an issue in this project. Finally, Mr. Anderson stated that NYSDOT is working very closely with NJ Transit. The project recognizes Access to the Region’s Core (ARC) as an ongoing project and is taking ARC into consideration in the future no-build scenarios.
- Q: Vic Weinstein asked what kind of improvements to I-87 and I-287 would be done in Westchester.
- A: Mr. Anderson answered that NYSDOT is currently making improvements to I-287 in Westchester, but other than those currently under way or programmed, no other improvements to I-87 and I-287 are planned in Westchester. He noted that both the Westchester and Rockland County Executives said many years ago that we are not going to be able to build our way out of congestion.
- Q: An attendee asked if there has been a traffic study on I-287 in the White Plains area.
- A: Mr. Anderson answered yes.

Mr. Roche returned to a discussion of the alternatives. He stated that in the Suffern area, there are different transit alignment options because of potential impacts to Wayne Avenue. He also noted that it could be beneficial to use the Piermont Line to minimize these impacts. He clarified that the Hillburn station would not necessarily have NJ Transit trains originating there.

- C: Joan Connors and Joan Schroeder both commented on how they would not like to see the Piermont Line used more frequently.
- A: Mr. Roche said all of these issues will be discussed further in the groups.

Mr. Roche went on to discuss issues associated with Airmont Road, pointing out that it is a very busy and complex interchange with the Thruway. He said that this area is of high concern to the project team and that the details are still being discussed and explored.

Mr. Roche stated that in the area of the Palisades Mall there is currently a well-functioning park-and-ride lot around the Home Depot. He stated that the project team may not want to move an existing, well-used park-and-ride lot, leading the project team to further study the way people use this lot and how a transit option could work.

- C: An attendee stated that he doesn’t foresee anyone using BRT from New Jersey on the Pascack Valley Line to Westchester. The attendee asked what the benefit is of using the Pascack Valley Line.
- A: Mr. Coyle answered that there is currently limited service but the project team is thinking 20-30 years down the line and therefore considering all options.
- C: An attendee informed the project team of the new highway facilities building being built in Rockland County and said that construction would start soon.
- Q: An attendee asked whether the project would consider a connection to Stewart Airport.

A: Mr. Anderson answered that such consideration can only occur independent of the TZB/I-287 Environmental Review. He added that if a Stewart Airport project becomes reality during the time of this project, the project team will incorporate it in its analysis. Mr. Anderson explained that the project team can only deal with approved projects, such as ARC.

Q: An attendee asked if the computer models take into account the current Tappan Zee Express Bus service ridership.

A: Mr. Coyle answered that the BPM (the Best Practice Model, used for travel demand forecasting) will incorporate this service and ridership levels.

Mr. Roche explained that the current Tappan Zee Bridge is 91 feet wide with no shoulders. He said that a new bridge could be 156 feet wide, consisting of 8 general traffic lanes (4 in each direction), 2 BRT/HOT lanes (1 in each direction), as well as inside and outside lane shoulders on both sides of the road. Mr. Roche emphasized that when it comes to bridge concepts, the project team is focused on function and fit.

Q: An attendee asked how you could keep the same footprint for a 91-foot bridge and a 156-foot bridge.

A: Mr. Roche answered that only on land would the bridge keep the same footprint.

Q: An attendee asked whether there were any plans to allow freight trains to access the bridge. The attendee said that trucks that currently use the bridge ruin the structure and said that the project team should try to get them off the road.

A: Mr. Roche answered that one of the alternatives would be capable of handling some types of rail freight.

Q: An attendee asked whether grades would be a problem for the rail.

A: Mr. Roche answered yes and said that he would go into more detail on the grade issues in the Alternative 4A discussion.

C. An attendee mentioned the new firehouse on Meadow Street and suggested that it not be condemned.

Mr. Roche mentioned that the project team looked at putting transit stations in the Greenburgh and Elmsford areas in the Alternatives Analysis (AA) phase of the study (the Alternatives Analysis report, which was published in January 2006, is available on the study website). He also mentioned that this was an area where there could be some transportation-oriented development (TOD) and that the project team has been in touch with Greenburgh planning officials to discuss options and to gauge interest.

In the area of White Plains, Mr. Roche said that the project team has been in close contact with the Westchester Department of Transportation about many issues but especially about the different routes that BRT could take through White Plains. He stated that many potential routes have been developed.

C: Vic Weinstein mentioned that the traffic on I-287 is headed north and said that it makes no sense not to widen I-287 from exit 1 to exit 6.

A: Mr. Anderson answered that the widening of I-287 in Westchester is unlikely.

Closing Remarks

In closing, Mr. Anderson thanked the attendees for the feedback and discussion. He said that the conversation would continue in a matter of weeks and that the project team would set up a second

meeting to present and discuss Alternative 4A with the SAWG members. He said he appreciates everyone's participation.

Paul Plotczyk, who is serving as one of the facilitators for the SAWGs, asked for some final feedback from the attendees. He asked people to describe tonight's meeting in one or two words. Some of the feedback he received was:

- Very informative
- Very complex
- Best information we've received so far

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.