

Questions to Assemblyman Brodsky 10/23/00

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October 23, 2000

The Honorable Richard Brodsky
5 West Main Street, Suite 205
Elmsford, NY 10523

RE: Questions for the Thruway Authority regarding its proposal for a new Tappan Zee Bridge.

Dear Assemblyman Brodsky:

Thank you for meeting with us to discuss the Thruway Authority's proposal for a new Tappan Zee Bridge, congestion relief pricing and related concerns. It was a rewarding and refreshing discussion and I thought you raised a number of important issues. I hope you also found the meeting useful.

As you requested, I have put together a list of questions that could be addressed to the Thruway Authority. In so doing, I have drawn from the work done by the TSTC, the Regional Plan Association and Sherwood Chorost. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with us.

Sincerely,

Drew Fixell

Cc: TSTC
Paul Janos
Tom Basher
Sherwood Chorost

Questions for the Thruway Authority regarding its proposal to replace the Tappan Zee Bridge

- 1) Have you determined the number (either absolute or as a percentage) of significant traffic tie-ups that are caused by conditions related to the capacity of the TZB? Such tie-ups would not include those caused by the tolls, construction on or near the bridge, sun-glare, or insufficient capacity or awkward design of the Thruway on either side of the bridge. Any tie-ups related to accidents on the bridge should be identified separately and analyzed to determine whether they are due to the current bridge structure (and whether they would have been preventable on a new bridge). Tie-ups caused by simple cases of stalled cars may be included in the total.
- 2) Have you or will you provide funding to the affected local communities to undertake independent engineering studies of the feasibility and cost of repairing/reconstructing in place the western causeway? Has any respected third party reviewed in detail your contention that the causeway cannot be repaired/reconstructed in place?
- 3) Will you undertake an independent transit feasibility study of the Tappan Zee crossing to ascertain whether commuter rail, light rail, guided busway or enhanced bus service is the best solution?
- 4) The Task Force report concludes that a bus/vanpool lane on the TZB is infeasible. However, the report did not include carpool use and premium priced single-occupant vehicles in its analysis of such a lane. If these two categories were included, what would be the effect on traffic congestion and would your conclusion change as a result? What would be the combined effect of such a lane when combined with TDM measures such as variable pricing? If these methods were used in conjunction with enhanced bus service and the West Shore rail, what would be the effect on congestion in the entire corridor?
- 5) The idea for a new bus stop/rail station near the toll plaza was mentioned in the report but no analysis of its potential impact was provided. What, in fact, would be the impact of such a project, (which would have separate and easy access before the tolls), on commute times, bus usage, and congestion? Similarly, has any consideration been given to expanding such a station by replacing the State Police barracks and allowing commuters to park there instead of at the existing Tarrytown station.
- 6) The Thruway Authority is about to undertake a major highway reconstruction project just east of the TZB that will rationalize the I287/87 interchange. There has also been mention of a plan to continue the fourth westbound lane to the PIP. Once these are completed, what is the likely impact on traffic congestion in the corridor and on the bridge? Shouldn't any traffic studies and decisions related to the TZB take place after their completion and if not, why not?
- 7) Do you have an alternative to the analysis performed by Metro North in February 1994 which projected daily ridership on a Stewart Airport to Portchester commuter rail line at 13,230?
- 8) Based on an estimated \$3 billion construction cost and Metro North's projected ridership estimate, the capital cost totals about \$225,000 per rider. How does this compare with other mass transit projects, including the West Shore Commuter Rail? What reasons do you have to assume that funding for such a project will be

forthcoming from any source? Has the federal government ever provided funding for a project with these characteristics?

- 9) Assuming the new TZB is built, how long will it take for traffic congestion to return to current levels (with and without the rail component)?
- 10) Given the enormous height differential between the Hudson line and the TZB, if a rail line is built, how will it provide a "one-seat" ride to NYC? If this is possible, how long would such a ride take and to what extent would its length discourage ridership?
- 11) If we accept your contention that a new TZB will be limited to four motor vehicle lanes in each direction, how would such a bridge significantly reduce rush-hour congestion when compared to the current bridge (which also provides four lanes in the appropriate rush-hour direction)? How would this reduce congestion in the corridor if the thruway itself provides only four lanes in each direction?
- 12) Have you done any analyses of the costs and impacts of providing inexpensive, extensive, flexible and luxurious commuter bus service from Orange and Rockland to Westchester? Have you compared such proposals to the Task Force recommendations for the TZB? If not, shouldn't such analyses be performed before any decisions are made regarding the TZB and commuter rail options?
- 13) On page 2-3 of the Task Force report, it is reported that almost 30% of TZ trips are Rockland to NYC trips. What portion of these are to sites not served by mass transit and how has this been factored into your analyses of the number of trips saved by a new rail line?
- 14) Have you conducted air quality and noise level studies along the I-287 corridor to determine if conditions meet National Ambient Air Quality Standards? How would those conditions be affected if a new bridge were to be built without additional mass transit options?
- 15) In the text of the Task Force report (see, for example, Exec Summary – 2), there is reference to traffic forecasts based on "low growth (20 percent more growth overall) or high growth (30 percent more growth overall)." However, the table that provides the bases for the actual analysis (B-11) use growth of 26% and 36%, respectively. Why is there this discrepancy and how does it affect your conclusions?
- 16) Why does the Task Force report assume an across-the-board 20% to 30% (or a 26% to 36%) traffic growth rate by 2020 when its own data (Table A-5) show that from 1994 to 1999 there has been zero growth in eastbound traffic volume during the peak hours of 7:00 to 9:00 A.M.?
- 17) How was the "capacity" of the TZB reported in the Task Force report determined? Has this calculation been reviewed by outside experts? Why does the stated capacity of the reversible lane appear to be significantly lower, at 1,200 cars per hour, than the other lanes, which have a capacity of 2,000 cars per hour? What is the capacity per hour of the toll booths?
- 18) Figure A-1 in the Task Force report appears to indicate that morning peak-hour eastbound vehicle speed *on the bridge* is about 30mph and is significantly higher than several other segments of the corridor. Accordingly, the graph clearly suggests that the TZB is not the source of traffic congestion. Why do you then conclude that the primary reason to replace the TZB is to alleviate congestion?
- 19) What are the most likely locations of the proposed new bridge? How far from the existing bridge would a new bridge likely be built and what is the most likely width

of the new bridge? In each alternative, how close would the bridge be to the nearest residences and what would be the likely effects on its neighbors?

- 20) What are the details of the analysis presented in the Task Force Report that leads to the estimates of lowered traffic volumes from the three cost-effective solutions, i.e., Total Demand Management (TDM), Value Pricing (VP) and West Shore Rail (WSR)? Has this analysis been reviewed by outside experts?
- 21) The Task Force report cites 4 major goals by which to evaluate specific proposals: 1) improve mobility in the I-287 corridor; 2) minimize environmental impacts; 3) develop timely solutions; 4) develop cost-effective alternatives. What is the specific impact on each of these goals of TDM, VP and WSR? How does their combined impact compare with that of a new T'ZB?