



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)
Land Use SAWG Meeting #3***

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



September 18, 2007

Meeting Title: Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Groups (SAWGs)
Land Use SAWG – Meeting #3 – Focus on the Transportation Land Use Connection and
Transit Oriented Development

Meeting Purpose: Exchange of information

Location/Date: Best Western, Nyack, New York
September 18, 2007

Agenda:

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Attendees: **Name**

Altieri, Vincent
Anzevino, Jeffrey
Buroughs, Ed
Fazzi, Sal
Greenblatt, David
Kirkpatrick, John
Suzanne Barclay
Lewy, Cheryl Winter
Lane, Rob
Sandford, Irene
Schulman, Sy
Slevin, Kate
Stellato, Mark
Strober, Eric
Weinstein, Vic
Zupan, Jeff
Dempsey, Ed
Marshall, Jon
Miller, Robert
O’Rourke, Gerry
Puglia, Lori
Schectman, Stew

Members of the agencies and consultant team.

Agenda Item 1

Introduction

Mike Anderson (NYSDOT) provided introductory remarks and Andrew Parker (Earth Tech, environmental consultant) made the initial presentation on various concepts that have evolved for integrating land use planning with proposed transportation projects. Dr. Parker’s presentation was followed by a presentation from Jeff Zupan (SAWG member, Regional Plan Association, or RPA) and Robert Lane (RPA), who presented a summary of the May 18, 2007 charrette convened by the RPA and the Rockland County Economic Development Corporation (RCEDC) on the subject of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in Rockland County. Ed Buroughs, Deputy Commissioner, Westchester County Department of Planning, also made a presentation, which focused on the TOD and the Westchester County comprehensive plan.

Agenda Item 2: Andrew Parker - Land Use and Transportation Planning Concepts

Presentation

This presentation presented various economic concepts for managing land development that may be induced by or otherwise occur as a result of new transportation developments (see Slides and Annotations).

Agenda Item 3a: Andrew Parker - Land Use and Transportation Planning Concepts

Questions and Comments

Comment: In response to a slide related to the multiplicity of planning agencies within the tri-state region, Jeff Zupan noted that the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission was founded to manage transportation developments occurring across the three-state region (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut). Its focus was on transportation issues but it also addressed other matters such as housing. He said that organization had unraveled as a result of its involvement in housing issues. Ultimately, he said, as a result of federal legislation, each state organized its own planning agencies or metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), which resulted in a breakdown of integrated planning.

Question: Sal Fazzi asked about the percentage of trucks on the Tappan Zee Bridge.

Response: Mr. Zupan said that due to the surcharge on trucks during peak periods few trucks use the bridge at those times, although there are times, such as 2-3 AM, when trucks can outnumber cars. However, overall trucks are a small percentage of traffic on the bridge.

Question: One participant asked about a “retail parking tax.”

Response: Dr. Parker explained that some planners believe that parking, such as that available at retail establishments, is under-priced in the US. Parking uses land and leads to traffic congestion and other impacts. New York City is an example of a jurisdiction that is less impacted by under-priced parking.

Question: Are strip shopping areas in this category?

Response: They are not the major consideration. However, parking associated with strip shopping is a significant source of congestions and vehicular accidents.

Comment: One commenter stated that parking would be important to the viability of a new transit system.

Response: Dr. Parker agreed that parking is important to all aspects of the transit systems being analyzed.

Agenda Item 3b: Jeff Zupan and Rob Lane - Charrette Results
Questions and Comments

Jeff Zupan introduced this segment by describing the RPA/RCDEC May 2007 charrette and its intent to address transit-oriented development (TOD) in Rockland County and to thereby help design a more cost-effective transit system. Rob Lane continued the presentation on the results of the charrette. The charrette was an attempt to bring interested parties together and identify locations and concepts for TOD. During the charrette the participants developed general concepts for TOD at several locations where the project planning team had considered transit stops or stations. The charrette did not attempt to identify completely new station locations but used those previously identified by the study, although one new location, at the Tilcon Quarry in Ramapo (Suffern), was added to the mix.

Comment: Mr. Lane commented that since government still pays for transportation developments, it has an important influence over how development occurs. He said that “home rule” is very much in place but cited examples of communities coming together for planning purposes, including the Pine Lands and the Highlands in New Jersey. He said a number of communities in Minnesota have come together and formed an I-35 coalition and have set up a planning agency to manage development along that corridor. According to Mr. Lane, the I-287 corridor is the right size for such a coalition since it is an intermediate-scale undertaking.

Comment: Mike Anderson said that the formation of the SAWGs was an example of NYSDOT’s commitment to good corridor planning.

Comment: Sal Fazzi stated that the original planning for the location of the Tappan Zee Bridge was a problem since localities did not talk to each other.

Comment: One commenter noted that NJDOT is attempting to undertake corridor planning.

Question: Should we not look at both Orange and Rockland Counties and identify potential development sites?

Response: Several participants responded in the positive.

Comment: Robert Miller asked how the project team will engage local planners. There is a problem with any development that is proposed.

Response: Rita Campon responded by saying that the project team had been reaching out to local communities throughout the entire planning process as well as meeting with both county planning departments.

Mike Anderson added that outreach will intensify as the project continues. Ed Buroughs added that there are things that Westchester County can do. Cheryl Winter Lewy agreed that it is important to meet with multiple communities so that many divergent views can be represented and discussed at the same time.

Slide Presentation: Jeff Zupan began the RPA slide presentation by saying that the goal of the charrette was to raise awareness within Rockland County of the need to be involved in transportation planning. Land use planning needed to be addressed in relationship to transportation planning.

Rob Lane stated that in thinking about the planning options it is important to consider how the transit systems can be threaded through existing development. Rail is most difficult in this regard. Essentially, commuter rail has not been built in this country for almost 100 years. He said that NYSDOT has identified station locations along I-287. The area near I-287 is auto oriented and thus the focus has been on concepts for park/ride stations.

RPA looked at the station locations under consideration and identified several as possible TOD sites:

- Airmont
- Nanuet
- Palisades Mall

RPA added the Suffern Tilcon quarry site to the study's station locations and noted that in addition to focusing on park/ride type facilities, it is possible to consider kiss/ride, transit (two-seat ride), bike, and walking-oriented strategies. Walking, however, would require a design that encourages it. TOD needs to make the area within walking distance of station more amenable to transit. The goal of the charrette was to explore opportunities for TOD.

Comment: Jeff Zupan stated that the ongoing analysis is focused on cost/effective solutions. However, the SAWG process provides participants a unique opportunity to develop input to the planning process.

Comment: Robert Miller stated that one of the major transit routes, Route 45 which buses use to access Spring Valley and other locations, is not being considered in the ongoing studies.

Comment: Jeff Anzevino asked if there are better locations for stations than those already identified.

Slide Presentation: Mr. Lane continued by saying a key question is how to get concurrence for the higher density development implied by TOD. RPA accepted the study's general transit alignments; thus the RPA study should be considered to be a demonstration of methodology as much as anything else. He said some of the results of the charrette were somewhat silly and some of the concepts generated by the effort were very good. In all cases it was the results of the effort of the community participants.

Mr. Lane suggested that planning for TOD should start quickly, and it needs multiple levels of engagement to be successful. He said TOD can always be leveraged to accomplish community goals and pointed to Somerville, New Jersey, where the effort took 1-1/2 years and cost \$120,000 but was well worth the effort.

The charrette was split into four groups, one for each potential station location. At Palisades Mall there are issues of congestion, flooding (along Route 59), and connectivity to residential areas to the west. It may be possible to move the station to the east making pedestrian access to the mall easier. It may also be possible to redevelop the Mall parking lots.

At the Nanuet location there is already considerable, relatively dense residential development. The question is what to do with the Nanuet Mall and the strip malls along Route 59. One of the charrette groups recommended using the Home Depot site for the station and also suggested redeveloping the Nanuet Mall site. Another group suggested locating the station at a site farther west.

At Airmont Road, the local charrette participants expressed some concern about the proposed station location. They recommended a by-pass road be constructed to relieve traffic at the Airmont/Route 59 intersection.

At the Tilcon Quarry site, the town has proposed a flood control project, but there is considerable open space available for development. It would be possible for residents from the village of Suffern to walk to the quarry site if a pathway were constructed across the Avon property. Avon indicated that they were reluctant to provide space from their existing parking areas but would consider a pathway that did not interfere with parking. A station located in the central Village would offer an opportunity to redevelop the village and would provide an opportunity for transfer to the NJ Transit system.

Comment: One commenter asked if a station at Suffern is a given.

Response: Jeff Zupan responded that NYDOT had shown the station at Airmont Road and not in the village of Suffern.

Comment: One commenter asked whether a station could be provided in Nyack given its high density development.

Response: Rob Lane responded by saying that for rail there are technical issues such as grades, that makes providing a station in Nyack difficult. However, a bus connection from Nyack to another station could be possible.

Question: Is a below grade station possible in Nyack?

Response: This question has been raised previously and the issue is being studied. There are numerous issues at every proposed station location that must be addressed.

Comment: Sy Schulman stated that density at station locations should be quantified in terms of population per square mile.

Response: Jeff Zupan stated that it would also be useful to identify the population located within concentric rings emanating from the station locations. The rings could, for instance, be in 0.25-mile increments. Then, if zoning changes were to occur, the densities in the various rings could be adjusted based on distance from the station.

Comment: Gerry O'Rourke stated that he would like to see greater emphasis on the Nanuet Mall area.

*Agenda Item 3c: Ed Buroughs – Westchester County Planning
Questions and Comments*

Ed Buroughs began his presentation by saying that Westchester County is trying to implement many of the planning concepts that Andrew Parker presented. Mr. Buroughs suggested that SAWG members would find the “Westchester 25” website highly informative. It now shows many of the planned development sites in the County. Westchester has been organized into five planning regions and the I-287 corridor is in the County’s Central region.

Slide Presentation: Mr. Buroughs described in considerable detail how Westchester County is placing much of their planning data on the new website. The website will include all the new topographic and planimetric data they have acquired as well as considerable municipality-specific information. The goal is to enable local governments to have access to the data they need to make decisions on new development in their jurisdictions.

Cheryl Winter Lewy continued the discussion by saying that the changes that are occurring in Westchester are regional and not local. Thus, the website, which encompasses the entire county, is an effective way to facilitate planning.

Westchester is currently putting forth 7 or 8 transportation-related planning proposals to address the need to connect the transportation systems that already exist within the county.

Municipalities that implement effective programs and regulations can direct development how and where it is desired rather than allowing developers to make decisions based on their specific project.

Westchester County supports the selection of an appealing design if a new bridge is constructed. The bridge should be a handsome structure that adds value to its setting.

Question: One commenter noted that the current plans do not include expansion of I-287 between Exits 1 and 4, which is currently congested. Are there plans to expand I-287 in this area? Will traffic increase in this area if a new bridge is built?

Response: Jeff Zupan stated that the current alternatives do not increase the number of lanes available in the peak direction. The new bridge alternatives would provide 8 lanes, eliminating the moveable barrier that currently provides 4 lanes in the peak direction. Mr. Zupan noted that the goal is for additional growth to be absorbed by transit, although he is not sure that this can be completely accomplished.

Comment: Mike Anderson commented that I-287 has a long history in Westchester County, and that a decision was made not to increase the capacity of I-287. Thus, the BRT alternative ends at the Tappan Zee Bridge toll plaza. We cannot entirely build ourselves out of congestion. We need to look at ways to manage traffic demand since there is no single highway or transit solution. We can only optimize our approach.

Comment: Sy Schulman commented that the build-up of traffic across Westchester along I-287 is due to the north-south roadways that provide access to I-287. Significant growth north of the corridor has increased north-south traffic.

- Comment: Mike Anderson noted that the bridge gets blamed for the traffic along I-287 in Westchester. However, 70% of the traffic crossing the bridge from Rockland is going either to Westchester or on to Connecticut.
- Comment: A comment was made that the current traffic back-up in Westchester is due to the continuous construction projects along I-287. This makes it difficult to know how the highway will perform when it is complete.
- Comment: Mike Anderson replied that there is good news – the construction work is expected to end in 2009. However, this construction effort makes no upgrades to the segments east of White Plains.
- Comment: The development that is occurring in north of I-287 in Westchester is mostly auto-oriented office campuses. If the development were to occur in downtown areas instead, some of the employees could use mass transit. Similarly the growth in traffic in Rockland County is largely due to developments in Orange County.
- Question: One participant noted that current plans to increase operations at Stewart Airport will add traffic to the system and that planning should include traffic demand 20 years from now, not just present demand.
- Response: Mike Anderson responded saying that the Tappan Zee Bridge team agrees with this concern and that the analysis will address this matter qualitatively since we still do not know what the plans are for Stewart Airport.
- Comment: There is only one east-west corridor and it relies on autos.
- Response: Mike Anderson stated that the project team had to start by developing alternatives but that the process of considering alternatives has altered our thinking in many ways. A station cannot be located at the quarry on the assumption that TOD will occur there. It is up to the community to step up and identify TOD sites and opportunities.
- Comment: White Plains is a big problem, because everyone drives there in single-occupant vehicles.
- Response: Jeff Zupan responded saying that it is his understanding that the city of White Plains assumes that the offices being built there will be filled by people driving to work. Based on that assumption, they have provided sufficient parking to accommodate this mode of commutation.
- Further
Response: Ed Buroughs agreed with Mr. Zupan's assessment. He noted, however, that people do use transit to access White Plains as well. One reason for the high number of automobile trips is the price of parking, which may be understated.
- Further
Response: Rob Lane stated that Yonkers has reduced available parking. However, they have also expanded road access into the downtown area.

Question: David Greenblatt asked if the project’s analysis was constrained by what the Federal agencies will allow.

Response: Mike Anderson responded that analysis must use approved analytical methods and forecasts. To the extent that the communities can convince the federal agencies that they will encourage TOD, the forecasts can be modified.

Question: David Greenblatt also asked if it were possible to take county-wide growth rates and redirect those to specific sites. Rob Lane asked if TOD could be projected to specific sites.

Response: Andrew Parker suggested that it may be possible to look at a range of future conditions. Mike Anderson also responded saying the project has to use approved forecasts and geographic distributions.

Jeff Zupan also commented on this matter by saying that the project needs to show conformance to federal requirements because there is so little federal money available. The region is going to request substantial funding for projects such as Eastside Access (\$3 billion), 2nd Avenue subway (\$10 billion), and Access to the Region’s Core (\$2-3 billion). There may not be money available for Tappan Zee Bridge. The question is can we say to federal agencies that we want to do TOD to improve project effectiveness.

Mike Anderson also responded saying that the issue is not only New Starts funding but also funds to offset the cost of the bridge. We have little leeway to manipulate the model that is being used to evaluate project alternatives and that we gain credibility if we use the approved approach. Jeff Zupan commented that this matter is very complex.

Comment: David Greenblatt suggested that we should look at the history of I-83 where it was determined that the land use recommendation of an expert panel should be followed rather than those of current community plans. Dave also asked if congestion pricing is being considered for general traffic.

Response: Mike Anderson responded that currently there are variable tolls only for trucks. However, congestion pricing could be considered for general traffic, as well, in the future.

Question: Are developments such as that proposed for the GM site, which proposes over a thousand residential units, being addressed. How are impacts of this development on Route 9 traffic being addressed in concert with the Tappan Zee Bridge project?

Response: Mike Anderson responded that for overall modeling purposes, the GM development is being addressed in the aggregate. John Szeligowski also commented by saying that under appropriate circumstances the GM project could be addressed in the Cumulative Impacts section of the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 DEIS in terms of traffic impacts at specific locations along Route 9.