

SUFFOLK AND
NASSAU COUNTIES

NYS MPO

Integrated Transportation Planning &
Community Design Processes

New York Route 25A Reconstruction

“You are to be
applauded for your
perceptive response
and willingness to
apply creative
engineering concepts
in crafting this
compromise
solution.”

—Jean Thatcher
Chair, Sounding
Committee of
Concerned Citizens for
Rt. 25A



NEW YORK STATE



Village of
Laurel
Hollow

*New York Route 25A
Reconstruction*

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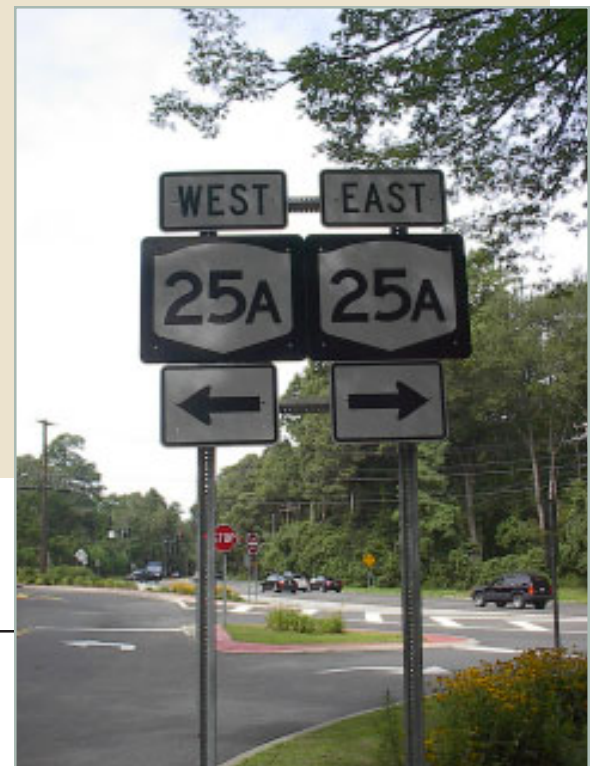
Significant Achievements

- ◆ NYSDOT worked with the local residents and groups until all sides concurred that concerns had been heard and addressed.
- ◆ NYSDOT used innovative construction techniques and materials to minimize environmental and cultural impacts. Careful scheduling of construction work was also employed to minimize disruption to traffic flows.
- ◆ The use of non-standard intersection design solutions successfully addressed site specific problems without widening the intersection.
- ◆ The community involvement process continued through construction. The public was included in discussions of subsequent modifications to the approved plans.

Previous page: The final intersection design used road markings to guide traffic to supplement curbings and landscaping based visual guides for drivers.

Overview

Concerned about high crash rates and congestion on the portion of NY Route 25A (25A) that passes through it, local residents in the Village of Laurel Hollow in Nassau County working together with the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) requested that NYSDOT examine potential upgrades to the roadway. Residents of the surrounding communities, however, felt strongly about minimizing impacts of any proposed roadway improvements on historic and environmental resources. After a period of intense public debate, the residents and NYSDOT, with the support of local officials, combined their efforts to identify an acceptable solution that preserved historic and environmental resources and addressed the safety issues. Project costs were on the order of \$6 million.



Route 25A is a key connecting route in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Land uses in the corridor were primarily residential and open spaces with some employment sites.



The Success Story

A 1.1 mile segment of NY Route 25A between the intersection with Cove Road on the west end in the Village of Laurel Hollow, Nassau County and the intersection with Harbor Road (Route 108) in the Town of Huntington in Suffolk County, of which nearly 90 percent is in Laurel Hollow, had several flaws that were greatly affecting traffic safety, including

- An intersection in proximity of a local elementary school, with restricted sight distances due to hilltops and blind curves;
- A steep grade where the roadway climbs away from Cold Spring Harbor, slowing the movement of trucks moving up hill;
- Dangerous winter conditions at driveways and intersections located on the steep portions of the roadway;
- Numerous poorly performing un-signalized intersections, side streets and driveways were suffering high delays; and
- Continuously increasing traffic levels, including through traffic resulting from increased development east of Laurel Hollow.

Poor roadway conditions were exacerbated by local growth at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and the New York State Fish Hatchery. Both of these organizations had their main vehicular access points on this portion of 25A. As the number of employees and visitors at these sites increased, so did the number of vehicles accessing 25A via un-signalized intersections.



Cold Spring Harbor is an important quality of life resource to the community and a key reason why residents fought so hard to avoid harmful impacts.

New York Route 25A Reconstruction

The crest of the hill was lowered to improve visibility and enhance safety.

The Fish Hatchery entrance is near the eastern end of 25A in Laurel Hollow, where the roadway is level and close to the wetlands around Cold Spring Harbor. The entrance to the Laboratory, on the other hand, was further west along the sloped portion of the roadway. Vehicles that stopped behind other vehicles waiting to make a turn into the lab often had a difficult time resuming travel up the hill in the winter. In the other direction, poor roadway geometry meant vehicles coming down the hill experienced difficulty stopping or slowing when vehicles in front of them slowed to turn into the side road.



Prior to this study, a climbing lane had existed for the uphill portion of this section of 25A to help relieve congestion problems resulting from heavily laden trucks moving slowly up the hill. NYSDOT subsequently converted a portion of this uphill climbing lane into a turning lane to accommodate increased turning movements. While the creation of the turning lane addressed a safety problem, the elimination of portions of the second uphill lane aggravated the delays and congestion.

As conditions deteriorated, the Village of Laurel Hollow requested that NYSDOT evaluate and recommend roadway improvements. NYSDOT worked with the Village of Laurel Hollow in creating this initial plan, and focused primarily on correcting safety problems. The planning process developed five potential alternatives that offered solutions to satisfy project requirements for improved safety, increased capacity and upgraded infrastructure. NYSDOT worked with the public throughout the process, with public meetings held after each alternative was formulated, plus an additional meeting held to present the recommended alternative.

NYSDOT submitted its first final design report in September 1993. The recommended design balanced safety and traffic operations



improvements with environmental impacts and well-developed environmental mitigations, including reductions in the amount of retaining walls required. Other improvements in this first final design included roadway resurfacing, roadway reconstruction to improve the profile and sight distance, intersection upgrades, improvements of two substandard horizontal curves, a second westbound and eastbound lane at the end of the project, and drainage improvements and wetland mitigation.

The initial final design, however, required widening the roadway by adding one traffic lane, which would result in modest filling in of adjacent coastal wetland areas. The plan did include mitigation measures to restore portions of the natural wetlands and harbor ecological systems.

After NYSDOT submitted its initial recommendations to the Village of Laurel Hollow, the Towns of Oyster Bay and Huntington, as well as Nassau and Suffolk Counties, the project met with considerable public

opposition from residents in the adjacent town to the east (Huntington), primarily because of the impact to coastal wetlands. Strong opinions emerged from project proponents and opponents with public hearings attended by hundreds of participants between 1993 and 1996.

One of the opponent citizen groups, the Sounding Committee of



Safety and traffic flow improvements included segregated traffic lanes and signals for turning vehicles and a travel lane for cyclists.

NYSDOT engineered the roadway improvements to maximize safe traffic flow and minimize aesthetic and environmental impacts.



New York Route 25A Reconstruction

SUFFOLK AND NASSAU COUNTIES

Concerned Citizens for Rt. 25A (CC25A), prepared a proposal whose intent was to address safety goals without altering the roadway. CC25A's proposal called for more traffic signals along the hill and resurfacing the road with a high-friction, skid-resistant material. It also recommended reducing the speed limit along certain segments of the roadway to enhance traveler safety. The CC25A proposal was not universally accepted, especially from an engineering and safety perspective, and many local residents felt safety issues were not addressed. Despite this, NYSDOT recognized the proposal as having some merit.

To move the project forward, NYSDOT opted to work with the residents of both Laurel Hollow and Huntington on a new plan for the lower portion of the road rather than continuing to make changes to the existing one. NYSDOT initiated a new intensive public involvement process that included a regular

schedule of public work sessions. The community and NYSDOT worked together to expand the range of alternatives and considered strategies that minimized the impact on wetlands at the expense of roadway capacity and level of service. They also reviewed potential applications of non-traditional intersection layouts and the use of new material technologies. Ultimately, NYSDOT created a plan that was acceptable to CC25A, the Village of Laurel Hollow and members of the community.

Collaboration with the community on the 25A Reconstruction project continued through the design and construction phases of the project. NYSDOT kept the public involved to ensure that change orders and/or unanticipated issues that appeared during project design and construction were resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

NYSDOT set up regular meetings with community representatives so that the public was aware of changes and modifications that



The final design separated traffic lanes; this permitted some vehicles to continue through the intersection without stopping, greatly improving traffic flow.

inevitably occur to a design during construction. As changes became necessary due to unforeseen or changed field conditions, NYSDOT discussed the potential modifications with the community representatives and finalized the modifications based on the community input.

Results

The collaborative process between residents and NSYDOT resulted in an innovative solution that addressed safety concerns and balanced reduced environmental impact with acceptable lower level of service standards.

The final design included intersection improvements with separate traffic lanes to allow some vehicle movements to continue uninterrupted through the intersection, minimizing vehicular queues. This greatly improved safety for vehicles making turns and reduced the likelihood of rear-end crashes that were occurring from vehicles trying to stop on a slippery downhill. Lowering the crest of the hill also improved sight lines making it easier for vehicles to access and egress from the main road.

Paved gutters, rather than curbs, were incorporated into the project design to help maintain a rural feel to the intersection. In addition, NYSDOT used reinforced earth gabion retaining walls to minimize the need for fill and, at the same time, permit vegetation to grow.

Lessons Learned

- **Be open to non-traditional solutions.**

NYSDOT expanded its “design toolkit” to counter environmental impact associated with roadway widening to include the potential of non-traditional solutions. Traditional intersection design, for

Earth gabion retaining walls permit vegetation growth, making walls more aesthetic.



New York
Route 25A
Reconstruction

SUFFOLK AND
NASSAU COUNTIES

example, was at this time used almost universally across New York State. In the case of 25A, however, traditional design solutions meant widening the roadway, which created an unacceptable environmental impact. NYSDOT solved the problem by borrowing a design solution more typically used on freeways. Accordingly, the continual flow of downhill traffic was segregated from traffic entering from the Laboratory, so that it eventually merged further away from the intersection.

- In certain circumstances, consider reopening the planning process instead of defending existing unpopular proposals.

NYSDOT worked for several years with residents in Laurel Hollow to develop a plan that specifically addressed safety concerns and minimized impacts to the environment and historic elements. The larger regional community, however, refused to accept even minimal impact. Rather than continue defending its original proposal, NYSDOT opted to reopen the planning process. In

this way, NYSDOT was able to incorporate the wider community into the planning and design process and address most concerns. NYSDOT retained the safety features most needed by the local community. At the same time, however, NYSDOT continued to work with the larger community on a serious response to their concerns, which immediately increased the willingness of the regional community to work *with*, rather than against, NYSDOT. It also, in all likelihood, saved time and costs associated with the

A new traffic signal, in combination with extra lane markings, facilitates safe and efficient turning movements to and from a major employment site.



planning, design and approvals of the proposed solutions for the intersection.

- **Use new technologies and products to create better solutions.**

Research is expanding the range of products and building techniques and technologies available to the construction industry, and some of these offer ways to minimize environmental and visual impacts. Others provide innovative skid-resistant paving materials that enhance vehicle safety. Project engineers and planners should work to maintain awareness of options and opportunities to integrate new technology into projects designs and implementation.

- **Enhance public trust and understanding by making public involvement part of all project phases.**

Typically, public participation is limited to project planning. Extending participation to the design and construction elements and presenting a menu of alternatives can alleviate community opposition to unwanted changes and ultimately, lead to better more cost-effective results. Oftentimes, unforeseen situations and circumstances arise during design and construction phases, and these changes can require modifications to the original design and conflict with previous agreements. To avoid misunderstanding and build trust among members of the public, especially for highly visible and contentious projects, public involvement should be continued throughout design and construction phases.

- **Be strategic about incorporating public input during project design and construction.**

Involving the public in design and construction decisions requires special care and consideration to avoid creating delays in project progress. Input should focus on required changes and proposed solutions, rather than unmodified portions of the plan. Likewise, public involvement in design and construction phases should be targeted to established representative groups or steering committees, and preferably should include people involved in the planning stages. In this way, discussions will start from a basis of understanding and cooperation.



- Consider how to best weigh community concerns against traditional highway engineering standards.

Oftentimes during the planning process, community members and groups will agree to a reduction in vehicle levels of service in exchange for fewer negative community impacts. In the case of Route 25A, for example, community groups opted to accept no increase to roadway capacity in exchange for reduced environmental impacts. These types of decisions typically reflect values of community members participating in the process. Local officials and planners should recognize that values are subject to change and are likely not universally held by all members of the community. As a result, such trade-offs agreements may require additional attention as levels of service deteriorate further or when community leadership and values change

Project Details

NY Route 25A Safety Improvements

Cold Spring Road to Route 108

Town of Oyster Bay

Town of Huntington

NYS DOT Region 10

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