



TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE/I-287
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Environmental Review Meeting Summary

Stakeholders' Advisory Working Group (SAWG) Introductory Meeting #2 (Con't. from Meeting #1)

Tuesday, June 12, 2007 6:00 PM
Best Western Nyack, NY

Introduction

Elisa Van Der Linde from Metro-North Railroad welcomed all and introduced the study team.

Paul Plotczyk was introduced as the facilitator and began the session by turning it over to Frank Grande of Earthtech (environmental consultant) and Mark Roche of Arup (engineering consultant) for a presentation. The objective of the meeting was to go through the current engineering drawings for Alternative 4A across the study corridor from Suffern to Port Chester.

Hillburn Area

A Hillburn commuter rail station is proposed just west of Route 59 and south of 4th Street adjacent to the existing Metro-North Railroad Port Jervis line tracks. A rail storage yard is proposed north of 4th Street.

Mr. Roche showed two options under consideration for an alignment proceeding east from the Hillburn Station. The first option would extend from under the Interchange 15 ramps and swing east between the Thruway and Wayne Avenue. The second option would place the new service within the right-of-way of the existing railroad freight line called the Piermont Line. The cross-corridor service would be constructed below ground at Interchange 15 to avoid an at-grade crossing of Route 59 and continue below ground through downtown Suffern, daylighting east of Washington Avenue to go over the Mahwah River.

Frank Grande explained that the study team had looked at connecting to the Port Jervis line on the west side of I-287 during the Alternatives Analysis stage of the study, which ended with the publication of the Alternatives Analysis report in January 2006. These west side alignments would impact residential properties in Hillburn and the water wells in Suffern so they were eliminated from further consideration.

Q: Joan Schroeder: How would the use of the Piermont Line impact the Chestnut Garden Apartments in Suffern?

A: Mark Roche: Using the Piermont line would eliminate that ground level rail and would put it below grade, which may actually benefit those apartments.

Q: What happens to all the freight tracks used now by Norfolk Southern?

A: Mark Roche: We would be adding capacity for storage and we would not impact the existing service.

Q: John Marshall: Is there any rail option that would connect north to Stewart Airport? Is there any planning over the long term for a connection?

A. Joe Pasanello, Metro-North Railroad, explained that Stewart Airport is a separate study from the Tappan Zee Bridge / I-287 Environmental Review and has independent utility. He added that a feasibility study had already been done and would look at the capacity on the Port Jervis line.

Q. Milton Hoffman: How close is the Port Jervis line to Stewart Airport?

A. Joe Pasanello, Metro-North Railroad, said that the closest junction, at Salisbury Mills, is about 4.5 miles to Stewart Airport.

Mark Roche added that provision of rail in Alternative 4A wouldn't preclude the future addition of a connection to Stewart Airport.

Mark Roche explained the significance of each line on the maps and what each represents, such as right-of-way, lanes, etc. Maps showing these options and interchanges are posted on the study website.

Interchange 14B – Alternative 4A would propose an elevated station east of Airmont Road adjacent to the Thruway. Under consideration are two options for the Airmont interchange, and two paths for the rail line to approach the proposed station. One would be on the south side of the Thruway and the line would be above Airmont Road. The second would be from the Piermont Line and the approach to Airmont Road would be from Dunnigan Drive. The existing rail line goes across the road at Airmont Road, however, crossing Airmont Road at-grade would be impractical. The rail line could therefore continue either elevated, in a viaduct, or within a tunnel. The underground alignment would not reach the surface until the area of Interchange 13 because of the topography through Monsey.

Mr. Roche mentioned that some stakeholders have suggested putting a station west towards Hemion Road rather than at Airmont Road, which is very congested. It has also been suggested that a station be located closer to Suffern. Other locations could be considered depending on the study's ridership forecasts.

Q. Couldn't you run Airmont Road traffic underground?

A. Mr. Roche said that locating the traffic underground would require it to go around 40 feet under the Thruway.

Q. Joan Schroeder asked about the existing railroad spurs to the commercial properties along the Piermont Line.

A. Mr. Roche said that it's a legal requirement to keep those functional.

Q. Vic Weinstein: Would you need 4-5 acres for parking at the station?

A. Mr. Roche said that the exact acreage that would be necessary would be based on the ridership forecasts. If additional acreage were needed, a stacked parking facility could be a possibility.

C. Joan Schroeder showed the group the location of the Retreat at Airmont and expressed concern that there would be a parking lot in the Retreat's backyard and potential effects on a wetland.

C. One percent of the bridge traffic now goes to New York City. Would a railroad be warranted for only one percent?

A. Mr. Grande said many of the commuters who travel to New York City use the Palisades Interstate Parkway and George Washington Bridge or use express buses that enter New York City through the Lincoln Tunnel. The Alternative 4A service would provide a connection to the Hudson Line and would provide service to Grand Central Terminal. He said about 70 percent of people crossing the bridge are going across the corridor.

C. Are there four stations in Rockland? How would one get to them?

- A. Mr. Roche said that there would be many ways to get to stations including kiss and ride parking lots, other stations on Port Jervis, buses, carpools, etc.
- Q. What kind of rail equipment is proposed for the corridor?
- A. Joe Pasanello said that Metro-North would use their current fleet of M7s (electric-powered with third rail running) or Dual Mode Genesis models, which can operate on diesel or electric. Diesel is less expensive to operate. He described the ability of some trains to use electric power supplied from the third rail and from overhead catenary.
- Q. Why don't we use light rail transit (LRT) equipment to go back and forth across the corridor?
- A. Joe Pasanello commented that the full-corridor LRT was eliminated during the Alternatives Analysis phase of the study. Frank Grande said that the forecasted ridership levels under this option showed a significant drop because of the need to transfer at the bridge to get on the Hudson Line.
- Q. What is the model used for ridership forecasts?
- A. Frank Grande explained that the model used is called the Best Practice Model, or the BPM, and that its use is required by the Federal Transit Administration for transit-related projects such as this. The BPM is a regional model that includes population and travel data from 44 regional counties. The model results will be used to determine how many people will use the commuter rail, and from what stations they will get on and where they will get off.
- C. The use of the Piermont Line for commuter rail will not affect the one or two freight trains that run per week.
- C. The Alternative 4A service plan calls for 10 trains in the peak hour, however, not all 10 trains would stop at every stop.
- C. If you're going to run an electric operation where are you going to locate your substations?
- A. Mr. Roche commented that locations for the substations have not been proposed at this stage of the study but said about 4 or 5 may be needed in Rockland.
- C. There was a discussion that the Palisades Center is up for sale and that the company that owns the Nanuet Mall may buy it. Wouldn't it make sense to explore possibilities for transit-oriented development in the area of Nanuet?
- A. Mr. Roche noted that changing land use is not under the purview of the study and is the responsibility of the municipalities. It was noted that the study team has met regularly with local planners throughout the study corridor to keep them up to date on the study and to learn about local land uses.

Pascack Station Area

- Q. Did you have any feedback from the Regional Plan Association's (RPA) charrette on land uses in Rockland County?
- A. Frank Grande described the recent charrette hosted by the Regional Plan Association and Rockland Economic Development Corporation. The workshop brought together local planners and town officials to brainstorm about the possibilities for transit-oriented development at several proposed commuter rail stations. RPA will issue a report of the results.
- C. Why not provide a physical connection from the Pascack Valley Line to the cross-corridor rail service?

- A. Since there is only one station north of that connection (Spring Valley), it would not be practical.
- C: The primary goal is to get railroad tracks across the bridge and corridor.

Palisades Mall Station Area

Mark Roche: The rail alignment east of Interchange 13 would be about 45 feet above the Hackensack River, CSX freight line, and the Thruway. A station is proposed near the Palisades Mall to serve a park and ride facility at the mall's Parking Lot J.

- C. Klaus Jacob mentioned that the RPA suggested moving the station about 200 yards to the east to permit a closer connection to the mall entrance.

Mark Roche: The rail alignment would be in a tunnel from east of Route 303 to about the area of River Road, underneath interchanges 11 and 10.

River Crossing - Nyack

- Q. What elevation is the new bridge at the edge of the river in Nyack?
- A. Mr. Roche said that the Bridge SAWGs would explore some of these details. He noted that the elevation of the existing Thruway is +35 feet and the elevation of the river is +0 feet.
- C: Mr. Jacob asked how we could talk about elevations when we don't have a bridge design set yet.
- A. Mr. Roche said the worst impact in terms of elevation would be on the order of 30-40 feet if the commuter rail alignment were placed on the lower level of a possible replacement bridge. If the alignment were placed adjacent to the Thruway then the total footprint at the edge of the river would be wider.
- C. Marysue Robbins said that this type of elevation would result in an impact to nearby properties.

Mr. Roche said that the commuter rail alignment at the Nyack River shore would transition and could be located on either the south or north side of the existing Thruway or along the central axis of a possible replacement bridge. This would differ from the alignment throughout Rockland, in which the commuter rail would travel on the south side of the existing Thruway and transition in a tunnel under Interchanges 11 and 10.

- Q. Are you considering a commuter rail station in Nyack?
- A. Mr. Roche commented that this was looked at in Stage 1 and eliminated.

Tarrytown area

Mr. Roche pointed out the proposed new Tappan Zee Station, the alignment's route across Westchester and its connection to the Hudson Line. The existing four Hudson Line tracks would split, and the two new proposed tracks would come up through the middle. This would allow a connection to the two central express tracks on the Hudson Line.

- C. Sal Fazzi: There are severe weather conditions associated with ice on the bridge for rail.
- A. Mark Roche explained that it's not the low temperature that is the main concern for train friction but the "mush" created with the leaves and ice and melting. No leaves would be anticipated on a possible replacement bridge.

- C. Joe Pasanello commented that the proposed station at the intersection of Broadway and Route 119 would alleviate some of the traffic heading to the Tarrytown Station.
- Q. Do some trains coming across the bridge go south and do some go east?
- A. Joe Pasanello responded that service would be to both Grand Central Terminal and cross corridor to White Plains and into Connecticut through a connection to the New Haven Line.
- Q. Sherwood Chorost: From the beginning to the end, have you figured out the dollar cost of commuter rail transit and can you compare it to the cost of bus rapid transit?
- A. Mr. Roche said the cost numbers are being updated.
- Q. Why not continue the tunnel in Rockland across the river and then into Westchester County rather than raising the alignment onto the Tappan Zee Bridge?
- A. Mark Roche responded that the tunnel had been eliminated for highway lanes and for commuter rail.
- C. Sherwood Chorost: Safety factors are a concern when combining both cars and trains.
- C. Tom Abinanti said we should not ignore the northbound connection to north Westchester to White Plains. How about those wishing to go from Peekskill to White Plains?
- A. Mr. Roche said that connection had been studied earlier but was dropped from further consideration because the expected ridership was very small. The cost to build this connection (approximately half a billion dollars) would therefore not be warranted at this time, but the design for the alignment would not preclude including this connection in the future.
- C. Tom Abinanti: You'd like to capture the driving public – make the same argument that you're making for the people from Suffern to White Plains to the people in the river villages.
- C. Jody Fox: We need to focus on the regional mobility and long-term planning efforts and not just on the Tappan Zee Bridge. Someone should be envisioning what that future planning should be.

Elmsford and Greenburgh Areas

Mark Roche outlined the two potential routes being studied for Alternative 4A in this area. The first was a combination of tunnel, surface and elevated commuter rail transit. The second was a full tunnel option that could be more economical with less environmental and construction impacts.

- Q. Is all of this alignment within the right-of-way?
- A. The tunnel route from the proposed Tappan Zee station around the Talley Rand Swamp would not be in the right-of-way but we are considering a tunnel route that would remain underneath the Thruway.

Mark Roche said that one station in the Elmsford and Greenburgh area is envisaged. Three locations are under investigation.

- Q. Vic Weinstein: How much additional land would be required for the tunnel option?
- A. Mark Roche said that the tunnels would require underground easements when under private property, and property would be acquired at stations for parking and supporting facilities. The size of the station parking area would be dependent on the forecasted ridership.

C: You would be better off using the resources to use some high occupancy toll (HOT) bus lanes or high-speed bus lanes.

C: Milton Hoffman: Instead of going under Route 119, why not consider staying under 287 into White Plains?

A. Mr. Roche said that would be possible. At this stage, we are trying to approximate locations for the stations.

White Plains area

Mark Roche explained the two route options for tunnels under White Plains and the allowance for transfer to the existing Harlem Line.

C: Would the extent of tunnels take us to the area of the Platinum Mile?

A. Mark Roche answered that this was not the case yet but as the team studies the constraints, the need for tunnels would be assessed.

Port Chester Area

Mark Roche outlined the connection to the New Haven Line, which would entail a short tunnel under the I-95, local roads and area near St. Mary's Cemetery. The cross-corridor commuter rail transit tracks would be split and exit the tunnel with one track on each side of the four New Haven Line tracks, providing for a connection to the local tracks and a stop at Port Chester Station.

General

Q. Have you done the traffic analysis for the design and build years?

A. We're assuming a design year of 2015 and analyzing 2035 as the build year. Bridges should be designed to function for as long as reasonably possible. We're not building to add capacity; we're looking at the best ways to improve overall mobility in the corridor and to potentially offer a transit choice.

Q. Are we providing a freight connection?

A. No, but we're not saying that sometime in the future freight could not be run over the bridge. We are designing for a specific kind of freight which is a little bit heavier than a CRT and takes into account the clearances.

Q. East Side Access will have a profound effect on Grand Central Terminal Metro-North Railroad service. Have you developed an operating system that takes that into account?

A. Joe Pasanello answered that the Railroad is working on it.

C. Klaus Jacobs: What's wrong with providing a rail tunnel through the soft sediments through the Hudson River?

A. Mark Roche commented on the difference in soft and hard material that the tunnel would need to go through. Joe Pasanello said that we went through a very extensive evaluation of the tunnel and determined it was more cost effective to place the rail on a new bridge.

C: Klaus Jacobs commented on the need to study possible foundations for a possible replacement bridge.

A: Mark Roche agreed and commented that analysis was underway.

C: Potential connection to the north Hudson area will be addressed in the Traffic & Transit group.

C: Would people really use transit to get to White Plains?

A: Growth in Westchester County is predicted along traditional and existing routes. The ridership numbers will be explored further in individual groups