



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)
Traffic and Transit SAWG Meeting***

Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor Project



November 4, 2010

Meeting Title:	Stakeholders' Advisory Working Group (SAWG) Traffic and Transit SAWG
Meeting Purpose:	Exchange of information
Location/Date:	Nyack Library Nyack, New York November 4, 2010, 6:00 – 7:35 PM
Agenda:	Introduction Presentation and Discussion Questions, Answers, and Comments
Attendees:	<u>Traffic and Transit SAWG Members</u> Charles Borgman Joan Connors, Airmont Citizens Liaison Committee Orrin Getz, New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers Richard Harrington Jane Keller Julius Levine, Rockland County Conservation Association Lawrence Lynn, Mayor, Village of Grand View-on-Hudson Richard May Mary Jane Shimsky, Assemblyman Richard Brodsky's Office John Tangredi <u>Other SAWG Members</u> Nancy Low-Hogan, Orangetown Town Board <u>Project Team Members</u> Craig Teepell, New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) Jill Ross, New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA) Wai Cheung, NYSTA Frank Grande, AECOM Rita Campon, Parsons George Paschalis, Howard Stein-Hudson

Introduction

Craig Teepell (NYSDOT) welcomed members of the Traffic and Transit Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Group (SAWG) and introduced the evening’s agenda, which was to continue the discussion of the proposed highway design improvements in Rockland County and to update members on the work accomplished since the last SAWG meeting. At this meeting, the primary focus was on the proposed eastbound and westbound climbing lanes and improvements to Interchange 13. Mr. Teepell encouraged participation in the discussion and asked participants to introduce themselves.

Presentation and Discussion

Several major highway design improvements are being studied as part of the ongoing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to improve mobility along the corridor. These highway design improvements take into consideration the proposed alignments for both commuter rail transit (CRT) and bus rapid transit (BRT) in the corridor. In the western project corridor, the highway improvements are:

- **Climbing Lanes:** At Interchange 11, currently the westbound Thruway transitions from four lanes to three, resulting in a bottleneck, increased congestion, and greater potential for accidents. The steep climbs westbound from Interchange 12 to 13 and eastbound from Interchange 12 to 11 create operational problems due to slower-moving vehicles. For this reason, climbing lanes were studied in these segments.
- **Collector/Distributor (C/D) Roads:** At the Interchange 13 cloverleaf ramps, the limited area to merge/weave causes turbulence. Introduction of C/D roads would separate the merge/weave movement from general traffic.

1. Climbing Lanes

Frank Grande (AECOM, environmental consultant) gave a brief PowerPoint presentation on the proposed climbing lanes. Climbing lanes are auxiliary, or supplemental, lanes on the right side of a steep highway that accommodate slow-moving vehicles such as trucks. Because of the topography of Rockland County, long segments of the Thruway have uphill grades as it crosses the county; for example, it has a 3% grade from the Hackensack River to Interchange 13. Steep grades slow down trucks, which in turn slow down general traffic. Cars sometimes attempt to change lanes to bypass the trucks. In these situations, climbing lanes can improve overall highway operations and safety.

To determine the need for climbing lanes along the Thruway, the project team performed a “warrants analysis” using guidelines established by AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials). The analysis evaluated whether the addition of the lanes is justified by considering the extent of truck speed reductions, vehicle volumes and levels of service (LOS), and accident rates. Results showed that trucks experience a slowdown of greater than 10 mph in critical lengths of the highway: westbound from the Tappan Zee Bridge to Route 59 in Monsey, and eastbound in the steep grades between Interchange 14 B and Route 59 in Monsey and in the climb from Interchange 11 to 12. In addition to the truck speed reductions, these sections of the highway also experience a poor level of service (generally, LOS E-F) and accident rates that are substantially higher (by nearly 3 times) than the statewide average. For these reasons, the team is proposing the implementation of climbing lanes in the eastbound direction along the steep one-mile climb between 12 and 11, and westbound along the seven miles

from Interchange 11 to the Spring Valley truck toll plaza. Since the segments where climbing lanes are warranted are not continuous, auxiliary lanes would be added to connect them. The auxiliary lanes would maintain lane balance and create a continuous westbound fourth lane from Interchange 11 (where the lane drop occurs) to the truck toll plaza.

Questions (Q), Answers (A), and Comments (C) on the Proposed Climbing Lanes

Q: What are the relative altitudes in Rockland County?

A: The elevation is about 610 feet in Monsey at the Route 59 crossing--the high point in the corridor--and about 250 feet at the Palisades in Nyack. The Thruway over the Hackensack River is at an elevation of about 65 feet, which is the lowest point in the corridor. The length of the corridor in our study is about 14 miles in Rockland.

C: Climbing lanes are used successfully on Route 17.

Q: Why does an area have a level of service C in the PM peak period (going westbound) and a level of service F in the AM peak hour (going eastbound)?

A: It's an issue of demand and flow. In the morning, this traffic is backing up because of the major movements from the Palisades Interstate Parkway (PIP) and the Garden State Parkway (GSP) joining the eastbound Thruway. As a result the eastbound traffic backs up from the downstream congestion, creating a poor level of service upstream. In the westbound direction large volumes leave the Thruway on those same connecting roads, so traffic releases and level of service improves in the western end of the corridor.

Q: What is the impact on noise of all the trucks on the road?

A: We will be analyzing noise impacts fully in the DEIS.

Q: Have measurements been taken of existing conditions for air and noise in Rockland?

A: We have receptors in place along the corridor, and they are taking measurements now.

C: I agree that climbing lanes can be helpful. There is one on the Taconic Parkway as it meets Interstate 84, where there is a steeper grade, and the lane works well.

Q: At Interchange 12, going eastbound, you have not only a climb but also an entrance on the hill. Would you have just one climbing lane there, or would you consider adding additional ones in that area to alleviate conditions there, especially where cars merge in with trucks?

A: The proposed eastbound climbing lane would be implemented by extending the Interchange 12 on ramp all the way to Interchange 11. Vehicles entering at Interchange 12 may continue in the extended lane or weave left if desired. Slow-moving trucks would either weave right into the climbing lane or continue in the lane just before it. This arrangement would allow the two left lanes to be free of slow-moving vehicles. It is also important to be mindful not only of the transportation benefits but also the environmental impacts when adding climbing lanes. Specifically, in the area between Interchanges 12 and 11, where proposed climbing lanes would be added to both sides of the highway, the widening of the highway and addition of transit would likely result in impacts to Mountain View Nature Reserve on the north side and possibly to properties on the south side as well. Adding an additional eastbound climbing lane would increase these impacts without necessarily providing an additional transportation benefit.

Q: Would the BRT vehicles need to use the climbing lanes so speeds can be maintained? Or can they maintain their own speeds?

A: No, they would not need to use the climbing lanes. It is anticipated that by the time the BRT is operating, there will be improved, state-of-the-art vehicles that will have the power to climb the steep grades without slowing down other high occupancy vehicles.

C: Some existing New Jersey Transit buses, such as the MCI coaches, actually have more power than people think, adequate enough to climb these lanes.

C: There's a trend to smart cars and smaller engines that may not be able to make the grades.

C: Cars now have much better performance than they did 30 years ago, with more powerful engines, better acceleration, and better gas mileage. There's been a huge improvement.

C: Another problem is that drivers forget to accelerate or decelerate as grades change because they don't always pay attention.

Q: That's why they have signs that say "Maintain Speeds on Upgrade" in some places. Why doesn't the Thruway put up these signs?

A: There are some, but usually this is not a problem; it's the speeding that's more of a concern.

C: It's especially important to maintain speeds in relatively hilly areas, which people who come from the city aren't used to.

Q: Would sound barriers or noise walls be used to control noise?

A: Yes, noise walls will be installed where the analysis shows they are necessary.

Q: Are noise walls included in the contingency factor?

A: Yes, we anticipate that they will be part of the mitigation for the project, and therefore they have been assumed in the contingency although we don't yet have the actual costs.

2. Interchange 13

Interchange 13 has a cloverleaf configuration with eight basic movements. This configuration results in vehicular conflicts and congestion, particularly in the weaving sections of the cloverleaf "loops." High volumes in the peak periods on the different ramps, as well as conflicting movements to and from the PIP, result in turbulence, which impacts traffic flow on the mainline. Level of service in this area is poor, ranging from D to F.

Collector/distributor (C/D) roads in each direction, separated by a concrete barrier, are proposed to separate the weave/merge movements at Interchange 13 from the through traffic on the Thruway. Because weaving and merging would take place in these additional roads, the main line would operate more effectively and without interruption. Vehicles that want to go from the Thruway to the PIP would use the exit ramp before the interchange and join the parallel C/D road. The exiting vehicles would merge with the entering vehicles from the PIP along the C/D road, and those entering the Thruway would use the entrance ramp beyond the C/D road to merge into the general purpose lanes.

Since the public open houses, the project team has continued to refine the design of the C/D roads to further reduce backups. By stretching out the alignment and increasing the length of the eastbound and westbound acceleration lanes, the new design would provide more space for the multiple vehicle interactions that occur in this interchange, thereby decreasing queues and possibly improving overall operation of the CD road. The longer loops may potentially result in some property impacts, though further work is necessary to see if they can be minimized or avoided. On the west side, there could be some impacts in the area around Route 304; specifically, one business could be impacted due to the combination of C/D roads, climbing lanes, HOV/HOT lanes or busway, and full, 12-foot shoulders. On the south side, two businesses and one residence may be impacted, although not until the implementation of the commuter rail transit service in the future. However, all these potential impacts will be

studied further as the DEIS continues to see if they can be avoided or minimized with refinements to the design (e.g., by reducing shoulder widths or justifying the retention of non-standard features).

SAWG members were then shown two videos of simulated traffic operations on Interchange 13, with and without the C/D roads. The Paramics software, a traffic analysis tool, is used create a virtual model of traffic interactions. The first video, which showed the eastbound interchange in the AM peak period with projected (future) volumes, demonstrated how vehicles back up on ramps, affecting traffic on the mainline as well. Multiple interactions—such as 300 vehicles wanting to get off the Thruway while 1200 want to get on it—add to the slowdown and congestion.

The second Paramics video showed Interchange 13 with the implementation of C/D roads and lengthened ramps. As in the first video, the projected traffic was shown in the eastbound direction during the AM peak period. With the C/D roads in place, the traffic within and through the interchange moved better and more quickly.

Questions (Q), Answers (A), and Comments (C) on the Interchange 13 Improvements

Q: You're showing us the plan for HOV lanes. Would the busway alternatives also have C/D roads?

A: Yes, the C/D roads are common to all the build alternatives.

C: If you want to see C/D roads, they are using them on Exit 165 on the Garden State Parkway (GSP). They also are used on the Long Island Expressway.

Q: With the improvements in place, you are going to have sharper curves on the exit ramps. Won't that slow down traffic?

A: Yes, traffic is likely to slow down on the ramps, but still operate within design standards. Again, this concept will be further refined in the DEIS and Final Design; the curve may be widened.

Q: Is anything happening farther west in terms of highway improvements?

A: We are looking at extending the non-standard acceleration lane at Old Nyack Turnpike as an auxiliary lane to Interchange 14. When CRT is implemented in the future this ramp would be closed. We are also looking at improving the segment between the westbound 14 entrance ramp and the 14A exit ramp to address the merging problems in this area. By extending one of the lanes, we could improve the safety in this segment.

Other Questions (Q), Answers (A), and Comments (C)

Q: Will people from around here be able to get on the proposed Interchange 10 going north toward Interchange 11?

A: Yes. We would be reconfiguring the interchange as a diamond design, which would add an eastbound exit ramp.

Q: Where does the eastbound exit (Interchange 10) ramp go to?

A: It would connect to the intersection at the top of the ramp. From there vehicles would proceed either south on Route 9W or northwest onto Franklin Street. Northbound Route 9W, which would be relocated, would be accessed by a U-turn about 1,000 feet south of the intersection.

C: When you're going eastbound, getting off Interchange 11 doesn't seem as onerous as when you're coming westbound.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.