

Letter to the Editor from Mayor Fixell re 3/4/12 Editorial:

In your Sunday March 4 editorial, you wrote enthusiastically about a proposal to add a ramp from the Tappan Zee Bridge to the Tarrytown train station. While the goal to provide a “congestion-free link between bus and rail” is definitely laudable and something we strongly support, you seem to have overlooked that this idea was originally included by the State in the now-rejected mass transit portion of the project. More importantly, you also seemed to have passed over a considerably more effective and far-reaching concept to achieve that link that the Village of Tarrytown has repeatedly (including at the recent hearing) proposed, namely build a new bus-rail transfer station into the new bridge’s toll plaza. Such a facility (the “TZB Station”) would allow bus passengers headed to Grand Central to quickly transfer to a new platform below. And aside from offering a quick congestion-free link, the TZB Station would also enable busses to seamlessly continue on, without delay, to other locations throughout Westchester. This characteristic, which the ramp simply would not provide, would vastly increase the flexibility, efficiency and value of the entire bus system by allowing NYC-bound passengers from Rockland to utilize every bus crossing the bridge.

In addition, the facility, if designed properly, could provide a number of other extremely valuable added benefits also not available with the ramp. First, it would reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, and save time by providing pedestrian and more convenient automobile drop-off access to Metro-North for the many commuters living nearby who now crowd the already congested streets leading to the Tarrytown train station. Second, by providing residents in the immediate vicinity of the new bridge with walking distance access to the Metro-North trains, the facility would add enormous value to properties that will otherwise be so negatively affected by the construction and presence of this massive piece of infrastructure (see Phil Reisman’s column in the same issue of your paper). Whether this would completely offset that impact remains to be seen, but there is no question that it would substantially mitigate it. Third, the TZB Station would provide both broad environmental and financial added value by enabling reverse commuters, i.e., those taking the Hudson Line to Tarrytown, to walk and/or to significantly shorten their post-train commutes to the many nearby employment destinations, such as the office buildings and hotels along Routes 119 and Broadway. And fourth, such a facility would avoid the substantial additional negative environmental impacts the ramp (itself an imposing, view-obstructing structure) and the busses traveling on it, would inflict on the already heavily-impacted neighborhoods through which it would traverse. Similarly, the TZB station, unlike the ramp, comes with no need to condemn valuable properties in the vicinity of the existing train station, and would, by removing busses, improve traffic flow in that heavily congested area.

Of course, we are not so naïve as to believe that such a facility would be easy or inexpensive to construct or be simple to incorporate into Metro-North’s operating system. However, given the totality of the benefits of the TZB Station, and the enormity of the bridge project and the magnitude of the negative impacts that need mitigation, it is incumbent on the State authority to give real and careful consideration to including it. It may require making tough choices, but as the saying goes, this isn’t rocket science, and if there’s the will, it certainly is not an insurmountable task to find the funding and solve the operating issues. And given the nature of this project, if it is not done now, it will be all but impossible to add later.