

TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE REPORT

FINAL DRAFT

May 5, 2010

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To commemorate the 400th Anniversary of Henry Hudson's first sailing of the Hudson River, the Hudson Fulton Champlain Quadricentennial Commission was established. Over two years, the Commission hosted a series of "listening stops" on the river to identify residents' major concerns and develop recommendations to shape its future.

Out of these "listening stops" a series of six dominant themes emerged demanding further analysis. The Commission's leadership developed these themes by instituting six task forces aligned directly to address them. They are: Land Use, Culture and Education, Economic Development, Transportation, Food and Agriculture, and Mechanisms for Action.

The Transportation Task Force was convened to develop a vision for improving transportation in the Hudson River Valley. As part of this effort, a group of stakeholders and transportation professionals synthesized the recommendations from the Quadricentennial's Hudson River Valley "listening tour" with their own knowledge of local transportation issues. Together, they sought to identify areas of long-term focus for policy and infrastructure investments. Four core topic areas and a series of related recommendations were the product of this process:

Commutation: Support the Economic Vitality of the Hudson River Valley
Investments to insure the future economic vitality of the Hudson Valley are essential, especially its connections to the greater downstate New York economic core. That means not only supporting the large planned investments in our public transit systems and highways as identified by the region's transportation planners, but going further and creating new initiatives to reduce truck traffic and better utilize existing freight networks while exploring the use of waterborne freight options where economically feasible.

Key Recommendations

- Fund Highways and Public Transit to Ensure Continued Economic Vitality
- Encourage Modal Shifts in the Movement of Goods
 - Expand rail-freight options
 - Explore waterborne freight possibilities

Connectedness: Integrate Connections in the Hudson Valley

The Hudson Valley itself needs to be better integrated if we are to take maximum advantage of the economic and quality of life strengths of this region. That will require not only capital investments, but also improved and integrated operations of existing transportation systems. Further, major national investments – such as the Tappan Zee bridge replacement – need to be made in ways that support the economy and quality of life that make the Hudson River so basin so attractive.

Key Recommendations

- Develop Integrated Fare Systems across Modes (Metro-North, Amtrak, Local Bus, Regional Bus, Ferry)
- Expand Regular Bus Service and Use of Bus Rapid Transit
- Explore Options to Increase Ferry Commutation and Recreational Services
- Ensure Tappan Zee Solutions Support Hudson Valley

Community: Make Hudson Valley Towns More Livable and Attractive

The wonderful quality of life in so many Hudson Valley communities is at the core of its attractiveness to residents and tourists, and transportation investments should be made in ways that will maintain, enhance and improve that lifestyle.

Key Recommendations

- Fund Planning in Support of Transit-oriented Development Programs
- Support Regional Land Use Planning Efforts

Re-Create: Envision a Hudson Valley Around the River

The Hudson River itself is the key to the region's identity. In the future, citizens and elected officials need to find better ways both to access the river from the land and increase the use of the River itself by enhancing access from it to the communities of the Hudson River basin.

- Improve Access to the River: Change Land Uses along the Shore, Create New Physical Connections, Explore Adaptive Re-use of Infrastructure
- Improve Access on the River: Create Eco-docks and Other Connections on the River, Develop Rail-to-Barge programs, Preserve Existing Infrastructure

Implementing these recommendations will require new sources of revenue – otherwise they are just idle promises. A series of bold and difficult choices will have to be made about how to fund this agenda, but whatever else happens, without significant new revenue there can be no progress on any of these plans. Obtaining this new revenue will not be easy in the difficult economic times in which we live when there are so many other pressing needs. For this reason, the Task Force strongly recommends the development of a “Hudson Valley Caucus” of legislators to fight for the projects we need in Albany and Washington, and the creation of a new “Hudson Valley Manifesto” embodying these principles that all candidates for state-wide and local offices should be asked to sign.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Hudson River Valley

For the purposes of the work of the Task Force, the area referred to as the Hudson River Valley was defined as encompassing the area from the river's origin in Essex County to New York City.

Population

The Hudson River Valley contains fifteen counties with a total population exceeding 3,329,000. Half of this population resides in the counties north of New York City in Westchester, Orange and Rockland. One-fifth resides in counties surrounding Albany in Schenectady, Rensselaer and Albany counties.

Growth

According to the US Census, nine counties in the Hudson River Valley experienced population growth at rates above the New York State average of 2.7% between 2000 and 2008. The counties of Orange and Saratoga experienced the highest rates of growth, with rates of 11.2% and 8.3% respectively. Columbia and Essex were the only counties to experience population declines. Other counties experiencing above average growth included Westchester (3.3%), Rockland (4.1%), Putnam (3.7%), Dutchess (4.5%), Washington (2.9%), Warren (4.2%), and Schenectady (3.3%). The remaining counties experienced population growth below the statewide average: Ulster (2.2%), Greene, (1.7%), Albany (1.2%), and Rensselaer (1.8%).

Geography and Political Jurisdiction

As previously noted, approximately 70% of the population reside in suburban/rural counties adjacent to or near New York City and Albany. Dutchess and Ulster Counties are situated between these two regions. Warren and Washington Counties are located to the north of the Capital Region. All four of these counties are largely rural. Governance and administration of services are dispersed over the State, county and local levels, meaning literally hundreds of jurisdictions are involved in the region.

Commuting Patterns

With the exception of Putnam and Rensselaer, the largest share of workers commute to locations within the county where they live. Even in Westchester County, which is commonly seen as a bedroom community for New York City workers, 63% of all employed persons worked in Westchester in 2000. However, the economic importance of the greater New York City economic engine can hardly be over-stated – some 28% of all Westchester workers commuted to New York City. Transit from Westchester, as well as from Rockland, Orange Putnam and Dutchess Counties allows Hudson Valley workers to access high-paying jobs in the economic engine of the country.

Transportation Overview of the Hudson River Valley

The transportation infrastructure already in place in the catchment area of our work is extensive and, while aging and in need of significant re-investment, provides an important foundation for the growth and attractiveness of the Valley.

Highways and Bridges

Four Interstate Highways and a number of state parkways serve residents of the Hudson River Valley. The New York State Thruway (I-87) runs the length of the Valley, from north to south, just west of the river. It serves as the economic spine of the downstate region, connecting New York City to Albany and beyond, and hence provides the single most critical piece of economic infrastructure for the valley.

Interstate 84 runs east-west through Orange and Dutchess Counties, connecting these counties to Connecticut and Pennsylvania. I-90 runs east-west from Massachusetts to Albany to Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo. I-287 forms a belt around New York City and New Jersey, serving as the primary means of east-west travel in Westchester County. Route 17 is an important local corridor providing connections to recreational areas and the Southern Tier; a portion of the route is being upgraded to interstate highway standards as I-86.

New York State developed six parkways in the Hudson Valley prior to construction of the Interstate System. Of these, four primarily serve Westchester County. Beyond these four, the Palisades Interstate Parkway connects New Jersey to Rockland and Orange counties along the Hudson River and the Taconic Parkway runs parallel to the Hudson River's east side from Westchester to I-90.

Seven bridges connect the eastern and western banks of the Hudson River in this area: The Tappan Zee Bridge, connecting Tarrytown and Nyack, the Bear Mountain Bridge, connecting Orange county to northern Westchester, The Hamilton Fish Newburgh-Beacon Bridge (I-84), the Franklin D. Roosevelt Mid-Hudson Bridge, connecting Highland to Poughkeepsie, the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge, the Rip Van Winkle Bridge, connecting Greene County to Columbia County, and the NYS Thruway Bridge, connecting I-87 to I-90.

Public Transit

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Metro-North Railroad operates commuter rail service on five lines from the Hudson Valley to New York City. Three lines operate east of the Hudson River and connect commuters in Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess to Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan. West of Hudson, the Port Jervis and Pascack Valley line connect passengers to New York's Penn Station and southbound NJ Transit commuter rail service via- a major transfer station at Secaucus Junction. Through-service on the Northern Branch lines terminates at the Hoboken transit hub, with PATH and ferry connections to Lower Manhattan.

Two feeder ferry services connect west bank Hudson River cities to Metro-North stops on the Hudson line. These services run from Haverstraw in Orange County to Ossining in Westchester County and from Newburgh in Orange County to Beacon in Dutchess County.

All counties are served by bus service, but the frequency and breadth of service vary widely. The Bee-Line Bus system in Westchester serves 32 million riders annually on 66 routes throughout the County. Rockland and Orange County residents working in New York City can also use commuter bus services provided by private operators. Privately-operated bus routes on the corridor connect Albany and Manhattan with service at a number of intermediate locations west of the Hudson River.

By contrast, northern Hudson River Valley counties offer commuter service for tourists and commuter service to Albany and other work hubs once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Some form of local bus service is available in every major and many minor cities above Westchester County, including: Albany, Poughkeepsie, Beacon, Hudson, Kingston, Rensselaer, and Troy.

Intercity Passenger and Freight Rail

Amtrak operates intercity passenger rail service on the Hudson's eastern bank from New York City to Albany and points north. Freight rail service is available on a track running on the west side of the Hudson River to points north of Albany and south to Port Newark and beyond. CSX trains run on the River Line, which lies on the west bank of the Hudson. On the east bank of the Hudson, CSX shares track with Metro-North's Hudson Line from Poughkeepsie and they run into their freight rail yard at Oak Point in the Bronx. CSX owns the track north of Poughkeepsie and Amtrak has operating rights on it, meaning the line on the east of the Hudson is a joint freight and passenger.

Air Service

Stewart International Airport (SWF), now operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, currently offers limited domestic service serving primarily travelers to and from the counties closest to the airport. The Port Authority is undertaking significant infrastructure investments at SWF, anticipating expanded domestic and eventually some international service to provide air service alternatives mainly to the Hudson Valley market. A bus shuttle connects the airport with Metro North Railroad's Beacon Station on the east side of the Hudson River. Current planning aims for gradual expansion of "rubber-tire" transit options as the flight schedule grows, with a connection to the MNR Port Jervis Line as a future goal.

Albany International Airport is located in the town of Colonie, just north of Albany. The airport is served by Delta, Southwest, United Airlines and US Airways.

Major Transportation Projects

Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on transportation projects annually throughout the Hudson Valley, but the vast majority of these projects are small-scale rehabilitations and renovations to highways, bridges, transit, and recreational trails.

The following major Hudson River Valley projects were listed in the 2008-2012 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) applications of the various Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Funding for many of the projects over the next few years remains in jeopardy, however, as the capital plans of the MTA and other transportation agencies are far from fully funded.

- NYS Thruway Authority
 - \$309 Million proposed for improvements roads and bridges on I-87 and I-95 in Westchester and Rockland.
- Metro-North Railroad
 - Hudson Line Station Rehabilitations: from Hastings to Ossining
 - New Haven Station Rehabilitations: from Mount Vernon East to Port Chester.
- Rockland County Bus Improvements
 - Purchase of low-floor hybrid buses, ITS technology including electronic fare collection, “Next Bus” technology, and a vehicle locator system.

Pending Projects

The Tappan Zee Bridge is long overdue for replacement. The required investment in the bridge is estimated to be anywhere between \$6 billion (for a relatively simple replacement) and \$16 billion (if additions such as bus only lanes, bike/pedestrian lanes and a Metro-North extension are included). Funding for this project must be a national priority given the broad scope of its impact, and it should not detract from investments needs in the region’s transportation network.

Task Force Process

Listening Tour Process and Summary of Findings

To prepare for a conference later this year to shape the future of the Hudson Valley, the Hudson Fulton Champlain Quadricentennial Commission sponsored a series of six workshops for invited leader-stakeholders representing a range of local, regional and state-based interests in the fall of 2009. Workshops were held in Hudson, Kingston, Troy, Newburgh-New Windsor, New York City and Yonkers. One hundred and fourteen people attended these events, and they presented some 175 ideas in a range of fields. The following priority ideas were presented that either fully or partially relate to transportation and the mission of the Task Force:

- What if the Hudson-Catskills was a “gateway”(where things go out and come in)?
- We could have strong cities with green productive land in between.
- We could be living in development patterns that sustain functional ecosystems.
- We could make places where we live, work, and play closer together and accessible by bicycle, kayak, foot and public transit.
- What if we used the river as a source of transporting people and goods.
- We could feed the 29 counties around the city with food from New York State shipped via the Hudson River.
- We could use the 2010 conference to develop a legislative agenda and lobbyist/advocacy group to promote these issues.

These ideas served as important input into the deliberation of the Transportation Task Force’s deliberations.

Task Force Members

The following Hudson Valley residents and regional transportation professionals comprise the membership of the Transportation Task Force:

- Anthony Campagiorni, Assistant VP, Governmental Affairs and Economic Development, Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation
- Alice Cheng, Principal, Cheng Solutions
- David Church, Commissioner of Planning, Orange County
- Kevin Corbett, Vice President, Corporate Development, AECOM
- Mary Ann Crotty, President, Macro Associates
- Joel Ettinger, Executive Director, NY Metropolitan Transportation Commission
- Tom Fox, President, New York Water Taxi
- Joseph Heller, USDA, RCD Coordinator, Lower Hudson-Long Island Resources Conservation and Development Council
- Chuck Houghton, Rensselaerville Institute
- Roland Lewis, President, Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance
- Richard A. Maitino, Vice President, Parsons, Inc. (Co-chair)
- Angel Medina, Director, Long-Range Planning, NYS Thruway Authority
- Susan Metzger, Chair, Orange County Planning Board
- John Poorman, Staff Director, Capital District Transportation Committee
- Jean Shanahan, Transportation Coordination Committee Staff Director, NYMTC
- Anthony E. Shorris, Professor, New York University (Co-chair)
- Ernest Tollerson, Director, Policy & Media Relations, New York State Metropolitan Transportation Authority
- Jim Tripp, General Counsel, Environmental Defense Fund
- Lou Venech, General Manager, Transportation Policy & Planning Development, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
- Tom Wakeman, Deputy Director, Center for Maritime Studies, Stevens Institute of Technology
- Jeffrey Zupan, Senior Fellow, Transportation, Regional Plan Association

Meetings and Process The Transportation Task Force developed its recommendations over the course of two meetings and through the consideration of written input from Task Force members.

III. KEY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The Transportation Task Force identified the following four issues and strategic recommendations for new transportation policy in the Hudson Valley in the near- and long-term future.

Commutation: Support the Economic Vitality of the Hudson River Valley

The Hudson Valley's proximity to New York City, the largest city in the United States and the economic engine of the region, is a key source of regional economic vitality. For decades, families have chosen to work in New York City and live in Westchester, Rockland, Orange, Putnam and even Dutchess County. In 2008, 300,000 residents of New York City commuted to employment centers outside of Manhattan such as White Plains.

Maintaining and improving existing commuter options will be critical to ensure continued economic vitality. In recent years, the New York State Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has faced billion-dollar operating and capital budget deficits. Highways and bridges continue to operate at less than ideal conditions after years of neglect. A 2007 report by the New York State Department of Transportation reported 25% of State Highway Bridges were functionally obsolete and 12% were structurally deficient.

As the US and the region continue to grow, the Hudson River Valley will experience increased truck traffic on its highways, which serve as a critical regional and national corridor for transporting goods. Because truck traffic on the Parkways is prohibited, increased truck traffic on the I-84, I-90, and I-87 will be especially noticeable. Opportunities may exist for the distribution of agricultural products from the Hudson Valley by barge or rail to decrease truck traffic on the Interstates.

Key Recommendations

- **Fund Highways and Public Transit to Ensure Continued Economic Vitality:** Maintaining strong connections to regional job hubs will require funding the expansion and maintenance of the Hudson Valley's valuable mass transit and highway assets. We need to support continued investment in maintaining and expanding our transportation systems.
- **Modal Shifts for Goods Movement:** To mitigate increased truck traffic and goods movement to and through the Valley, rail freight transportation options should be improved and the possibility of moving freight on the river should be further explored.

Connectedness: Integrate Connections in the Hudson Valley

With careful planning, communities along the Hudson River Valley could become tourist destinations by leveraging their proximity to population centers in New York City and Albany. New York City residents and foreign tourists from developing and polluted nations are eager to experience the natural beauty, scenic paths, and historic centers of the Hudson Valley. Lack of public transit to and between destinations has been cited as an obstacle to attracting tourists. To leverage its potential for attracting tourists, the Hudson River Valley should improve connectivity options for tourists. Business models such as that of New York Water Taxi, a New York City-based ferry company that transports tourists to harbor destinations, could be explored.

Once tourists reach the ferry landing, train station, or bus node nearest their destination, they will need convenient transit access to attractions further inland. Where potential ridership volumes are inadequate to support scheduled transit service, for-hire and “on demand” service or station-car and convenient rental car options would allow more visitors to make the most of their trip to and from the region via transit while offering flexible access that would allow them to make the most (and spend more time and money) in the region.

Key Recommendations

- **Develop Integrated Fare Systems across Modes (Metro-North, Amtrak, Local Bus, Regional Bus, Ferry):** Creating integrated fare options will encourage tourists without cars to visit the Hudson Valley and encourage those with cars to use transit, leading to decreased congestion on local roads. A more expansive regional connectivity, enabled by a vastly expanded Metrocard-type service, could also be explored.
- **Expand Regular Bus Service and BRT:** New options for bus service and bus rapid transit systems (BRT) linking to Amtrak and Metro-North stations and town centers would improve transportation options for current residents and attract tourists from New York City. Localities should expand these services as appropriate given potential demand. BRT may be feasible along a number of corridors. Demand may be greatest across the Tappan Zee Bridge, along the Cross-County Expressway, and on Central Avenue from White Plains to Yonkers. Routes may exist in Albany that warrant analysis.
- **Explore Options to Increase Ferry Commutation and Recreational Services:** Look to successful models in New York City and other localities to enhance the tourist experience in the Hudson Valley and create a recreational network of ferries services connecting the river towns and attractions. For example, the S.S. Columbia is currently being restored and could be an attractive recreational ferry service. We should also explore the possibility of adding new feeder ferry routes to train stations or new services that travel directly to New York City.

- **Ensure Tappan Zee Solutions Support Hudson Valley:** The replacement of the Tappan Zee Bridge will provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to expand intermodal options and pursue transit-oriented development zoning strategies in Orange and Westchester counties. Our leaders should work to make sure that the new Tappan Zee makes the most of these opportunities, including through consideration of a Metro-North extension, bus lanes, and/or bike/pedestrian lanes on the new bridge.
- **Encourage Options for Biking and Walking:** Continue to support and expand opportunities for walking and cycling. This can be done by installing bike amenities and pedestrian design elements in and around Metro-North and Amtrak train stations. Explore options for allowing bikes on buses, creating bike maps and promotional material to guide guests to walkable areas and cycling trails.

Community: Make Hudson Valley Towns More Livable and Attractive

Much like the rest of the country, sprawling development patterns prevailed in the Hudson River Valley in recent years. In most parts of the Hudson Valley, accessing the grocery store, the pharmacy and or retail shopping is simply not possible without a car. As a result, the appeal of town center living – with easy walking access to services and amenities – has been degraded.

The development and expansion of local bus systems could be harnessed to develop livable and attractive residential and employment centers. Improved and expanded bus service is ideal for Hudson River Valley densities. These services could expand options for travel both within and between town centers. Integrating transportation improvements with sound land use planning will be essential when making such investments.

Key Recommendations

- **Fund Planning of Transit-oriented Development:** As energy prices rise and the population ages, demand for real estate in high and medium-density locations will increase. Our communities should focus new development along main streets and near train stations.
- **Support Regional Land Use Planning:** Hudson Valley communities should begin discussions to determine how their land use actions and transportation initiatives impact neighboring localities. Eventually, these discussions could lead to concrete actions to support rational land use planning across local jurisdictions for mutual benefit.

Re-Create: Envision a Hudson Valley Around the River

As the US economy shifts from manufacturing to service sector based activity, localities around the nation have rediscovered their waterfronts and centered new planning efforts around these opportunities. While towns in the Hudson River Valley generally developed away from the waterfront, they would be wise to consider the reuse of former industrial sites, and opportunities to expand access to the river.

Key Recommendations

- **Improve Access to the River through Better Land Use along the Shore, Creation of New Physical Connections, and Adaptive Re-use of Infrastructure:** A number of former manufacturing sites along the river possess enormous potential for adaptive reuse as parks, housing, light industrial and other uses. Small investments to physically connect these sites to the mainland or the river could reap significant shared benefits to local communities.
- **Improve Access on the River Using Eco-docks and Other Connections on the River:** Eco-docks, which rise and fall with the tide, are easy to install and inexpensive to maintain, and it is generally easier to obtain permits to install these docks. These and other low-cost options should be explored to allow residents better access to the dock and promote trans-river transportation and goods distribution options.

Tools for Change

The improvements recommended in this report will not come without costs. Policy makers must utilize all available tools to adequately finance specific projects and ensure an equitable distribution of the investment's costs.

As an integral component of the Interstate Highway system, the Federal government should largely fund the replacement costs of the Tappan Zee Bridge. Given its national impact, this project should not compete for funding with needed local and regional initiatives.

New State and local funding sources will need to be created in order to maintain existing commutation options to New York City, integrate tourist connections to Hudson Valley destinations, make town centers more livable, and support planning around the River. That means a number of bold and difficult funding options must be seriously considered. These options should include: new and increased tolls, congestion pricing (on Hudson Valley highways), gas taxes and even a new carbon tax. When considering these options, policy makers must take into account that driving is usually the only way to get from here to there in most Hudson River communities, and therefore, principles of fairness, adequacy and efficiency must be considered all together when developing new sources of revenue.

Further, pricing options should be seen as a tool both for new revenues and also for demand management. Drivers may need to pay a larger share of the burden for financing repairs, renovations and transportation enhancements, but these fees should also be used to control demand and limit the need to expand existing highways. Congestion tolling at the Port Authority's Hudson River crossings and the Tappan Zee Bridge has demonstrated the positive demand management impacts of pricing policies. Such strategies could be used to mitigate the need for future highway expansions.

There are six Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) planning for the Hudson River Valley. These organizations should work to integrate their various planning efforts to increase commutation, connectedness, enhance communities and re-create life around the River. They should consider the creation of an umbrella planning organization for the entire Valley to enable more comprehensive planning.

We need to coordinate on the operating side as well as the capital investment side if we are to leverage the strengths of the Valley. The operations of various transportation services should be integrated to allow for seamless intermodal connections. A new “Hudson Valley Transit Pass” should be considered to allow riders to pay their bridge tolls, and fares on bus, ferry boats and Metro-North.

Most importantly, communities and their elected representatives need to coalesce around specific items and work together to advance the region’s agenda. Our elected officials should form a “Hudson Valley Caucus” to lobby for projects in both Albany and Washington. Powerful blocks of Assembly Members, State Senators and U.S. Representatives currently lobby for the local interests of Long Island, New York City, and Upstate New York, but the 3.3 million residents of the Hudson Valley lack unified representation. Too often, this results in their interests being unrealized or inadequately supported.

This Hudson Valley Caucus should convene a policy and planning process to further refine their vision for the Hudson River Valley and the transportation tools needed to make this vision a reality. Working together with our political and civic community leaders, we can collectively determine how to leverage the strength of Valley residents and local business to develop the political strength we need to make our vision a reality. We should strongly consider the creation of a “Hudson Valley Manifesto” which candidates for office and others seeking our support should be asked to sign on to if they are seeking to represent our communities.

IV. CONCLUSION

These recommendations constitute a vision for developing the Hudson River Valley’s transportation infrastructure in the long-term. Implementation of these recommendations will allow the Valley to continue to be a thriving destination where people live, work and visit.