PIN 0804.89
LONG ISLAND TRANSPORTATION PLAN

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Bethpage High School
November 14, 2001, 5:45 to 7:45 PM

MEETING PURPOSES

The primary purpose of this meeting was to obtain guidance on advancing a Draft Plan for public review. The other purposes of the meeting were to show the LITP2000 video to the TAC, share the results of the most recent public outreach, and review the elements of the proposed Draft Plan.

A motion was made and seconded to advance the Draft Plan presented at the meeting. However, it was agreed that a mail ballot be used to give all TAC members the opportunity to vote on the motion. When written, the Draft Plan will not only identify the proposed transportation system improvements, but it will also describe an implementation strategy. After distribution to the TAC for their review, and subsequent review by the public, the plan will be finalized. The Final Plan will be considered for approval by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council for incorporation into the Regional Transportation Plan.

PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

The presentation included a review of the study timeline, summary of public outreach efforts, viewing of the LITP2000 video, overview of the study, description of the proposed Draft Plan, and suggested steps for its implementation. Highlights of the presentation follow.

1. The Preliminary Preferred Alternative was developed based on:
    - public and agency input resulting from the early and on-going extensive public outreach program; and
    - detailed technical evaluations involving state-of the-art travel demand and traffic forecasting computer models, land use considerations, and town reviews of future development goals and anticipated growth in employment and number of households.

2. The Preliminary Preferred Alternative is projected to reduce traffic congestion delays by 38% and reduce congested roadway miles by 26% beyond LIRR and local bus system improvements when compared to 2020 base conditions, while calling for modest roadway widening along 15% of the highway system.

3. Public input on the Preliminary Preferred Alternative was received from May through November of this year from the following sources:
    - Comments received at 12 Community Open Houses attended by 428 Long Islanders
    - E-mails to the Study Team
    - Website questionnaire
    - 24-hour hotline
    - Letters to L.I. media
    - Smith Haven Mall information booth

4. 70% favorable public opinion was voiced through the open houses and website questionnaires.

5. Smith Haven Mall had an audience of over 1,000 people and 337 questionnaires were completed about the Preliminary Preferred Alternative. Questionnaire results are as follows:
    - 92% of the people agreed that the Long Island Rapid Commute (LIRC) transit system is needed.
    - 85% of the people agreed that they would use the LIRC transit system if it provides frequent service, saves time, has reasonable fares, and has modern, comfortable, clean-fuel vehicles.
    - 86% of the people agreed that the roadway widenings and extensions are needed.

6. The Preliminary Preferred Alternative was refined based on public and agency input as follows:
    - The LIRC transit system was extended eastward along the LIE. The extended system would add about five transit routes to the system.
    - The LIE widening between Exits 64 and 68 was changed from general purpose lanes to RCV priority lanes.
    - The Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway extension was shortened from Route 25A to Syossett-Cold Spring Road to minimize impacts.

7. Primary elements of the Proposed Plan include:
    - The LIRC transit system would use over-the-road Rapid Commute Vehicles (RCVs). The system would consist of more than 90 routes serving intra-Island travel and would be coordinated with local bus and LIRR improvements.
    - RCV priority treatments to consist of 68 miles of new priority lanes along with priority signals and queue bypasses at key intersections on arterial streets.
    - Roadway improvements to consist of 125 miles of arterial widening and 6 miles of roadway extensions.

8. Funding and implementation considerations include:
    - Annualized cost of $236 million, including LIRC transit system capital and operating costs. This amount is viewed as within the range of affordability.
    - No RCV priority lane construction until LIRC funding is identified.
    - The plan would be implemented in stages over a 20-25 year period.

DISCUSSION

Highlights of the TAC member discussion of the Proposed Plan and presentation follow. Some of the points made at the meeting have been augmented in the following discussion to better address TAC member comments.

A discussion took place about funding of the plan. A financial plan will need to be developed for the plan. Transit funding must be identified and assured before RCV priority lane construction can take place and the system would be implemented in phases. Federal, state, local, and public-private sources would be used for capital costs, and federal, state, local, and public-private sources along with farebox revenues would be used for system operating costs. The entire system does not need to be funded before any priority lanes are built. The strategy would call for phased implementation of the plan over 20 to 25 years, including the priority lanes and the LIRC system. Funding for the LIRC system and priority lanes would need to be identified and assured in logical increments consistent with the plan's phasing.

There were questions about an operating agency for the LIRC transit system. This issue must be carefully studied before reaching a decision on the make-up of the agency. It is expected that a decision can be reached within a time frame that is consistent with a realistic schedule for phased implementation of the LIRC system.

Questions were asked about Long Island population projections and growth on the East End of Long Island. In developing the plan, the Study Team met with each municipality to discuss population, household, and employment projections, and future development. The strengths of the LITP2000 plan are its ability to be refined and to be implemented in stages. These strengths will allow the plan to accommodate any appropriate revised growth forecasts, new growth patterns throughout the island (including the East End), and also support "smart growth" patterns and transit-oriented developments to further enhance travel choice and transportation system benefits.

There was a discussion about Travel Demand Management measures. In addition to encouraging use of the LIRC transit system, the priority lanes will also encourage ridesharing during peak periods since 2+ carpools would be permitted to use the lanes. Experience with the existing LIE HOV lanes clearly shows that they have encouraged many to rideshare so that they can take advantage of the time savings and travel reliability the lanes offer. The 2020-2025 forecast for the Proposed Plan is that carpooling would increase over current conditions.

A TAC member asked how well the priority lanes would perform with 2+ carpools in addition to transit vehicles. The 2020-2025 forecast for the Proposed Plan shows that with the 2+ occupancy rule, the entire priority lane system would provide a significantly better level of service than the regular lanes. Therefore, in addition to encouraging ridership on the LIRC system, the priority lanes also will encourage more 2+ carpooling on Long Island. These are both important reasons for the plan's sustainable congestion management over the long term. The use of the priority lanes will be monitored. If operations in the priority lanes start to degrade RCV operations, the carpool occupancy requirement could be increased to 3 or more people.

A TAC member submitted a paper concerning the need to encourage careful use of the land, add environmental costs to the equation, and emphasize public transportation. The LITP2000 Plan, with the LIRC transit system as its linchpin, will provide the blueprint for encouraging land use planning that promotes transit-friendly development and discourages sprawl. The Plan emphasizes public transit use via the LIRC system and integrates all the Island's transit systems. The travel congestion management benefits of the Proposed Plan will result in environmental benefits compared to base conditions and also compared to the other alternatives studied.

A member asked about right of way impacts. Construction for the RCV priority lanes and the roadways widenings are expected to be within existing rights of way to the greatest extent possible. Where property acquisition is required, it will be minimized.

A member asked if there would be a problem of RCVs in arterial bypass shoulder lanes currently used by bicyclists. The conflicts between bicyclists and RCVs would be minimized through proper design to accommodate both bicycles and RCVs in the bypass lanes.

Comments were made concerning the design of the Rapid Commute Vehicles. The final choice of the vehicle will be decided further along in the implementation phase of the project. The seating capacity of the RCV ranges from 20 to 45 people, depending on the size of the vehicle selected. The vehicles do not all have to be the same size. Vehicle dimensions and seating capacity could vary based on the demands of the different routes.

A TAC member pointed out that congestion is created by construction activities. A State DOT representative replied that the Long Island Region of the Department avoids construction during commuting hours by shifting to night work and through lane closures only during non-peak hours to avoid or minimize construction-related congestion.

There were several questions about what environmental process would likely be followed in subsequent phases of the project. Environmental review of the Plan's elements will be required prior to their implementation, focused on the corridors where specific projects would be located, along with ongoing public involvement. However, the sources of funding for different project elements is a key determinant of whether environmental reviews would be conducted pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. As the project implementation phasing and funding have yet to be determined, it is premature to conjecture whether the state or federal environmental review process will need to be undertaken for any given project element.

The issue of segmentation of environmental review was raised, in view of phased implementation of the Plan. While the environmental reviews necessary for Plan implementation have not yet been determined, it is possible that a programmatic or tiered Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) may be appropriate to broadly and conceptually address the cumulative or combined effects of the Plan. In that case, subsequent project-specific EISs would be prepared as different plan elements are developed for implementation. In any case, it is assumed that project-specific EISs -- or possibly Environmental Assessments (EAs) for some projects for which the significance of impacts is uncertain -- will be required. The EISs will evaluate the effects of the different Plan elements within the corridors where they would be implemented. Prior to determination of what environmental documentation will be required for the Plan and its various project elements, the "tests" of segmentation -- whether a project has independent utility, logical termini, etc. -- will have to be addressed and appropriate regulatory agencies will need to be consulted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

The specific questions and responses made during the discussion follow.

Q: What do you mean when you say that you must have funding for LIRC prior to building priority lanes?
A: We would need assurance that there would be funding for creating the transit agency and operating the LIRC system before constructing priority lanes.

Q: Is the estimated annualized cost of $236 million per year estimated in today's dollars? Don't you have to factor in inflation?
A: It's a 20-year cost estimate using the present value of money. Economic analyses typically do not include inflation since it affects everything, and the dollar value changes consistently with inflation.

Q: Regarding land use and development goals, what is the impact of the East End Towns on this plan?
A: The main growth on the East End will be residential in nature. Traffic problems on the East End are primarily due to an influx of seasonal residents and tourists.

Q: How do we overcome the public's negative comments about expanding roadways in their areas? Condemnation of property?
A: There is adequate existing right of way along most major roadways and the new lanes would be within the existing right of way as much as possible. No wholesale condemnation is envisioned because the proposed roadway improvements were developed in consultation with the towns so they are consistent with local community development goals and quality of life.

Q: If the Plan is implemented in stages, isn't that just segmentation under SEQRA?

A: It depends on the phasing of the project. Each phase of the project has to show its independent utility in order to be able to segment them. You can't segment if the combined umbrella effect would have important repercussions. However, there is a major benefit to preparing the Plan via an overall, island-wide, transportation systems approach as was done via the LITP2000 process. Each individual component of the proposed Plan is but one part of the whole which has been evaluated for its overall effects on congestion, air quality, and quality of life. Thus, segmentation issues should be minimized.

Q: If the RCV bypass lane is the same shoulder lane currently used by bicyclists, won't there be a conflict between the two uses?

A: The conflicts between bicyclists and RCVs will be minimal. The system can be designed to accommodate both bicycles and RCVs in the bypass lane.

Q: The only down side to the Plan is the necessity for people to use park-and-ride lots and stop at so many stations. Won't these delays discourage people from using the system?

A: The system will have multiple stops, but the amount of stops will be balanced against the time travel demands of the riders in order to encourage people to use the system. Additionally, the RCVs will not circulate from neighborhood to neighborhood. Thus, wait times and overall travel time would not be excessive.

Q: Why don't we mandate restrictions on the number of occupants per vehicle allowed on the LI roadways, similar to the current restrictions against single-occupant vehicles in the Holland Tunnel?

A: Those restrictions were put into place under emergency circumstances because of the World Trade Center disaster. Mandated HOV use on all LI roadways is probably not politically acceptable and people would likely be unwilling to tolerate such a mandate.

Q: Does this project come under the jurisdiction of NEPA or SEQRA?

A: If there is federal funding and approvals involved, then it must follow NEPA requirements.

Q: We have seen many different versions tonight of the type of vehicles we are calling an RCV. What is the actual design of the RCV that would be used with the LIRC system?

A: The choice of vehicle will be decided upon further along in the implementation phase of the project. There are several manufacturers from which to choose. The capacity of each vehicle ranges from 20 to 45 people, depending on the size of the vehicle selected, with additional room for standees as well. The vehicles don't all have to be the same size. The size selected could vary based on the demands of the different routes.

Q: Have the Study analyses factored in the population projections of 15% on average for all of Long Island with the East End projected to account for over 60% of that growth?

A: The Study Team consulted with every town and county planning department, including the 5 East End towns, to get their input into the land use and development projections.

Q: Is there more that can be done to modify peak travel demand, such as new programs and incentives for commuters? What are other regions doing with similar congestion problems?

A: The Employee Commute Option was rescinded by the Federal Government. California charges for parking as a disincentive to single-occupant vehicles. Flex time can be used, but it results in a shift in trip times, not a reduction in trips. The Regional Travel Demand Management Program of the State DOT will continue under the proposed LITP2000 Plan. It will continue to reach out to employers and commuters alike to implement tailored programs to reduce peak-period traffic.

Q: Who will pay for the annualized operating costs?

A: Primarily local and state funds would help cover the cost of the operating expenses.

Q: Did the computer modeling for projected congestion relief take into account the effect of all the new construction that will be involved in building the LIRC system?

A: The model looked at year 2020-2025 with full build-out of the LIRC system. The EIS will look at the impacts of construction for each phase of the project.

A: The State DOT looks to avoid construction during commuting hours by shifting to night work and through lane closures only during non–peak hours.

Q: Will DOT be responsible for the road widenings to accommodate priority lanes for the LIRC system?

A: Yes.

Q: What will be the incentive to get people out of their cars?

A: The time savings and elimination of a congested trip would be the incentive for people to switch to the RCVs. Research shows that "saving time" is a primary influence on mode-choice behavior among people who have several travel options available to them.

Q: Will carpools still be allowed in the priority lanes? How will it offer RCVs a fast trip?

A: The recommendation to include 2+ carpools in the priority lanes was based on scientific testing of the projected number of vehicles that would use the priority lanes under various scenarios: 1) RCVs only; 2) RCVs with 3+ carpools; 3) RCVs with 2+ carpools. The testing showed that with 2+ carpools included, the priority lanes would not be congested and the person-carrying efficiency of the priority lanes would be maximized. However, over time if the volume in the priority lanes with 2 or more people per car increases beyond acceptable limits, the restrictions could be changed to 3 or more people per car, or the priority lanes could be a transit-only lane. The use of the priority lanes will be carefully monitored to ensure that operation of the RCVs are not degraded.

TAC MOTION AND BALLOT RESULTS

The following motion was made and seconded.

THE CONSULTANT SHOULD PREPARE A DRAFT PLAN SO THAT IT INCLUDES THE UPDATED PRELIMINARY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE PRESENTED AT THIS TAC MEETING, ALONG WITH AN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY.

The motion was opened for discussion, but no discussion ensued. It was suggested and agreed that a mail ballot be used to give all TAC members the opportunity to vote on the motion. The results of the mail ballot were:

AGREE	30
DISAGREE	1
ABSTAIN/ NO RESPONSE	9

The motion passed.