



Testimony of Robert Freudenberg, Senior Planner, Regional Plan Association Before the Senate Transportation Committee Hearing on NYSDOT 5 Year Capital Plan

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Good Morning, my name is Rob Freudenberg and I am a Senior Planner for Long Island at Regional Plan Association, an independent research and advocacy organization that has promoted the livability, vitality and sustainability of the Tri- State Metropolitan region for over 85 years. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide comments on the NYS DOT 5-Year Plan and we commend Chairman Dilan for his leadership in holding these statewide hearings.

This Plan comes before us at a challenging time. An unpredictable economy, inflated construction costs and budget shortfalls compound the already difficult task of allocating funds for the preservation, enhancement and expansion of the State's aging transportation infrastructure. But we cannot underscore enough the importance of investing in this critical, regional network. We must focus on smart, effective investments that ensure our infrastructure remains safe and functional so that it may continue to serve as the connective fabric of our regional economy, which is one of the world's largest and most productive. Studies show that poor road and bridge conditions cost residents significant annual costs for vehicle maintenance, lost productivity due to congestion and additional fuel costs. Acting now is essential to maintain our region's productivity while eliminating the costs of future capital repairs.

RPA has reviewed the Capital Program and we are pleased to see progress being made in reaching towards more sustainable policies, however, we find a number of areas for improvement. We offer our comments on how best to prioritize spending for a robust regional and State-wide economy.

Prioritize Repairs of Highways & Bridges

Because a majority of our regional goods move via truck, New York State's highway and bridge network is critical to the economy of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region. Yet, funding has not been sufficient to keep conditions in a steady state and as a result, road and bridge conditions have been worsening over time. We strongly encourage NYSDOT to **prioritize repairs** of critical, existing highways and bridges over the construction of new or expanded highways and bridges. A full 90% of the funding in the program is for maintenance of existing infrastructure, but we ask that any large projects that include additional lanes or interchange expansions, come under further scrutiny, as these projects often do little to alleviate congestion in the long-run.

Implement Managed-Use-Lane Strategies for the region.

Currently NYSDOT is engaged in a MUL study that includes the five boroughs of NYC, Westchester and Nassau counties. RPA recommends that NYSDOT set aside funding to implement the recommended strategies of this study, which should be completed sometime next year, including the strategy to implement High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes. The Long Island Expressway's existing HOV lanes could be an ideal location for a pilot project. We also suggest that the agency consider

commissioning a supplemental study to examine opportunities for limited MUL strategies in Suffolk County.

Increase capacity for freight movement. Truck traffic on Long Island significantly contributes to the congestion on Long Island roadways, while current rail freight capacity on the Island is severely limited. We hope that the Governor’s forthcoming report on potential sites for intermodal facilities will offer clear guidance that can be acted upon once released.

Identify corridors that would benefit from enhanced bus service.

RPA recommends that NYSDOT work together with the MTA/Nassau Bus and Suffolk Bus to implement enhancements to bus service - including signal prioritization or off-board fare collection – across the Island. These elements can be implemented with a relatively modest investment, but enable tremendous service enhancements.

Invest in elements of the Main Line Corridor Improvement Project. Also known as the Third Track, the Main Line Corridor Improvement Project can bring about many benefits for Long Island including job and job market growth, improved LIRR service and reduction of VMT. However, if financial resources are unavailable to implement the full Third Track project in this Capital Plan, RPA urges NYSDOT to support other projects that can set the stage for Third Track implementation at a later date. These projects include investing in the existing “grade-separated” crossings that would need to be widened and the “at-grade” crossings that would be eliminated. Tackling these projects now will lay the groundwork for the completion of the entire Main Line Corridor Improvement. We were disappointed to see reference to the Main Line Corridor Improvement Project removed from the latest version of the Capital Program.

Develop a bikeway master plan for Long Island.

Biking is both a recreational and commuting activity that should be encouraged and facilitated on Long Island. RPA is pleased to see efforts being made by NYSDOT to enhance the biking experience along state roadways, but would urge the Department to use funding to develop a larger master plan for bikeways and facilities on Long Island. Such a plan would prioritize key biking routes –particularly those that connect residential areas to job centers and bus and rail stations. Capital funds will be better spent on bike lane construction if a master plan is first developed.

Work to Pass Complete Streets legislation (A8587, S5711)

A recent Transportation for America report, co-authored by our friends at the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, found that pedestrians accounted for over 31% of all NYC metropolitan area (NYC, Long Island, Northern NJ) traffic fatalities, yet New York State spent only 1% of its \$5.6 billion in federal transportation dollars for pedestrian safety projects between 2005 and 2008.

RPA commends you Senator Dilan, for your leadership to improve safety on our roadways by sponsoring the Senate Bill 5711, or the Complete Streets legislation (A8587, S5711). This bill would ensure roads are safe for all users, including walkers, cyclists, transit riders, drivers, senior citizens, and children. We support you in making this bill a priority in coming months.

Work with local communities

We are pleased to see that the capital program includes \$25 million for “community and corridor land use planning initiatives” to provide technical assistance and land use planning for corridor investment strategies and “livable community planning grants.” New York State highways are a vital link to the economic success and vitality of our regional communities. At the same time, some highways, like Sunrise Highway (Route 27) – which have evolved over time to become high speed, high volume roadways - pass through the heart of a number of important downtowns, severing the community and impacting their vibrancy and economic success. Plans like those for Long Island’s

Route 347 are promising and show that working with the community can reap great rewards on small investments. RPA applauds NYSDOT's commitment to community planning and urges expansion of this element of the program.

Mitigate the impacts of stormwater runoff.

Because Long Island is an island surrounded by critical coastal habitat and because its residents rely on a sole source aquifer for drinking water, contamination by stormwater runoff is a serious threat to the quality of life of Long Islanders. Roadways and other paved surfaces exacerbate the impacts of stormwater runoff and RPA urges NYSDOT to play a more active role in mitigating the impacts of stormwater runoff. Capital funds should be set aside to both explore innovations in stormwater capture and conveyance along roadways as well as to test and install effective stormwater technology on roadways being repaired, reconstructed or newly constructed. Roadways should be seen not only as a network for vehicle movement, but also for water movement to adequate destinations for retention.

Conclusion

A safe, reliable and effective transportation network is vital to sustain a robust economy and ensure strong quality of life for area residents. All of the above issues represent critical ones that should be addressed with great care.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.