



TRANSTALK

A Publication of the Institute of Transportation Engineers ITE Metropolitan Section of New York & New Jersey

Volume 4, Issue 3

September 2001

From the Editor...

The next meeting of the Met Section will be held at the Milleridge Inn, Jericho, Long Island, on Tuesday, September 25, 2001. The evening program for this meeting will focus on the Long Island Transportation Plan 2000 - LITP 2000 - New York State DOT's plan for Nassau and Suffolk Counties. The speakers will be Wayne R. Ugolik, NYSDOT Region 10, Supervisor of Regional Transportation Planning and Development and Marvin Gersten, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Senior Project Manager. The following was written by Mr. Gersten and Irving Perlman, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Deputy Project Manager.

The Long Island Transportation Plan to Manage Congestion (LITP 2000)

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 2.7 million people live on Long Island. Within the next 25 years, Long Island's population is projected to grow by 15% to 3.1 million people. Additionally, there will be 25% more households, 30% more jobs, and nearly 30% more cars on the road than today. LITP2000 will be Long Island's plan to manage traffic congestion over the next 20 years. It will be implemented in stages over time.

The plan is being developed by a consultant team headed by Parsons Brinckerhoff and is guided by a 40-member Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC consists of representatives from LI counties, towns, and cities, State elected officials, business leaders, members of the public, and representatives from transportation interest groups and agencies. The New York State Department of Transportation is a TAC member and is the study facilitator.

NEED FOR LITP 2000

Long Island is no longer just a bedroom community for New York City — most people both live and work on the island. Today, almost 80% of the more than one million Long Islanders traveling during the morning rush hours start and end their trips within Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Additionally, most travel is by auto (88% of total trips) and most auto travel is by drivers traveling alone (83% of auto trips). If current driving trends continue, traffic congestion will increase at an alarming rate. The LITP2000 study has focused on developing multi-modal transportation solutions that manage the growth in traffic congestion to help get around better within Long Island.

SHAPING THE SOLUTIONS

Over 500 transit, highway, carpool, and other strategies received from the public, transportation agencies, and other stakeholders and advocacy groups have been tested. The testing process was performed in two phases. The first phase involved combining many of the more than 500 strategies into 13 improvement options. The second phase involved combining the best performing elements of the Phase 1 options into multi-modal alternatives.

The 13 improvement options created in the first phase were grouped into four categories:

- 1) Travel demand management – voluntary and mandatory incentives to reduce commuter trips by car
- 2) Transit system expansion – local bus service and LIRR improvements, new transit services, and new transit services with parking charges at worksites
- 3) Carpool lanes – high occupancy vehicle (HOV) network and HOV/HOT (high occupancy/toll) network
- 4) Roadway improvements – widening and extensions

The test findings were:

- ◆ No single modal improvement (transit, auto) would effectively manage traffic congestion;
- ◆ Must combine the best performing transit and roadway improvements to effectively manage congestion; and
- ◆ A new transit system should be explored.

It was clear to the study team that *transit improvements* should be given first priority in developing the alternatives for the second phase of testing. Linkages were identified between major origins and destinations within Long Island where most travel takes place to develop transit routes. The proposed transit system and routes were reviewed at a series of meetings held with MTA, LIRR, LIBus, and Suffolk County Transit.

Next, *roadway improvements* were identified, but only for locations where transit improvements alone wouldn't eliminate future congestion. The study team met with each town supervisor, planning department or highway department to identify local roadway improvements. They reviewed maps displaying future congested roads and they focused on improvements based on anticipated growth in employment and the number of households within their communities, future development goals, and the quality of life of residents.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)

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Joseph Pecora*Nominations***Ray Martinez***Professional Development***Mayer Horn***Public Information***Ira Quiat***School Coordination***Ira Huttner***Technical***Mark Kulewicz***Web Page***President's Column - Issue 3 - 2001***By ROBERT BRAKMAN***CAMPAIGN FEVER**

As the summer heat breaks, it is the time that election campaigns get into full swing. Primary elections will soon trim the field of candidates. Voters will begin to focus on issues like education, crime, and hopefully transportation. In New Jersey, the subject of Parkway Tolls has taken on a life of its own as candidates line up on the issue. Radio talk shows are programming time for discussion on tolling and the methods of tolling. "Call in, we'd like to hear your thoughts on 'Sleazy Pass'", was one introduction I heard while heading north-bound on the Garden State Parkway. Drivers called in with their anecdotes about how they were overcharged or ticketed wrongfully; or they gave their opinions that tolls be removed – with little thought as to how operating or capital costs could be covered.

As transportation professionals, we can contribute to this public debate. Presumably we know something about how transportation is paid-for; the purposes of tolling, the advantages and disadvantages of paying from tolls versus paying from taxes. We have a sense of how transportation is supported in the broad sense. Is paying a toll to use a bridge less fair to a driver than paying a fare is to a bus rider? As this debate unfurls, I would like ITE to actively participate. Does this mean that we publicly support or oppose tolling? Perhaps, but more importantly we should support an informed public decision on tolling. I encourage you to write to me on this topic. We'll post your thoughts on our web page and use them to help formulate our position. I also encourage you to participate in the public debate as an ITE member.

Speaking of ITE members and campaigns, did you know that ITE is engaged in a recruitment campaign for new members? This campaign can result in financial gain for our section if we can out-recruit other ITE sections. So here's a chance to help a fellow transportation professional and our section by encouraging that person to join us. Point them to our web page, bring them to our next meeting at the Milleridge Inn on Long Island. Perhaps some of our Long Island members can recall and discuss their experience with the lifting of tolls on the Southern State Parkway.

So far this year, we have taken positions on congestion pricing, on Long Island's long-range transportation plan, and on the methodology for studying a replacement for the Tappan Zee Bridge. I've mentioned tolling above. In New Jersey, the access code is undergoing major revision, which will require our input as an institution of professionals. It is you, our members, who are making this happen. I'm glad to see that we are increasing our public participation. After all, it was one of the things I've campaigned for as an active ITE member.

Thank you for helping ITE in this campaign.

L.I. Transportation Plan 2000...

(Continued from Page 1)

Finally, certain assumptions were made about the "base conditions" to be included in all of the alternatives. Base conditions include implementation of the following:

- ◆ Long Island Bus Study recommendations
- ◆ LIRR East Side Access Project (access to Grand Central Terminal)
- ◆ LIRR 2010/2020 operating plan
- ◆ LIE HOV lanes, Exits 32 to 64

All alternatives also include goods movement, bicycle, and pedestrian strategies.

Four alternatives were developed for second phase testing. The first alternative includes a *Long Island Rapid Commute* (LIRC) system (a transit system providing frequent service using modern rubber tire vehicles) along with complementary roadway improvements. The second alternative combined the elements of the first alternative with value pricing toll strategies, wherein a toll would be charged during peak travel times for those traveling alone in their cars on certain roadways. This toll would encourage people to travel outside of rush hours, to form car or vanpools, or to take the LIRC system.

A third alternative included about 220 miles of roadway improvements coupled with carpool lanes on the Southern State Parkway. The fourth alternative would improve the same roads, but would also add High-Occupancy-Toll or HO/T lanes along 12 miles of the Northern State Parkway. A HO/T lane would charge motorists that drive alone during rush hours, while carpoolers would ride for free.

The four alternatives are:

Alternative 1

- ◆ LIRC Transit System
 - ◆ Transit routes, 50 routes
 - ◆ Transit priority lanes, 60 miles newly constructed on expressways and parkways and 40 miles on LIE
 - ◆ Transit priority measures on major arterials (queue bypasses, traffic signal treatments)
- ◆ Roadway improvements, 130 miles

Alternative 2

- ◆ Alternative 1 LIRC transit system and roadway improvements
- ◆ Value pricing (tolls) on all parkways and expressways
 - ◆ \$0.15 per mile for all vehicles except buses and carpools
- ◆ Parking charges at work sites (\$1.50 per day for all vehicles)

Alternative 3

- ◆ Roadway improvements, 190 miles
- ◆ 2+ carpool lanes on the Southern State Parkway

Alternative 4

- ◆ Roadway improvements, 190 miles
- ◆ HO/T lanes on the Northern State Parkway (\$0.15 per mile for all vehicles except 2+ carpools)

The results of testing indicated that Alternative 1 would be the most effective in managing congestion and is the "preliminary preferred alternative." Roadway improvements alone (Alternatives 3 and 4) would not substantially relieve congestion, and roadway pricing strategies (Alternative 2) would result in intolerable congestion on the parallel roadways and local streets.

LONG ISLAND RAPID COMMUTE (LIRC) TRANSIT SYSTEM

The LIRC transit system will serve travel in all directions, improve connections to Long Island Rail Road stations, link with local bus service improvements, and provide reverse-commute connections with New York City travel markets. As envisioned, the system will provide frequent service using modern Rapid Commute Vehicles (RCVs). Unlike a monorail or train that runs on fixed rails, the RCVs will have rubber tires and will travel on roadways. RCVs can circulate through neighborhoods to pick up passengers or go to Park and Ride lots and new LIRC stations.

When this system was evaluated with the Study's computer models and compared to a fixed rail system, the over-the-road RCVs performed significantly better because of their flexibility, shorter travel times, and reduced transfers.

The LIRC transit system can have an impact on future land use. It will provide the blueprint for the future transportation system on Long Island that can:

- ◆ Guide future development that supports transit use and avoids sprawl; and
- ◆ Foster coordination among land use visions and plans.

Additionally, LITP and the LIRC transit system can be modified in the future to incorporate locally-endorsed land use plans

NEXT STEPS

The next steps are to:

- ◆ Obtain approval from the Technical Advisory Committee to proceed with Alternative 1 (the "preliminary preferred alternative") as the "preferred alternative;" and
- ◆ Obtain plan approval from New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC).

(SEE COMMENTS ON PAGE 11)

From the Editor: The subject of tolls, especially in New Jersey, and most especially on the Garden State Parkway, has become a hot political issue. Previous issues of *TransTalk* have discussed various aspects of this issue. The President's column in this issue discusses this subject. The following presentation was made at last year's Annual Meeting of the toll industry association – the IBTTA, the International Bridge, Tunnel, and Turnpike Association - by a senior professional who has served the toll industry for many years.

Presentation at IBTTA 2000 Annual Meeting

**By Daniel W. Greenbaum, Partner
Vollmer Associates**

TOLLS AND POLITICS DO MIX – UNFORTUNATELY

Imposing tolls, increasing tolls, or even maintaining tolls is much more politically difficult today than it was some years ago. Let me suggest the possible reasons for this, together with what I believe are the misconceptions behind these reasons. Then I will address what we might do to combat the problem.

Now vs. Then

In the period some years ago when many of the toll facilities were built, particularly in the US, the legislative bodies creating the agencies to construct and operate them took great pains to assure their independence. To avoid the radical changes that are usually inherent in our elective process, toll road management was separated from the traditional political structure. This independence was believed to be essential in order to attract and protect purchasers of the toll agency revenue bonds.

Over the years, this separation has been deteriorating, with the top officials in many toll agencies now holding other governmental positions and/or otherwise beholden to the elected government. Formerly, overlapping terms, designed to assure continuity of management regardless of election results, were common practice. Now, the top management is often replaced after an election. As a result, politics and political ambitions today have a strong influence on the toll agencies. I will come back to this shortly.

Why has this change occurred? I think there are several reasons. First is the ability of the toll facilities to generate revenues. They are looked at as a source of money that could be used for purposes other than maintaining and operating the toll facilities and repaying bond holders. This is always

very appealing to elected officials struggling to fund a vast array of programs and looking for ways to avoid tax increases or to propose tax cuts. Another reason is the success of the toll facilities. With very few failures, the perceived need to protect the bond holders is greatly reduced. And thirdly, maybe most importantly, the toll issue is perceived by politicians to be one that they can use to get elected or reelected.

The Political Attraction

Let's talk about this political attraction. The attraction, of course, is not for tolls but rather against tolls. The strong perception is that the way to get votes is to oppose tolls, either new tolls, proposed toll increases or existing tolls. A good example was a toll system built many years ago that had a poor safety record because of outdated design standards. We helped develop a plan to correct these deficiencies together with an expanded toll system to finance the improvement. The plan was well received with virtually no opposition and was endorsed by local business organizations and the media. Unfortunately, there were delays, for unrelated reasons, in obtaining the necessary legislation. When election time approached, one candidate for local office was not doing well at the polls. He needed an issue and in desperation came out against the proposed plan. When this occurred, none of the other candidates dared take the other side of the issue, even though the plan had been endorsed by all local groups involved. As a result, not only was the improvement plan shot down, but the toll agency was dissolved. That was over 20 years ago, and only now are some of the substandard conditions being corrected. By the way, the desperate candidate did not get elected.

Perceptions vs. Facts

How real is this view that the anti-toll stance will get votes, or more importantly, that a pro-toll stance will be politically damaging? I suggest that this perception is generally inaccurate and not supported by experience.

Sure, there have been specific examples when the public, rather than the politicians, has shown strong objections to new tolls or toll increases. Objections, however, almost always originate with those already in office or trying to be elected.

I have been at public meetings to review proposed toll increases of 30 to 40 percent, when not a single individual has bothered to speak up against the toll. The public attendance was often fewer than those from the toll agency. The only objection came from the Triple A and the trucking organizations. This acceptance by the general public of tolls and toll increases has been born out by many surveys of public opinion, which have shown that when the case for tolls is clearly presented, and the alternatives are apparent, the toll option is preferred.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 10)



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Tolls and Politics... (Continued from Page 4)

A look at the price of gasoline and the public's reaction to it provides another indication of the impact of raising the cost of traveling. Any proposal for raising the tax on gasoline is greeted with dismay in the political arena. Some years ago, there was an incredibly difficult battle among the elected officials to agree upon funding the Federal Interstate Highway System with a five-cent increase in fuel tax. Many of the opponents believed a vote for this increase would cost them dearly in the next election. However, after the tax was enacted, there was little, if any, negative public reaction, and I don't know of any politicians who were defeated because they voted for the tax.

The public's attitude on the cost of gasoline is also reflected in the recent steep cost increases in the last year. In the U.S., the price per gallon had to approach \$2.00, or twice as high as the previous year, before there was any significant public outcry. The increase of \$1.00 was some 20 times the five cents the politicians were so worried about to fund the Interstate System. It is also equivalent to an increase of about five cents per mile. A toll increase of this magnitude is generally unheard of. My favorite example of the public attitude regarding gas prices is an intersection of Route US 1 in the northeast where there is a gas station on each corner. Every time I go by, I check the price of gas at each. Generally the differences are at least five cents per gallon, yet there are always cars at all four stations. The brand name or convenience outweighs the difference of five cents per gallon for the traveling public.

Interestingly, in many locations outside the US where private toll roads proliferate, the political influence on tolls is controlled. These controls are the agreement between the government and the private consortiums who build and operate the toll roads. These agreements set the toll levels and generally provide for controlled future increases. There is little evidence that there is a strong negative public reaction to these agreements that assure toll increases. This is another example that the politicians' perceptions of public opinion may be misperceptions.

A final reason that the politician's perception may be inaccurate, and a very important one! The regular users of a toll facility are almost always a small percentage of the total potential voters in a region. This is true, first, because much of the population of a region is not in the area of the toll facility. And, second, because the regular users are a small percentage of all the different individual users of the toll facility. Some of you may remember that at a past annual meeting I showed you that, while regular users – those traveling once a week or more – account for about two thirds of all trips, they represent only about 12 percent of all the different individual users. Almost 90 percent of your individual patrons are infrequent

users who are not greatly affected by the tolls. The number of potential voters in a region that do not use the toll facility, or rarely use it, far outnumber the regular users.

Reasons for Public Outcry

When there is a public outcry against tolls, as opposed to the outcry of the public officials, the reasons generally are either that commuter discount rates are being affected, that there are other non-toll issues that have irritated the local travelers, or that the local officials have made the tolls an issue. Let's look at each of these.

Commuter Rates: Once a discount rate that distinguishes regular users from others is in place, it is extremely difficult to take it away. This fact should be fully recognized when such a rate is originally established. At one public meeting a large vociferous crowd angrily spoke against a proposed increase in what they thought was commuter rates. Finally, after about an hour of shouting, they understood that the proposal was to increase tolls other than the commuter rate. They all then went home. No one had any objection to the increase on these non-commuter tolls.

Non-toll Related Issues: Toll agencies, like all governmental bodies, are often the targets of discontent – particularly if they collect money. Issues that do not relate to tolls often create criticism and ill feeling that show up on toll issues. You are all familiar with issues such as requests for noise barriers, delays due to construction, unfortunate incidents at service areas, lack of satisfactory responses to letter of complaint, etc., etc. I once attended a meeting to discuss a proposed toll increase with a large angry crowd. Because this was the only opportunity for them to make their views known directly to the toll agency, virtually all the comments were on these non-toll issues. The elected officials, however, always interpret this type of outcry as anti-toll, thus jeopardizing any proposed toll increase.

Local Political Impact: Because some of the local voters are regular users of the toll facility, their politicians can effectively make the tolls an issue. The defeat of proposed toll increases, or the elimination of tolls clearly appeals to these regular local travelers. However, as we have seen, there are many more potential voters who do not use the route regularly, or not at all. If tolls are not available to pay for the road, these people who receive no benefits from the defeat of the toll will have to pay the costs of running the toll road through increased taxes or reduced funding for other projects that would benefit them. We don't hear from them, however, as they are dispersed, and the negative impacts are diluted. The issue, therefore, is not considered worth fighting for by their elected representatives, or possibly these officials do not even realize that their constituents are being hurt by the anti-toll actions.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 11)

Tolls and Politics... (Continued from Page 10)

What to Do

What can we do to lessen the negative political impacts? How can we fight back? There are several things that can be done, or are being done. First of all, the IBTTA has undertaken a study to respond to some of the criticisms that are continually leveled at tolls, such as that tolls should be removed when the bonds are repaid, and that tolls cause excessive pollution. This effort, which is being led by Linda Spock with some assistance from me, should be completed by the end of the year. The report will provide some ammunition to respond to the various criticisms.

And, there are all those other non-toll issues that create the negative toll agency feelings. You all have to deal with complaints about construction delays and lack of noise barriers and you have to cope with local assemblyman who claims his phone calls were not returned as soon as he or she might have wished. Remember that these are the gnats that will come back as lions and tigers to bite you the next time the tolls need to be raised. Do everything you can to minimize these issues.

Also, remember that the process of implementing a toll change always takes longer than you expect. By the time crucial action is required, the chances are pretty high that it will be election season again with its disastrous consequences for toll issues. So, start the process six months sooner than you think you should.

We need to enlist the media to combat the anti-toll attitude. This is difficult because disasters such as floods, earthquakes and murders make the news. The politicians want to make toll increases into one of these disasters. Needed improvements, which are usually the reason for toll increases, are not as newsworthy as the disasters. Nevertheless, it is essential that all proposals for tolls or toll increases be closely tied to improvement programs. The need for and importance of these improvements must be highlighted in a continual dialogue with the media emphasizing that any improvement must be paid for. This dialogue has to be maintained, even if a toll increase is not required at that time. It is then clear that when critics say you can't have the tolls, they are also saying you can't have the needed improvements, or - if you are to have them - someone else has to pay for them.

This message usually is aimed at the regular toll road users. The important audience, however, is the very large number of non-users or infrequent users who make up the majority of the voters. The people who will have to pay for the improvements if there are no tolls. They and their elected officials need to understand this and they need to get mad about it. Let's get these people on our side!

Fighting back is not easy. While the politicians' perception of the public's anti-toll attitude is, I believe, often a misconception, it is not easy to change. By understanding the reasons for anti-toll sentiments and addressing the issues I have discussed, I think we can make a strong counterattack.

LITP 2000: Comments

by Met Section Member

LITP2000 looked at numerous measures, solicited public input, performed extensive weighing of measures, and went through a major travel forecasting effort. The result is less than what should be expected from such a huge effort. Of particular note is the twelve pages on "Transit, Ridesharing, and Commute Options Subcommittee's Rated Solutions." The problem is less with the wide variety of suggestions by members of the public than with the lack of leadership by the study professionals.

While some planners might decry the lack of land use planning in a major transportation planning study, a major deficiency is how transit is treated: While calling a bus a "Rapid Commute Vehicle" is noteworthy, it's hard to imagine a transit planner producing a candidate scheme consisting of light rail operating in more-or-less a rectangle: along Sunrise Highway from Route 110 in western Suffolk, west to the Meadowbrook Parkway, north to Jericho Turnpike, east to Route 110, and south along Route 110 to Sunrise Highway. The idea of building a light rail line next to the Babylon branch of the LIRR to serve local trips seems incomprehensible to transit planners.

One place to start is with priorities: LITP2000 fails to address the important hierarchy for travel on Long Island: Should the use of some modes be encouraged relative to others? (This in a region that is building a major HOV lane project.) Do we as a society prefer that trips that can be made by commuter railroad be made by that mode or by auto - or don't we care? Here is one approach: Rail, then bus, then vanpool, then carpool, then single occupant auto. Somewhere towards the beginning is walk and bike although walk is rarely an alternative to rail, for example. Vitaly important on Long Island in encouraging railroad use is access to the stations: Since parking lots are often full, discouraging use of the railroad, feeder bus, carpooling, biking, and walking to stations should be encouraged - and not merely with words! Resident restrictions at commuter parking lots and garages is the norm and should be removed - by state legislation if necessary.

A basic question is what can the LIRR deliver in terms of serving intra Long Island trips? Before building additional

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 12)



TRANSTALK

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Comments... (Continued from Page 11)

transit facilities, determine how existing facilities can contribute to serving travel. Sure, if one asks the LIRR about its priorities, it will respond by citing its capital plan which includes East Side Access to Grand Central and fleet replacement. What about local and reverse peak travel? How can the LIRR be made more attractive for these trips? What about fares, service, operating costs? Indeed, one can argue that there has been no vision for the LIRR, what should this commuter railroad of tomorrow look like? Likewise, what is the vision for the highway system?

Noteworthy...

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Met Section Nominations

The Met Section bylaws require that there be two candidates for the position of Treasurer. Further, Section 4.5 of the bylaws states, "Not later than September 20 of each year the Secretary shall send to the members of the Section a list of candidates nominated by the Nominating Committee. Additional nominations for any office may be made by petition, signed by not less than twenty-five voting members and representing at least three employment organizations. Each such petition shall be accompanied by the written consent of the nominee to run for the office for which nominated and must be received by the Secretary not later than September 30. A member may not be a candidate for more than one office." The Nominating Committee has selected, for the 2002 Treasurer Joseph Orth, CAIT-LTAP Program Director with Rutgers University and Manuel DaSilva P.E., Traffic Engineer with Schoor DePalma.

Visit the Met Section's Web Site

The ITE Met Section has a web site: www.ite-metsection.org. It has the latest information on what's happening in your Met Section. Bookmark it. Check it often. Future meetings of the Met Section are usually listed here first.