

## **RECENT PUBLIC INPUT - COMMENTS RECEIVED**

### **Introduction**

Twelve public information open houses were held throughout Long Island in May and June 2001 and an information booth was staffed at the Smith Haven Mall in the Town of Brookhaven during the weekend of November 3 and 4, 2001. About 1,500 Long Islanders took advantage of these opportunities to meet with members of the Study Team to discuss the Proposed Plan and ask questions; many also offered comments. The vast majority of the comments have been supportive of the Proposed Plan with strong support for the Long Island Rapid Commute (LIRC) transit system with rapid commute vehicles (RCVs) and for the roadway improvements. Other comments relating to the plan included:

- Marketing is needed to get people out of their cars.
- Pedestrian and bikeway improvements need to be part of the plan.
- Include improvements to existing transit systems to complement LIRC.
- Include Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) system expansion and improvements.

Many of the comments received at the open houses and the mall information booth, as well as from e-mails sent to the Study Team, 24-hour telephone hotline, and letters to LI media, focused on deficiencies of the existing transportation systems serving Long Island. Other comments focused on details of the Proposed Plan. Summaries of these comments, along with responses, are provided below.

### **Existing Transportation Systems**

More and better transit is needed on Long Island. Local bus systems need to be expanded and improved.

The *LITP2000* Study has been coordinated with local bus system improvements planned by transit agencies. Numerous modifications and expansions to existing bus routes and operation will occur as part of the proposed LITP2000 implementation strategy. These improvements will encompass direct connections to unserved and underserved areas, new services for specific travel markets, more frequent service and expanded hours of operation, and new feeder bus routes to LIRR stations. These improvements will provide a major expansion of existing island-wide local bus service and they will facilitate use of the LIRC transit system in the Proposed Plan.

Improvements are needed to the LIRR.

The LIRR has identified a number of projects in their improvement program. These include:

- East Side Access to Grand Central Terminal
- Mainline third track to Hicksville
- Second track to Ronkonkoma

These are also included in the proposed LITP2000 implementation strategy.

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### Traffic signal systems should be improved; signals should be synchronized.

The Long Island Region of the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) operates most of the traffic signals along State routes within coordinated systems. Different plans are in effect for the morning, off-peak period, and evening to provide the maximum throughput for vehicles on the State routes. During the late night and early morning hours when traffic volumes are low, the signals run independently to minimize delays to vehicles on the side streets. The DOT operates 1000 traffic signals and its goal is to re-time signal systems on a 3 to 5 year cycle. This requires a great deal of traffic data collection and field observations along with utilization of signal optimization software to improve traffic flow.

Signals can be optimized to a degree. However, there are several factors that contribute to the appearance that some traffic signals are not synchronized:

- Congestion occurs when traffic volumes exceed roadway capacity.
- Multi-phase signals and high side street volumes limit the green time available for the State route.
- When the directional split is close to 50/50, as it is on many Long Island roads, favoring one direction would negatively impact the other direction. Balancing of traffic delays is needed when optimizing the traffic signals in this condition.
- Undetected equipment failure, such as damage to interconnect cable, can cause signals to be out of synchronization with adjacent signals.

The Region is presently installing a closed loop signal system (CLSS) to improve the ability to monitor the operation of traffic signals. This will allow direct communication with traffic signals from remote locations. CLSS provides alarm reporting for signal failure, malfunction verification, signal timing adjustment, traffic responsive operation, viewing of real time operation, and automated collection of traffic data.

In addition to signal system improvements, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) are being implemented to increase the efficiency of existing roads by methods such as INFORM and computerized systems for routing traffic around accidents or traffic jams.

### Existing roadways need to be widened.

The Proposed plan includes roadway improvements -- widening along 72 miles of state roads and 53 miles of Suffolk County roads, and roadway extensions totaling 6 miles. They were included to address projected future congestion that will not be resolved by the LIRC transit system, local bus system improvements and LIRR improvements.

The *LITP2000* Study Team met with staff from each Long Island town to help decide what roadway improvements would be helpful in the future. Each town suggested roadway improvements that made sense in light of its local growth assumptions; future development goals, including anticipated employment and household growth; and the desire to preserve its residents' quality of life.

Improvements encompass:

- Additional travel lanes
- Continuous center left-turn lanes
- Intersection turn lanes and grade separations
- Roadway extensions

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The goals of these improvements are to:

- Improve traveler safety
- Redirect traffic from residential streets
- Help to better manage overall congestion
- Comply with local development objectives
- Improve transit operating speeds for LIRC and local bus systems

There is a need to reduce heavy truck traffic.

Reduction of long-haul truck movements on Long Island will be accomplished by construction of a rail-truck intermodal freight transportation center at the Pilgrim State Hospital property in Islip. Construction of the intermodal freight transportation center is included in the proposed *LITP2000* Plan. Operation of a rail-truck intermodal freight center at the Pilgrim site will reduce the number of over-the-road tractor-trailers on Long Island's highways as freight movement shifts from trucks to railcars.

Bicycle facilities should be provided/improved.

The Long Island Region of the New York State Department of Transportation will undertake the development of the comprehensive Long Island Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan. This effort will include public involvement and interagency coordination. The need for this effort sprung from the *LITP2000* Study and is currently funded via the approved Unified Planning Work Program of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council.

A bridge or tunnel vehicular crossing of Long Island Sound is needed.

A vehicular crossing of Long Island Sound was evaluated in the *LITP2000* Study. However, the technical analyses showed that such a crossing would be ineffective in managing congestion, because every vehicle leaving Long Island via the crossing would be offset by a vehicle coming to Long Island. Therefore, a Long Island Sound crossing is not included in the Proposed Plan to Manage Congestion. However, this *LITP2000* conclusion does preclude subsequent study and development of a crossing to achieve other goals.

### **The Proposed Plan**

The LIRC system should serve park-and-ride lots, businesses, industries, and shopping centers.

The Rapid Commute Vehicles (RCVs) will use major roadways in residential areas to pick up passengers within a short walk of LIRC transit stops. Some routes will begin at park-and-ride lots for those people not within walking distances of LIRC stops. LIRC routes will be coordinated with local bus routes and with LIRR stations.

The RCVs will use major arterial roadways to access priority lanes on expressways and parkways. Express stations located in the medians of expressways and parkways will allow passengers to transfer to and from other LIRC routes. These median stations will be located at cross-roads so that RCV platforms can be reached from local roads. This will allow passengers to transfer to or from local bus routes and allow residents within walking distance to board the RCVs.

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As the RCVs near their destinations, the vehicles will leave the priority lanes and circulate in commercial areas to drop off passengers at the businesses and industries where they work.

The LIRC transit system will also serve residents traveling to major shopping centers and other attractions. The system will operate seven days a week for most hours of the day to conveniently serve shoppers, late-working employees, and others on flexible schedules.

The LIRC system should be a light rail system.

*LITP2000's* state-of-the-art computer models were used to compare a fixed rail system (light rail or monorail) with over-the-road rubber-tired RCVs. RCVs and the proposed LIRC transit system tested better than a fixed-rail system due to the scattered origins and destinations and trip-making patterns of Long Islanders. Results clearly showed that RCVs would be significantly more effective for managing Long Island's traffic congestion because RCVs are more flexible, offer shorter travel times, and reduce the need for transfers compared to a light rail or monorail system. RCVs can circulate through neighborhoods to pick up passengers, go to new park-and-ride lots or to new LIRC stations. Compared to a fixed-rail system, RCVs will provide more opportunities for door-to-door service, thus eliminating the need, in many cases, to transfer from a feeder bus to another transit vehicle.

It will be difficult to convince people to switch from cars to transit.

One of the goals of the Proposed Plan is to encourage some commuters to divert from autos to the LIRC transit system. Only a small percentage of commuters changing to transit would have a significant impact in alleviating future traffic congestion. To attract riders to the LIRC system, the RCVs would use new priority lanes so that they do not get stuck in traffic and would save riders time. On other major roads, RCVs will be able to bypass cars stopped at red lights by driving along a portion of the shoulder designated for their use. Using currently available electronic communication technologies, RCVs will also be able to "tell" the traffic-signal system when they are approaching a red light. As conditions permit, the RCV will receive a green light to ensure safe, smooth traffic flow. Travel on the LIRC system would offer significant time savings to many commuters and encourage them to use the service rather than drive themselves.

The Long Island Rapid Commute transit system will operate seven days per week for most of each day. Average daily ridership is projected to exceed 200,000 by 2025.

Roadway (parkway) aesthetics should not be compromised.

During the implementation phases of the Proposed Plan, all transportation improvements undertaken by the New York State Department of Transportation would embrace the principles of context sensitive solutions and the Governor's Quality Communities Initiative.

As an example of this approach, the project that provided an additional lane in each direction on the Northern State Parkway between the Meadowbrook and the Wantagh State Parkways was accomplished within the Parkway's right-of-way and provided community-approved sound abatement as well as extensive landscaping. All bridge replacements were designed to eclipse the aesthetic appeal of the original stone arch bridges. The result has been a safer road that is beautiful to drive and that has improved the quality of life for the surrounding community. Any improvements to State highways would be advanced along these same lines.

Explain the difference between the Rapid Commute Vehicle (RCV) and a bus.

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RCVs will combine the look of monorail or Light Rail Transit vehicles with the benefit of routing flexibility offered by a bus. They will be:

- Sleek and modern
- Comfortable, with 20 to 45 seats per vehicle and low floor boarding
- Fast and reliable
- Clean, using low emission technology
- Adaptable to electronic guidance systems

### Tolls should not be implemented on Long Island roadways.

The Proposed Plan does not include tolls. An alternative that was studied included all of the elements of the Proposed Plan plus value pricing and parking charges at worksites. The purposes of testing these pricing elements were to determine their impact on LIRC system ridership and traffic on the roadway network.

Value pricing was defined in the alternative as barrier-free, non-stop electronic payment of tolls on all of Long Island's limited access parkways and highways during the morning and evening peak periods. The toll rate tested was \$0.15 per mile. This would result in a toll of \$2.25 for a 15-mile trip. The tolls would not apply to carpools and vanpools with three or more occupants.

Parking charges at worksites were tested with a rate of \$1.50 per day. This charge would apply to all vehicles, including carpools and vanpools.

Tolls are unpopular on Long Island. A letter in opposition to tolls from the entire Long Island delegation to the New York State Senate was presented to the *LITP2000* Technical Advisory Committee at their June 13, 2000 meeting. The letter stated the following:

“We are writing to express our unequivocal opposition to the concept of establishing tolls on any of Long Island's Parkways.

“We recognize that the members of the LITP 2000 Technical Advisory Committee are required by Federal Law to evaluate all potential strategies to facilitate travel in Suffolk and Nassau counties. Long Island's population, unique geography, and environmental needs will require innovative solutions to meet our future transportation demands. It is important that the members of the Committee focus their valuable time and talents on only those potential improvements which are technically and environmentally feasible, fiscally responsible, improve transportation safety and enjoy strong public support. The placement of tolls fails every one of these important requirements.

“Tolls on our Parkways are an unacceptable alternative that must be removed from any further consideration. We look forward to working with the Committee on more productive strategies to improve our region's quality of life through common sense transportation solutions.”

The letter, dated June 12, 2000, was signed by Senators Caesar Trunzo, Owen H. Johnson, Dean G. Skelos, Kenneth P. LaValle, James J. Lack, Kemp Hannon, Carl L. Marcellino, Michael A. L. Balboni, and Charles J. Fuschillo, Jr.

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Additionally, the scientific testing of the tolling alternative showed that it would dramatically *increase* congestion because many travelers would choose to drive on parallel roads and local streets to avoid paying tolls on the limited access roadways such as the Long Island Expressway.