

South Nyack – New NY Bridge & Shared-Use Path

Village of South Nyack Tappan Zee Bridge Task Force

Overview:

This correspondence highlights the Village's efforts with regards to the Tappan Zee Bridge construction and the introduction of a shared-use bike and pedestrian path that is part of the new bridge design. Many concepts have been discussed and the Thruway plans have changed over the years; however none of the concepts discussed were ever finalized as the State had not adequately addressed the issues we have raised.

The number one concern of the Mayor, the Trustees, and the Task Force has been, throughout, the safety and welfare of South Nyack's residents and the sustainability of our village while retaining the charm and character of South Nyack.

The new bridge construction includes a pedestrian and bicycle path (aka Shared Use Path – SUP). The bridge's entrance/terminus for this path will be placed somewhere in South Nyack. South Nyack elected officials and residents have expressed concern that this path could be burdensome, a traffic hazard and expensive for Village residents.

Please read on for a brief history. Regular updates from the Mayor are available online; contact the South Nyack Village Hall, (845) 358-0287, to receive emails on our progress.

Original "Thruway Corridor" Plan

The original TZB/I-287 corridor plan introduced several years ago included widening I-287 as it passes through South Nyack to accommodate mass transit. Those construction plans would have possibly freed up some land, giving the Village an opportunity to reinstate property in the Village for a commercial hub which could greatly offset the current tax burden on our residents.

1. That plan would have required a total redesign and reconstruction of the Exit 10 interchange using less land.
2. Village officials realized that this could provide an opportunity for South Nyack to leverage that redesign to bring substantial benefits to South Nyack and the river villages region.
3. The left-over land at Exit 10 could be used by the Village:
 - a. Provide a new village center that could be a basis for economic development for the Village, alleviating the heavy tax burden on residents.
 - b. Exit 10 would also be a practical place for the terminus of the new shared-use path. Connecting the path to a new village center would provide a place to accommodate parking away from residential neighborhoods. It could also be a place where services might be provided to visitors bringing a source of new revenue to the Village.

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Exit 10

That vision of a re-designed Exit 10 came to be known as the “Village of South Nyack Economic Sustainability Initiative”.

1. The Village began to lobby the Thruway to collaborate with us to plan to incorporate our vision into the corridor plans and we began to seek funding for a Feasibility Study.
2. The Village’s vision was supported by all our local representatives even after the governor reduced the scope of work in the third quarter of 2011 from an expansive “Corridor Project” to a lesser “Bridge Project”.
 - a. In March of 2011 Rockland County specifically recommended studying the plan in the County’s Comprehensive Plan.
 - b. In February 2012 the proposal to conduct a feasibility study was adopted into the Federal government’s Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).
 - c. In February of 2014, the Governor’s Mass Transit Task Force endorsed studying the initiative.

Project Changes from a “Thruway Corridor Plan” to a “Bridge Plan”

In the fall of 2011 Governor Cuomo segmented the project and focused only on replacing the bridge. The plans for the New NY Bridge included widening the Thruway only to South Broadway and proposed totally replacing the South Broadway overpass and the taking of six homes by eminent domain.

1. The overpass redesign was made without any input from the Village.
2. Since the project was scaled back, the Thruway had no interest in discussing anything having to do with Exit 10. The Mayor and Trustees felt the Village needed to consider what we might have to do to accommodate the path while we continued to pursue our long-term vision.
3. We had still not secured funding for our feasibility study.

New Design – New South Broadway Bridge/Overpass and Elevated Shared Use Path

When the project was reduced to just the bridge, the plans showed the SUP terminating at a new South Broadway overpass.

1. The path was proposed to come off of the bridge and stay elevated as it paralleled the highway past Bradford Mews and Smith Avenue.
2. The path was shown to terminate up on the South Broadway overpass. The Village pointed out problems with this proposal as the path ended on a vehicular overpass.
3. It had no connection to the Esposito Trail, which runs behind the Village Hall from the Village of Piermont to Cedar Hill Avenue in South Nyack.
4. There were still no provisions for visitor parking or facilities.

The Thruway agreed to meet with us to explore possible solutions to issues. We started to develop several alternatives including different overpass designs or possibly adding pedestrian-friendly elements to the overpass and routing the path towards Elizabeth Place Park with a connection up to the Esposito Trail. There were many variables discussed, but none finalized.

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Environmental Impact

The Thruway is required by state and federal law to conduct a thorough environmental review of the impacts of the new bridge.

1. In the Environmental Impact Statement the Thruway maintained that the Shared Use Path was for non-vehicular transportation purposes only.
2. The environmental study did not include any data on how many people would be expected to use the SUP, where they would park, what services they would need, or any of the many other impacts the path would have on South Nyack.
3. There was no consideration that the path might become a tourist attraction and draw more traffic.

During this environmental review process South Nyack made extensive explicit comments about the severe impacts the SUP and overpass replacement would have on the Village.

1. We continued to stress that its effects on South Nyack needed serious consideration.
2. We continued to maintain that smart planning required the Thruway to collaborate with South Nyack to make the path successful for South Nyack.
3. The people preparing the Environmental Impact Statement dismissed our concerns and asserted that there would be no negative impacts on South Nyack.
4. The Trustees considered taking legal action, but the expense of a legal challenge against the State and Federal Government by a little village was way more than South Nyack could afford.

New Design – No Need for a New South Broadway Overpass or Elevated Path - Smith Avenue Would be the New Path Terminus - In May 2012 the Thruway changed their plans again with no input from the Village.

1. We were told that the bridge engineers had figured out a way to transition traffic onto the new bridge without needing to replace the South Broadway overpass.
2. The Shared Use Path was no longer elevated, but to parallel the highway at grade level, take a sharp northward turn just before South Broadway, and end at the dead end of Smith Avenue.
3. Village officials immediately recognized that this location was very problematic as Smith Avenue is a quiet, residential dead-end street.

The scaled-back plan also meant that the Thruway was no longer going to take the six properties by eminent domain as first proposed. Several of the affected homeowners were upset with this decision by the state. They expressed that ever since their properties were targeted for taking, it would become nearly impossible for them to be sold on the open market. They asked that the Thruway proceed with the takings, to ensure they got a fair deal. The Thruway said they could not legally proceed with eminent domain because the properties would no longer be directed for a public use. Instead they persuaded Tappan Zee Constructors to offer to purchase the properties in private transactions. One property owner decided to keep their house. Two accepted offers from the bridge contractor TZC. The remaining homeowners have maintained that the TZC offers are inadequate, in that they do not offer the same guarantees that an eminent domain taking would.

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South Nyack TZ Bridge Task Force

In February 2013 the Village Trustees appointed a task force of volunteer village residents, Planning Board Chairman Jerry Ilowite; former County Legislator Connie Coker; and Richard Kohlhausen who is a local businessman and is Chairman of the Nyack Hospital Board of Directors. The Task Force was asked to be the liaison between the Village and the New NY Bridge (NNYB) Team. Throughout our talks with the NNYB, many concepts were discussed, but never finalized.

Shared Use Path

1. In late 2013 the NNYB team agreed to meet with the South Nyack Task Force to discuss the SUP terminus. They insisted the SUP would be opened at the completion of the bridge project regardless of the location. *At this point, the Village still had no funding for our feasibility study. We are relying on the study to help us map out the future possibilities for South Nyack. The Task Force felt it had to consider what might have to be done to handle the SUP traffic, parking, facilities and trash collection if it couldn't be connected to Exit 10.*
2. Interim plan - While we still wanted to ultimately connect the SUP into a future Exit 10 redevelopment, we looked for a possibly acceptable interim plan. We felt we had to try to get the path and parking as close to Exit 10 as possible.
 - a. Working with the NNYB team, we considered a plan to bring the path out to the corner of Cornelison Avenue and South Broadway with a small parking lot where Village Hall is now. We felt this compromise would get the terminus away from the middle of a residential area to at least the edge of one.
 - b. Using the Village Hall site for parking would provide at least some off-street parking without taking of any more residential properties.
 - c. Lastly, the State would have to find us a new location for Village Hall. The Village has been interested in getting better river access for the residents. One possibility would be to use state funding to purchase the Olson Center from Living Christ Church and use it for a new Village Hall, Police Headquarters, and Community Center.

While this plan was still in the conceptual stage, we wanted to get feedback and input from the Trustees and residents. This concept was presented to the Trustees in January 2014 and then to the public in March.

The Thruway Moves Forward

Before the plan was ever presented to the public, the Task Force learned that the Thruway had gone ahead with an eminent domain taking of a portion of the residential property on the south east corner of Corneilson at South Broadway for the purpose of extending the path to Cornelison.

1. The Village never gave any direction or approval to the Thruway to do the taking, since we did not yet have any resident input or support and we didn't have any firm plan to relocate Village Hall.
2. From our discussions with the NNYB team, the Task Force was under the mistaken impression that the homeowners of that property had reached an acceptable agreement to sell their property.

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March 2014 Public Meeting

At the public meeting in March many residents expressed their problems with the plan.

1. Neighborhood residents thought the terminus and parking would still overwhelm their neighborhood.
2. Many were concerned that adding pedestrian traffic to the intersection would be much too dangerous, since it includes a Thruway entrance ramp.
3. Residents expressed that we shouldn't accept an interim solution and the Task Force should try harder to find a way to move the terminus and parking into the Exit 10 area.

Task Force Expanded

After the March meeting, the Trustees added two additional members to the Task Force, Nancy Willen, retired Clarkstown Highway Department Administration, and Greg Toolan, IUOE Local 15D Surveyor.

Task Force Request for New Designs

The Task Force asked the NNYB team to consider alternatives that would terminate the path at Exit 10 and provide a better connection to the Esposito Trail and routes to downtown Nyack. The NNYB team said they received several suggestions from residents as well and would examine them.

1. Task Force member Gregg Toolan proposed a plan to:
 - a. Add a traffic circle at the north end of Exit 10 (closer to the flyover bridge on 9W) for entrance and exit to the Thruway.
 - b. Re-route northbound 9W away from the ramp loop and back up on to 9W to connect with the traffic circle.
 - c. Repurpose the current South Broadway Thruway entrance ramp for pedestrians and bikes, thus bringing the SUP to Exit 10.
 - d. Use the existing 9W overpass ramp loop (the current entrance for northbound traffic coming up from Piermont/Grandview) for parking.
2. One of the ideas submitted by the NNYB was to build a commuter parking lot along the Franklin Street overpass. This design would not change the current Exit 10 configuration.

Shared Use Path Location – Cornelison at South Broadway

We are still concerned about the location of the Path if it is located at this corner.

1. Parking – drivers will still try to park on Village streets near the entrance.
2. We asked the NNYBT team to find a way to move the terminus into Exit 10.
3. The Mayor formed a parking task force to explore formulating new parking regulations to defend the neighborhood and Village.
4. Volume - There was still no consensus on estimates of how many visitors could be expected to use the new SUP. The notion that the path would be used only for transportation was now belied by the fact that the design included lookout points (known as belvederes) with placards about local points of interest. Some people thought thousands of people would visit it, like at the Walkway Over the Hudson, or New York City's High Line. Others thought it would be so unattractive that no one would use it. We again asked the NNYB team to conduct a professional study to estimate usage.

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5. The NNYB team originally promised to present alternatives for residents to consider in June. They then said their engineers needed more time and postponed the public presentation. As the summer passed the Mayor continued to press the NNYB team for a commitment to a date.

November 20, 2014 Meeting

Based on discussions from the previous meeting with NNYB representatives, the Task Force was expecting to see further plans with regards to the redesign of Exit 10 with the inclusion of the Shared Use Path. Several concepts of similar plans had been viewed and discussed since the public meeting in March 2014. Instead, the NNYB team representatives showed up with three concepts to address parking and made it clear that they were moving ahead with the SUP terminus at Cornelison; insisting that terminating it at Exit 10 wasn't practical and would be too expensive.

They wanted to limit the presentation to the public to the one plan for parking at the Franklin Street overpass, with the rest of the presentation merely variations of this concept or of on-street parking. They did not want to present any of the more ambitious plans to the public because they said they could never happen.

Usage Study for the Shared Use Path

The NNYB team showed the Task Force the results of their usage study and the numbers were subsequently given to the media. The study suggested that South Nyack would need parking for an average of 54 cars. The Task Force asked for more details on the study. It was up to the Village to figure out where the cars would park and how parking would be restricted, regulated and enforced.

The Mayor and Task Force were very disturbed by the attitude of the NNYB team's representatives. The feeling was that the State was bullying South Nyack to accept their judgment as to what was acceptable rather than allow South Nyack to decide what is best for our village.

November 25, 2014

The Mayor held a press conference and called Governor Cuomo's office and requested a meeting to discuss the situation.

We maintain that a Shared Use Path entrance at the southeast corner of South Broadway at Cornelison is the wrong location. Ironically, during the press conference a transit bus was unable to make the turn on to the Thruway entrance on South Broadway at Cornelison. After driving wide into the northbound lane of South Broadway, the bus had to back up twice into the intersection towards Carnelison before finishing the turn.

We urge the residents of South Nyack to stay informed about the Shared Use Path and Exit 10. Sign up to receive the Mayor's Email Update. Call the Village Hall (845) 358-0287.