

T2B In Reply 6/7/01

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In Reply

The Bridge is Not the Problem

Over the last few weeks, the Journal News has published a number of articles and an editorial regarding the Tappan Zee Bridge that have been filled with misleading information, crucial omissions and, ultimately, incorrect conclusions. Clearly, it is time to set the record straight.

First, it is a simple fact that the bridge is *not* the cause of congestion in the region. As shown in the Thruway's I-287 Task Force Report (Figure A-1), the average Westchester-bound speed *on the bridge* during the morning rush-hour is 30 mph, including the impact of the tolls which slow cars to 5mph. Crossing the bridge takes only about 6 minutes. In contrast, traffic slows to 8mph from Elmsford to White Plains.

While contrary to conventional wisdom, a cursory review of the roadway configuration reveals the reason – I-287 has only 3 lanes while the bridge has 4 lanes in the appropriate rush-hour direction. The bridge simply is not the bottleneck in this system. And once the Easy-Pass lanes are upgraded, average speeds on the bridge will rise even higher.

Second, the Thruway is not an impartial arbiter. In your editorial, you write, "This is a time...to initiate studies without any preconceived ideas." Well, despite its protestations to the contrary, the Thruway has repeatedly demonstrated that it favors one preconceived idea, i.e., building a new bridge. Here are just three of the many examples of Thruway bias:

- 1) Thruway officials repeatedly state publicly that the deck of the bridge on the Rockland side (the causeway) *cannot* be repaired and must be replaced. However, in an unscripted response to a written inquiry, Thruway representatives wrote: "...in the mid-1990s we needed to replace a portion of the center lane *on the Causeway* due to deck deterioration... (we replaced) the deck and supporting steel girders with new prefabricated deck/girder units."
- 2) The Thruway published a survey conducted by Zogby International so fraught with bias that Mr. Zogby himself backed away from it. Its obvious to anyone reading it that the questions were designed to elicit responses supporting a new

bridge.

- 3) The Thruway's I-287 Task Force Report is replete with "errors" that slant its findings. To cite just one: While the report repeatedly states that traffic will grow 20% to 30% over 20 years, hidden in its projections are over-estimates of 26% to 36% (Table B-11).

Third, it appears that the Thruway's "promise" to provide a Rockland to Westchester rail link is a pipe dream designed to lull residents into complacency.

The proposal to build a direct connection to the Hudson line would require both engineering and financial miracles because of the enormous change in elevation from the bridge to the rail tracks. Alternately, an east-west line across Westchester is unlikely to generate significant ridership because of the widely dispersed locations of employment centers in Westchester and the absence of extensive *intra-county* mass transit. In fact, the MTA in 1994 rejected a similar cross-Hudson rail line precisely because of low ridership projections and high costs.

To make matters worse, the MTA, which must fund mass transit projects, is already facing enormous difficulty funding its currently identified capital needs. Similarly, competition for Federal mass-transit dollars is exceedingly fierce. Consequently, if we are to believe in the promise of mass transit, the Thruway must first prove that their proposals are feasible, develop specific plans, and secure the necessary funding sources. It is not unreasonable to demand that these steps be taken *before* plans for a new bridge are allowed to proceed further.

Fourth, it must be emphasized that the existing bridge can be maintained as a safe and effective transportation link. Just two years ago, the then Chairman of the Thruway Authority publicly stated, "motorists can continue to rely on (the Bridge's) safety and convenience well into the 21st century." Independent experts contradict the Thruway's assertion that structural issues, including earthquake resistance, cannot be resolved.

Moreover, the Thruway has paid only lip service to numerous alternative traffic-reduction measures that don't require adding capacity. Van/car pooling, congestion pricing for cars, West Shore rail, and enhanced bus service all have been virtually ignored. We would be far better off if only a small portion of the funding destined for a new bridge were invested in comprehensive traffic management. Before wasting billions of tax dollars in an ill-conceived plan that won't accomplish its goals, the Thruway should fully explore every opportunity to ease traffic congestion through other means. To do otherwise is an abdication of its responsibility to serve the public.

The following is a list of municipal officials who have co-signed the above "In Reply/Community View" article and have asked to have their names published in conjunction with it.

Tarrytown:

Trustees:

Mayor Paul Janos

Tom Basher, Sherwood Chorost, Julia Fullenweider, Dominic Morabito, Susan Sincero

Nyack:

Deputy Mayor John Shields

Trustees:

Richard Kavesh, Ray O'Connell

Greenburgh:

Supervisor Paul Feiner

South Nyack:

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Grandview:

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Vincent O'Brien, Fred Devan, James Howarth, Curt Lowey