



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

Meeting Minutes

***Stakeholders' Advisory Working Groups (SAWGs)
Traffic and Transit SAWG Meeting #3***

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



September 6, 2007

Meeting Title:	Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Groups (SAWGs) Traffic and Transit SAWG Meeting #3
Meeting Purpose:	Exchange of information
Location/Date:	Best Western Motel in Nyack, NY. September 6, 2007
Agenda:	Item 1. Introduction by Paul Plotczyk (Page 2) Item 2. Presentation (Page 2) Item 3. Questions and comments (Page 2)
Attendees:	Name Chuck Borgman Hon. Harriet Cornell John F. Crews Michelle Ernst Maureen Morgan Julius Levine Joan Connors John P. McLaughlin Janet Zagoria Jay Fallik Orrin Getz Hon. Lawrence Lynn Patrick Gerdin Ben Gross Mary Jane Shimsky Steven Higashide Members of the agencies and consultant team.

Agenda Item 1

Introduction to Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Groups by Joe Passanello and Paul Stinson

Agenda

1. What are high occupancy/toll (HOT) lanes?
2. HOT Lane Examples from Other Cities
3. HOT lanes in Rockland County

The facilitator, Dr. Stinson (WSA) told the group that full results of the HOT lane analysis are not yet available.

Jim Coyle introduced David Rubin, who gave the presentation.

Agenda Item 2

Presentation

Agenda Item 3

Questions and Comments

Question: Several questions arose about how the HOT lanes could be accessed, and how that access would be enforced.

Response: Mr. Rubin stated that the HOT lanes would be separated from general purpose lanes with striping and a buffer. Slip ramps at select locations would enable entry and exit from the lanes, with EZPass sensors at those points. If drivers did not have EZPass transponders, cameras would identify them and they would be issued tickets.

Question: Julius Levine asked whether the HOT lanes would be available for general (free) use if there were an accident in the general purpose lanes.

Response: Mr. Rubin stated that they would not, but they would be available for emergency vehicles.

Comment: Larry Lynn stated that removal of a lane would be a disaster.

Response: Mr. Rubin noted that the HOT lanes would be an additional lane, and no general purpose lanes would be removed.

The group was quizzed if anyone had experience with HOT lanes in other parts of the country. Orrin Getz had been on HOT lanes in Sand Diego and stated that it was “positive.”

Suggestion: Larry Lynn suggested that people should be able to dynamically convert their EZPass to an HOV3 transponder by calling in.

Response: Mr. Coyle noted that at this stage we were discussing concepts, and noted that technology is constantly changing. Certainly the project team does not want to create anything burdensome. Mr. Rubin noted that new airbag technology may also be able to determine occupancy in vehicles and communicate that to transponders. This comment led to some SAWG members to state concerns about “big brother” invasions of privacy.

Question: Maureen Morgan asked why the original consortium behind the State Route 91 HOT lanes in Orange County backed out.

Response: Mr. Rubin answered that they were not earning as much revenue as hoped.

Question: Mr. Fallik asked if the HOT lane tolls would be limited to some maximum level.

Response: Mr. Rubin stated that right now the concept is they would not, so as to always ensure Level of Service B in the lanes. Mr. Coyle noted that the “toll is the throttle,” to restrict demand in the HOT lanes.

Question: Harriet Cornell said it would be useful for drivers to know the toll before they have to pay.

Response: Mr. Rubin answered that indeed, tolls would be posted well before drivers entered the HOT lanes.

Question: Mr. Levine asked why the team did not propose putting in an additional general purpose lane.

Response: Mr. Rubin answered that a general purpose lane would simply fill up with new traffic. A HOT lane would instead provide dependability for transit, high occupancy vehicles, and others who choose to pay..

Question: Mr. Shimsky asked about costs.

Response: The answer was \$6-6.5 billion, including a new Tappan Zee Bridge. Mr. Shimsky expressed concern that taxpayers would have to pay for facilities they don’t use. Mr. Coyle and Mr. Kartalis noted that a finance study is ongoing. Mr. Passanello stressed that the HOT lane also supports bus rapid transit (BRT).

Question: Mr. Fallik asked if BRT would still be in the HOT lanes if CRT is chosen as the transit mode.

Response: Mr. Rubin answered that some bus service would still be provided in the HOT lanes even in that alternative, though it would not be as extensive as in the full BRT alternative.

Mr. Coyle stated that the full BRT alternative would support up to 50,000 riders a day.

The facilitator noted that the HOT lanes would be used by three types of travelers: SOVs who pay a toll, HOVs, and BRT users.

Question: Ms. Morgan asked how HOT lane would exit the highway and wondered if exiting vehicles would have to weave across two lanes of traffic. It was noted that this is the current configuration of the LIE HOV lane. Mr. Shimsky expressed his skepticism that the LIE configuration works well.

Response: Mr. Rubin responded that direct ramps are being considered at select locations.

Orrin Getz told the group that I-84 has dedicated exits for HOV users. Mr. Rubin replied that this would be a good thing to do – if there was enough room.

Question: Harriet Cornell asked about speed limits and was told that they would be the same as in general purpose lanes.

Question: Mr. Shimsky asked about the width of the new highway and the bridge.

Response: Mark Roche described how all of the improvements in the proposed new bridge, including HOT lanes and full shoulders, would bring the width to 210 feet, as opposed to a width of 91 feet on the current bridge. The team also stressed that the right-of-way is 250 feet throughout most of the corridor in Rockland County, while the existing road is generally 110 feet wide.

Maureen Morgan stated that the project is supposed to “merge” Rockland and Westchester, and noted that the group had spent the entire time discussing Rockland and not Westchester. She felt that building more road space is counterintuitive and “as wrong as I can imagine.”

Mr. Coyle again stressed that HOT lanes offer transit benefits, and that no alternative offers only highway solutions.

Maureen Morgan speculated that where HOT lanes merge back into general purpose lanes in Westchester there would be massive impediments.

In response, Mr. Rubin pointed out that there are already five lanes between Interchanges 9 and 8. Mr. Shimsky asked if that capacity would absorb vehicles coming off the HOT lanes. It was noted that a HOT lane is in effect half a lane in terms of volume.

Question: There were some questions about capacity at Route 119 – how can you add traffic there if it is already at capacity.

Response: Mr. Coyle noted that there will be growth there in any case; the question is how best to manage that growth.

Question: It was asked whether HOT lanes would reduce traffic in the parallel general purpose lanes.

Response: Modeling suggest there would be some reductions (compared to a no-build scenario), but probably not significant ones.

Comment: Ms., Morgan asked to “read into the record” the history of HOV lanes in the corridor. She noted that they were considered in Westchester, but were killed in 1998 by the governor, as they were deemed not appropriate. Mr. Coyle stated that this had not been forgotten. Ms. Morgan said they would have failed in Westchester because there would be many different destinations.

Mr. Rubin then presented a simulation of traffic conditions with a HOT lane. While the volume used were “synthetic” (i.e., did not yet reflect true conditions), the simulation illustrated how the HOT lanes would operate.

Question: Ms. Zagoria was unclear as to what was being done in Westchester.

Response: Mr. Rubin noted that the study team was told not to suggest any highway improvements east of Interchange 8. Ms. Morgan agreed with these instructions.

Question: Ms. Zagoria wondered who made that decision.

Response: Ms. Morgan recited several points of agreement that were made at the beginning of the study six years ago. One was not to alter I-287. Another was to limit takings. “An agreement is an agreement.”

The next SAWG meeting will discuss BRT. A discussion followed as to whether LRT or CRT should be presented at the subsequent meeting.