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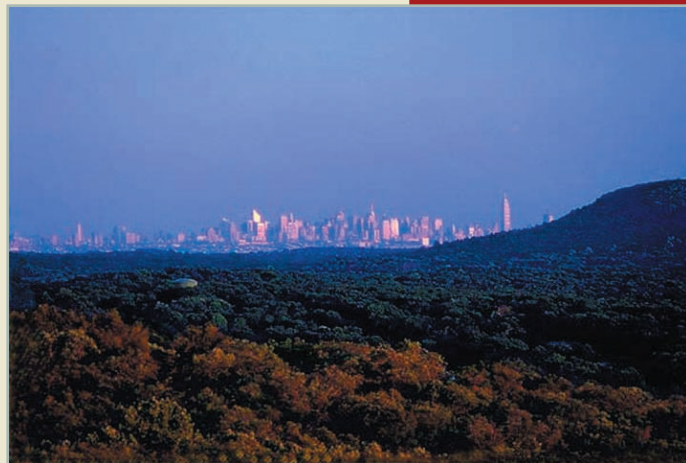
Integrated Transportation Planning &
Community Design Processes

NEW YORK METRO

Sustainable Development: Pilot Studies in the NYMTC Region

“creating a
neighborhood
out of what used
to be a highway”

-James Yarmus,
Rockland County
Planning Dept.



NEW YORK STATE



New York Metro

Significant Achievements

- ◆ Two of NYMTC’s completed studies have resulted in actions taken by local municipalities on land use, as well as transportation improvements constructed through NYMTC’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).
- ◆ As a result of the Rt. 6/25/202/Bear Mountain Parkway Sustainable Development Project, the three local municipalities have entered into an inter-municipal agreement to better coordinate local land use planning.
- ◆ Stakeholders and residents involved in the studies came to understand and acknowledge the necessity of developing a linked transportation-land use plan to protect their quality of life.
- ◆ Planners involved in the studies from NYMTC and elsewhere better appreciate community needs and aspirations that the infrastructure being planned both creates and supports.

Overview

The New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) is a regional council of governments that serves as the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for New York City, Long Island and the lower Hudson Valley. NYMTC is responsible for transportation planning for one of the most densely populated and dynamic regions in the country, with one of the most extensive transportation networks in the world.

The region’s comprehensive, albeit mature, infrastructure is continuously challenged by increases in population and economic activity, making sustainable development approaches in the region not only desirable but often necessary. Within the NYMTC region, the link between land use and transportation services is not planning theory, but rather an everyday reality.

To facilitate a more proactive approach to linking land use, community design and transportation planning in the region, NYMTC has coordinated four “Pilot Sustainable Development Studies” across the region. While each of the studies presented its own specific challenges and opportunities, all have been characterized by extensive, and extended, public involvement and consensus building. Two of the completed studies have resulted in actions taken by local municipalities on land use, as well as transportation improvements constructed through NYMTC’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

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The Process

NYMTC’s pilot sustainable development studies have been characterized by extensive public involvement: local residents and business owners not only identify the issues the planning process will address, but they also debate, analyze, and finally select their community’s preferred solutions.

In each of these studies, the process began with “visioning sessions,” where residents and business owners expressed their aspirations for their community. These sessions, by their very nature, focus on quality of life issues, with land use and development questions dominating the discussions. Also high on the agenda are safety issues and aesthetic concerns. By focusing on the type of community they want to live in, participants are able to move toward a consensus vision of that future. Once consensus is reached on a preferred vision for the community’s future, then transportation improvements are explored to support (or sustain) that vision.



Photosimulation of improvements to Rt. 303 Corridor.

While the transportation planning process is not routinely driven by community aspirations, in NYMTC’s pilot sustainable development studies this is clearly the case. The community-based approach not only affected how the planning process operates, but also its scope and the type of improvements it produced.



Example of planning tools used in Rt. 6/202 Study Process.

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Rt. 303 Corridor, Orangetown, NY

Right: Rt. 303 in
Rockland County.

Rockland County has the fastest growing population of all the counties in the NYMTC region. Located 10 miles northwest of New York City, this historic area was once dominated by farms and small hamlets.



After the Tappan Zee Bridge opened in 1956, new residents arrived seeking affordable housing or suburban amenities. The Tappan Zee, as well as the George Washington Bridge to the south, provide access to New York City, making private automobiles the county's dominant form of transportation.

Route 303 is the main roadway through the Town of Orangetown and the hamlets of Tappan and Blauvelt. By the 1990s, residents considered it dangerous and unsightly, and were interested in not only improving its safety, but also in enhancing their own quality of life by addressing some of the problems associated with the roadway.

In 1999, the Town of Orangetown, New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and Rockland County began a sustainable development study for the Route 303 Corridor. Neighborhood



meetings were held, and residents and business owners were invited to air their grievances on the Rt. 303 Corridor and the surrounding area. They were also invited to envision a better roadway, and to describe what it would look like. Planners tabulated preferences and themes.

Over the course of the next three years, community planning workshops, known as ‘charrettes,’ followed, in which land use and development preferences were identified. Throughout the process, residents expressed a desire for village centers and preserving the corridor’s remaining open spaces. The study team then developed potential future scenarios that responded to these desires.

Various future scenarios for both land use and transportation were developed, and these scenarios were tested, using computer simulation, to give participants insights into how different combinations of scenarios would look in five, 10 and 20 years. These tests also included variables of different rates of future population growth, job growth, commercial development, etc., that could be expected under the different scenarios.

Residents were presented with the full range of possibilities for every combination of transportation and land use. They were then asked to select a preferred future. Given the extensive community involvement that marked the process to this point, the result was embraced as the community’s consensus.

Rt. 303 Significant Achievements

- ◆ Implementation of the preferred future scenario for the Rt. 303 Corridor began with short term safety improvements - left hand turn signals; synchronized traffic lights, etc.
- ◆ Quality of life improvements soon followed: bicycle and pedestrian trails; historic preservation districts, community parks and playground.
- ◆ With the ultimate goal of creating new hamlet centers as a guide, changes were institutionalized through zoning revisions. Longer-term transportation improvements were programmed onto the TIP.
- ◆ From the beginning of the effort, community members recognized that they were involved in re-writing their town’s master plan. They took this responsibility seriously and appreciated that results in such a large scale project were necessarily incremental -- not immediate.
- ◆ By the time the community accepted a final sustainable development plan, one participant characterized their work as “creating a neighborhood out of what used to be a highway.”

*Sustainable Development:
Pilot Studies in the NYMTC Region*

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Rt. 6/25/202/
Bear Mountain Parkway
Sustainable Development
Project

Right: The study area
within Westchester
County.

NYMTC's second pilot sustainable development study was established in portions of three communities in northern Westchester County: the City of Peekskill and portions of the Towns of Cortlandt and Yorktown, extending from the Hudson River east to the Taconic State Parkway. Westchester County is among the nation's "oldest suburbs," and enjoys an extensive transportation infrastructure – highway, rail and bus – linking it to New York City.



While this sustainable development process generally followed the template developed during the Rt. 303 Corridor study, it proved a more complex and ambitious undertaking, as it required close coordination between three municipalities, as well as the county and NYSDOT.

In the summer of 2000, residents met in a series of public meetings to identify their communities' most pressing issues. Within months, another series of meetings occurred in which the study's 'Guiding Principles' were debated



Engaging residents and stakeholders in development of the study's "Guiding Principles" was key to the study's success.

and formalized, and various issues and potential solutions defined. The study team then used these results to develop various land use and transportation improvement scenarios, which were presented for public review by spring 2001.

Rt. 5/24/202/ Bear Mountain Parkway Significant Achievements

- ◆ Safety improvements, including traffic signals at busy intersections and the lengthening of signal timing for safer pedestrian crossings opposite busy retail outlets in Cortlandt’s town center; Better signage on the Bear Mt. Parkway; Bollards along Rt.6 along Mohegan Lake

- ◆ Quality of life improvements, including landscape redesign on Oak Shrub Ave.; Bicycle racks outside the public library in the same area; Improved drainage to clear the way for pedestrian traffic, and a central plaza in Peekskill.

- ◆ The study’s major achievements perhaps actually followed its completion. As a result of the community’s experience with planning for sustainable development, Yorktown revised its master plan in 2005 and adopted the bicycle and pedestrian transport recommendations for their road projects. Also in 2005, Metropool started a van pool service to the Cortlandt train station. Most significantly, the three local municipalities have since entered into an inter-municipal agreement to better coordinate local land use planning.

Participants selected five alternative future scenarios. Each was developed and enhanced by computer simulation and matrix analysis, for an overview of how it would work with the envisioned transportation improvements required



over the next 20 years. Variables for different levels of development and job growth were also calculated for each scenario.

Prior to making a final decision, residents insisted on developing ‘Performance

The Study assessed aesthetic and visual conditions and considerations as part of the plan development process.

Measures' to quantify the impact of each scenario in the Guiding Principles. This happened in February 2002, and residents were able to evaluate each alternative against their own benchmarks by April of that year.

Participants identified and selected a Preferred Land Use Scenario and Transportation Improvement Bundles in May 2002, allowing them to accept a final scenario by August of that year, as participants' own criteria for performance determined their choice.

Sustainable East End Development Strategies (SEEDS), Suffolk County

The SEEDS initiative on the easternmost tip of Long Island's Suffolk County is by far the most extensive and complex of NYMTC's pilot sustainable development studies. SEEDS involved five towns and nine villages on Long Island's East End, a premier, and

SEEDS Significant Achievements:

- ◆ When the SEEDS initiative concluded in December 2005, East End elected officials and their planning departments released a consensus concept plan.
- ◆ East End municipalities are now developing an inter-municipal agreement to coordinate local land use planning.
- ◆ Transportation agencies are planning "next steps" for the study's supporting transportation improvements.



Renderings of "what-if" sustainable development scenarios were used to inform public and policy-maker discussions.

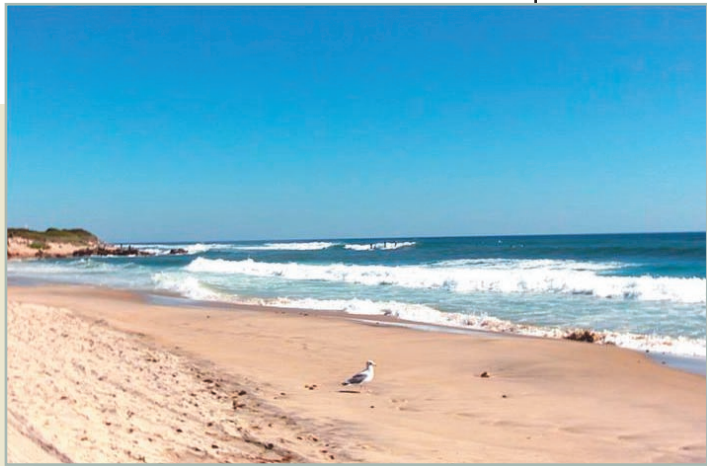
historic, leisure destination that retains a largely rural character.

In addition to being an exceptionally large study area, it proved uniquely challenging in that the region has a history of contentious relations with its own county government, with NYS DOT and with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). In fact, the SEEDS study area is the center of the Peconic County movement, which in the past called for the area's secession from Suffolk County.

A collaborative group involving NYMTC, NYSDOT, Suffolk County and local municipalities launched SEEDS in April 2001. The effort included two distinct levels of community visioning: Sessions to identify local transportation and quality of life issues; and workshops to voice aspirations for what the area should look like in 20 years.

The SEEDS collaborative held 14 meetings throughout the East End, which resulted in extensive and varied input. Through the meeting process, the study team determined that the community did not consider the initial 'future scenarios' it presented as adequately representing the full range of proposed options. Therefore, to achieve community consensus, significant and time-consuming revisions to the planning process were required.

In addition, the simulation modeling at the center of these scenarios was contentious since both weekday and weekend results were needed to fully define the transportation issues in a seasonal resort community.



Long Island's East End contains some of New York State's most important natural and recreational areas.



Left: The East End is also a highly productive agricultural area.



Likewise, the “town centers” concept proved difficult to model. These technical challenges came at a cost: the SEEDS initiative lost significant credibility, as the need for more extensive consensus building over a longer timeframe became apparent.

The process was further challenged by the local elections results of 2004 when the local Town Supervisor who championed the SEEDS initiative lost her bid for re-election. The region’s dynamic local politics continued to influence the process, when some newly elected officials – not having been involved in the consensus building process from the very beginning – criticized the study’s lengthy timeframe.

Despite the complex and contentious planning process, the SEEDS initiative was able to regain momentum as residents conceded – despite specific problems with the modeling process – the necessity of developing a linked transportation-land use plan to protect their quality of life.

Coney Island/Gravesend Study, Brooklyn

NYMTC’s fourth pilot Sustainable Development study is in its initial stages, but like the SEEDS project, this study area contains a historic beachfront with a distinctive character that residents are eager to preserve.

Brooklyn’s Coney Island is a storied recreational destination. It is home to a myriad of amusements and entertainment opportunities, including a boardwalk, beach front access, an aquarium, rides, restaurants and a minor league baseball stadium. Promoting and



coordinating economic development to revitalize the community, while preserving its quality of life, character, culture and natural features, presents both unique challenges and unique opportunities.

After numerous community visioning sessions, NYMTC and NYC DOT are working in conjunction with the Coney Island Development Corporation to develop future scenarios responding to residents' concerns.

Simultaneously, NYMTC is evaluating Coney Island's current transportation network, and the area's future transportation needs, using computer modeling. This extensive transportation modeling effort is examining a series of land use and transportation scenarios for the base year and 2015 and 2025. Once all the scenarios are run, the data will be evaluated and presented at a public meeting, where residents will be asked to choose their preferred vision for their community's future.



Beyond its famous beach and amusement park, Coney Island is also home to a community of 60,000 people.

Lessons Learned

- **Building Consensus on a Community's Future is Time-consuming but Essential for Making Progress**

The pilot studies clearly demonstrated that attempting to reach consensus on a community's future is both time consuming and essential. Each of the completed studies took at least twice as long as initially planned. There were a number of reasons for the length of these efforts, including the need for several rounds of public workshops; organizing the information from the visioning into specific future scenarios; testing those scenarios; establishing community buy-in those scenarios were representative of the community input; the need to construct multiple scenarios in the simulation model and to model those scenarios in multiple combinations; the need to carefully summarize the modeling results; and the selection of a preferred alternative on a consensus basis, based on those modeling results. The unavoidable conclusion of these experiences is that sustainable development studies are an organic outgrowth of community participation, which, by its very nature, requires much time for a successful outcome. However, it is difficult to maintain interest and credibility in a so lengthy a process, and this fact – in so far as it undercuts community involvement -- may work against a successful result.

- **Planners Need to Acknowledge that Modeling Transportation and Land Use Interactions is an Inexact Science**

Modeling the interaction of land use and transportation futures is still an inexact calculation. Current travel demand models do not have the capability to estimate the travel demand that may be induced

by the development potential made possible by transportation improvements. These relationships and interactions must therefore be approximated by using a matrix analysis approach, in which land use futures and transportation future are modeled in every possible combination. This adds both time and complexity to the process. In addition, land use futures must be described through inputs used in the model, and therefore development type and square footage must be converted into proxy statistics, such as employment or number of households. It is important that planners acknowledge these complexities, and the limitations of the modeling process, to stakeholders, decision-makers and the public in order to retain credibility in the planning process and to help everyone involved understand the dynamics of a community-oriented planning effort.

- **Planners Need to Allow for Adequate Time and Effort to Convey Analysis Results Clearly and Understandably to Process Participants**

Although the construction of alternative futures is relatively straightforward and easy to convey to the study participants, the data produced by the modeling exercise is voluminous and difficult to accurately describe, particularly after the multiple iterations of a matrix analysis. Nevertheless, this data is critical to any study's outcome, since the participants must come to consensus of future choices based largely on these complex modeling results. A great deal of time is necessary to accurately present these results in a meaningful and understandable fashion.

- **Local Politics and Election Cycles Can Affect Planning Process Consensus-building Efforts**

The completed studies have all been dependent on the buy-in and active participation of local elected officials in partnership with the agencies responsible for transportation improvements. Local champions are particularly critical to moving the process forward and maintaining its credibility. However, the length of the process can work against local buy-in, as support based on the enthusiasm of elected officials can be changed by the next Election Day cycle. Additionally, enthusiasm for the effort often varies among the local elected officials. However, it was also found through the pilot studies that they can build sufficient momentum over time to be able to accommodate political changes and varying agendas, although this is by no means guaranteed.

• Building in “Early Win” Implementation Opportunities Can Help Maintain Momentum toward Long-term Plan Goals

Each of the completed pilot studies has now moved into an implementation phase. However, some level of implementation or improvement also needs to happen with the study in order to overcome the skepticism of participants who may see the study as “just another planning effort” or as a “Trojan horse” for others’ hidden agendas. In NYMTC’s four studies, short-term implementation that leads to “early wins” was critical to establishing and maintaining local credibility and trust. However, not all preferred improvements are short-term and a concerted effort by the study partners must be mounted to effect the implementation of necessary land use changes and medium- and long-term transportation improvements. These studies do demonstrate that the results can create a focal point for both the local officials and the responsible agencies to initiate action and solidify funding for implementation.

• Sustainable Transportation Studies Can Help Planners Better Understand the Connection of Planning to Community Vitality

NYMTC’s pilot sustainable development studies introduced the agency’s planners (and others) to a broader understanding of how their work and products can affect constituent communities. NYMTC officials point out that the agency’s work is no longer defined by

transportation infrastructure alone, but by an appreciation of the community needs and aspirations that the infrastructure both creates and supports.

Project Details

Sustainable Development: Pilot Studies
in the NYMTC (New York Metropolitan
Transportation Council) Region

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