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TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE/I287 CORRIDOR PROJECT ANNOUNCES TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE INITIATIVE

Targets Communities in I-287 Corridor for Assistance

Municipalities along a 30-mile stretch of the I-287 corridor are about to receive some expert help in thinking about transportation choices and issues as part of their community planning.

New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) Acting Commissioner Stanley Gee, New York State Thruway Authority Executive Director Michael Fleischer and Metro-North Railroad President Howard Permut today announced that the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor Project will be launching an initiative to provide Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) training resources to municipalities along the corridor, from Suffern in Rockland County to Port Chester in Westchester County.

NYSDOT is the lead agency managing the corridor study, in coordination with MTA Metro-North Railroad and the Thruway Authority and in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The new initiative, a technical assistance program called "Transit-Oriented Development – Building Quality Communities around Transit," is designed to provide municipalities with tools, resources and hands-on exposure to leading-edge land use and planning techniques to meet a broad range of community goals.

"The idea is that in planning for the future, municipalities gain a better understanding of the role transportation can play in setting forth a vision for their community," Acting Commissioner Gee said. "This program will provide localities along the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 corridor with access to the most current, practical insight into how local land-use decisions affect planned transportation improvements. We believe that municipalities will benefit from this intensive technical assistance and encourage interested elected officials, civic leaders and community groups to participate."

TOD refers to residential and commercial centers designed to maximize access to transit and non-motorized transportation. Features include design that encourages walking and cycling, streets that have good connectivity and traffic-calming features to control speeds, mixed-use development that includes housing of various types and prices, shops, schools and other public services within each neighborhood and parking management to reduce the amount of land devoted to parking. They also include transit stops and stations that are convenient, comfortable and secure, with features such as comfortable waiting areas, real-time vehicle arrival information, vendors selling refreshments and periodicals, washrooms and information.

The project team is making TOD training available to communities to assist them with their comprehensive planning and land-use efforts in anticipation of transportation improvements that the study is considering. These improvements include the replacement of the Tappan Zee

Bridge and introduction of a high-speed bus service called Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) across the corridor and Commuter Rail Transit (CRT) across Rockland County, which would connect with the existing Metro-North Railroad Hudson Line to provide service to Grand Central Terminal in New York City.

"The Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor impacts municipalities throughout the lower Hudson Valley and is a vital transportation artery for thousands of daily commuters, supporting some of the highest traffic volumes in New York State," State Thruway Authority Executive Director Michael R. Fleischer said. "The Authority looks forward to working with local communities on the Transit-Oriented Development initiative to improve the area's transportation network and make travel throughout the corridor more efficient and user-friendly."

Metro-North President Howard Permut said, "Too often, development occurs without consideration to public transportation and the result is sprawl. This program will educate people about the benefits of designing walkable communities around transit hubs, which is the wave of the future."

The TOD program follows the state's Lower Hudson Valley Smart Growth initiative with its aim to assist communities in planning for economic growth and development. The Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor Project recognizes that planning for transit improvements according to smart growth and TOD principles requires a specialized level of expertise. The project team has retained a consortium of renowned TOD experts to provide the training and other resources to the corridor communities. The consulting group includes veteran smart growth and TOD experts from Project for Public Spaces (PPS), Reconnecting America and the Regional Plan Association (RPA).

Westchester County Executive Andy Spano said, "We welcome the state DOT's initiative to bring added technical resources to our communities. This program will build on our existing partnerships with local governments through Westchester 2025 to promote sound long-range planning and enhanced public transit. We need land use policies that support investment in transit services."

The training program will focus on the full range of issues associated with TOD, including quality community design, sustainability, model planning and zoning concepts, housing options, property value preservation, parking and project financing. The educational program also will highlight the high level of community commitment and critical decisions necessary for the success of any TOD effort. Additionally, it will provide other tools and resources municipalities may begin to utilize immediately after receiving the technical assistance.

"We appreciate the DOT's and the Tappan Zee Bridge Study Team's efforts to inform Rockland's municipalities and the public about the value of including transit-oriented development as an integral part of this planning process," Rockland County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef said. "This will also work in tandem with our Comprehensive Plan, which will examine opportunities to maximize transit and land use issues for the long-term benefit of Rockland County and its residents."

The consortium, with resources and other assistance from the project team and in coordination with officials from Westchester and Rockland counties, will be developing

customized programs based on existing scenarios in eight corridor communities, four in each county. Those municipalities have not yet been determined. Participants will receive training on TOD and engage in hands-on exercises to help them evaluate existing conditions and conceptualize TOD in their respective communities.

The project team briefed corridor municipal leaders on the initiative during a meeting in Rockland County on June 22nd and Westchester County on June 23rd. Training will begin in the fall with two county-wide workshops open to all municipalities in each county. Eight additional two-day, in-depth sessions are planned for the selected municipalities in the spring of 2010.

The sessions will be targeted to a wide range of participants, including municipal leaders; planning, transportation and other municipal officials; industry experts, including developers and historians; public interest group representatives and other local designates. In addition, sessions are open to members of the public and land-use/planning students.

Anyone interested in becoming involved as a participant in the training sessions may contact the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Project office for more information, at 914-358-0600, or via e-mail, at tzbsite@dot.state.ny.us.

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