

Memo

To: Penny Eickemeyer
Cc: Ed Buroughs, Ingrid Ellen
From: Peter Feroe
Re: Final Report – NYMTC 9/11 Memorial Scholarship Program
Date: September 22, 2009

This report serves as a summary of the work that I performed for the 9/11 Memorial Scholarship Program during the 2008-2009 award period. More detailed information on the work that I performed can be found in the four quarterly reports that I submitted during the course of the program.

At the outset, I want to thank UTRC Region 2 and NYMTC for giving me this wonderful opportunity. I also want to sincerely thank Ed Buroughs and the rest of my colleagues in Westchester County – both in the Planning Department and the DOT. The guidance and support they provided were critical to the success of my project. On a personal note, I am also incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with such talented and dedicated planners. I also want to thank Professor Ingrid Gould Ellen of NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. Professor Ellen's guidance on this project, and throughout my time at Wagner, was, and still is, an invaluable resource to me.

Overview

The primary goal of my project, and the focus of my internship, was to encourage transit oriented development (TOD) within the I-287 corridor in Westchester in advance of the new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that is being planned in conjunction with the replacement of the Tappan Zee Bridge (TZB). To carry out this task, I was placed with the Westchester County Department of Planning, under the supervision of the deputy commissioner, Ed Buroughs. I helped achieve my project's objective through two main efforts. The first was a targeted Public Education campaign – both on BRT and TOD. The goal of this effort was to move beyond dots on a map and help make the system real for the communities. The second effort was to work to refine the route and station locations proposed by the project team so as to maximize the TOD potential of the new system. I also performed many other tasks in furtherance of my project's objective.

Public Education

One of the largest challenges I faced at the beginning of my internship was demonstrating exactly what was at stake for the communities affected by the BRT system and explaining how they could leverage the transit improvements to help achieve their existing community goals. Therefore, the first thing I did was I created a presentation about BRT that I could deliver to community leaders. The presentation included background information on what BRT was, drawing on examples from around the world to examine various types of BRT vehicles, runningways, stations, and information systems. During the presentation, I also talked about the land-use benefits that BRT systems have been able to achieve. This was extremely important as many communities just didn't believe that BRT could provide the same level of development benefits as a rail system. I had to show that this was not true – that the evidence clearly shows

that a well designed BRT system can compete with rail systems in terms of their ability to spur community revitalization. Finally, the presentation also included a discussion about how BRT's various characteristics could (and should) be applied to Westchester, including which characteristics, such as separated guideways, were crucial to the system's success.

I delivered this presentation several times throughout the county, including to a large meeting attended by each community along the corridor in which my colleagues and I explained the current status of the BRT planning project and solicited community input. I also delivered this presentation to smaller meetings that involved only a single community – often just the mayor, board, and planner were present. I also addressed meetings that were more public in nature, such as meetings of a community's comprehensive plan committee. Finally, I delivered this presentation to the Westchester County Planning Board.

Overall, these presentations were extremely well received by the communities along the corridor. In fact, after one presentation, a village manager told me that despite years of hearing about BRT, he was not sold on it until he heard this presentation. It was only then that he bought into the concept of BRT and actually believed that it could spur redevelopment in his community. Without his buy-in to the concept of BRT, it would have been extremely difficult for the community to plan for TOD around the new stations.

As another part of this public education campaign, I created a [website](#), accessed from the planning department's [homepage](#), which provides information on the TZB project, including a description, a timeline, and information on the project's background. The goal of the website was to create a resource that community members could use to exploit this opportunity and actually implement the principles of TOD. In addition to the background information, it contains detailed information on the concepts of bus rapid transit and transit oriented development by providing links to reports by TCRP, the FTA and advocacy organizations, as well as to academic research. The website also contains links to case studies so communities can research how TOD has been implemented in real-world settings. Finally, it provides a listing of organizations that are also doing work to advance these concepts – both locally and nationally.

Refining the BRT Route & Station Options

The other main effort of my internship program was to work with my colleagues at the Planning Department to develop our own alternatives for BRT route and station locations. While the TZB project team has done a lot of work, we were not convinced that the route and station options that they identified maximized the TOD potential of the new system. This was true primarily because the DOT has proposed locating stations in very close proximity to the highway because they own the ROW. Subsequently, these stations would be farther away from existing land-uses and activity centers and farther away from areas that might benefit from having transit service in the future because of their suitability for redevelopment.

Therefore, we looked at the corridor and asked two fundamentally different questions. Instead of asking what the most expedient route and station options are, we asked what the best way to serve existing activity hubs is. We then asked, what areas along the corridor are prime candidates for transit oriented redevelopment, and how can we bring service to those areas to catalyze TOD?

The result of this inquiry was the creation of nearly 100 BRT route and station alternatives within the 10 segments of the Westchester portion of the I-287 corridor. These alternatives were developed with the goal of balancing the very real need of ‘cross-corridor efficiency’ with the needs of best serving existing activity hubs and maximizing the potential for TOD. For each segment of the corridor, I also developed an accompanying ‘fact sheet’ that included information on existing land uses to be served, the potential for TOD, the constraints of implementation, as well as other pertinent information. The fact sheets also served as a compilation of the comments that the County has made on the project over the past couple of years. Taken together, these alternatives formed a comprehensive and interactive catalog of information about BRT system options. This catalog was delivered to the Project Team in late September 2009.

This catalog was created primarily in Google Earth. It includes a depiction of the options put forth by the project team, the areas identified by Westchester County as sites of potential TOD’s, and all of the route and station options identified by the County. Each of these features can be toggled on and off independently so the user can analyze different data components to suit their needs. In addition, creating the catalog in Google Earth gave us the ability to look at the route and station options on top of aerial photography as well as gave us the ability to toggle on and off other information, such as land use, existing buildings, and existing bus routes and stops. In fact, any information that is available in GIS can be converted for use in Google Earth. Finally, utilizing Google Earth gave us the ability to incorporate 3D modeling of potential TOD’s that were created in Google SketchUp as well as the ability to tour these models from different perspectives. To date, Westchester has visioned four station areas in Westchester County. These 3D models, created by a fellow intern, provide examples of how TOD might look and feel around various BRT stations.

Overall this catalog has been an incredibly useful tool in engaging community members about this project. It helped make the planning process more real as well as gave communities a user-friendly way to offer new alternatives – either for route and station locations or for development scenarios. In fact, one community even asked if we could model their preliminary thoughts about redeveloping the area around a potential BRT station so that they could see what it would look like and how it would fit in with the BRT system.

In addition to the creation of this catalog, my colleagues at the Planning and Transportation Departments also spent a large amount of time working directly with the NYSDOT-led project team to discuss the specifics of the project. Over the past year, we have met with the Tappan Zee Bridge project team numerous times. These included working level meetings with NYSDOT staff and their consultants to discuss detailed route and station alternatives as well as larger meetings to discuss issues of overall system configuration. I attended and participated in just about every one of those meetings.

Other Efforts

In addition to these major efforts that I just described, I also performed other tasks to advance the goal of my internship.

NYS TOD Training

The state has launched an innovative effort to encourage transit-oriented development and has singled out the I-287 corridor in Westchester and Rockland to pilot the program. Three consultants (Project for Public Spaces, ReCconnecting America, and Regional Plan Association) are working to develop training modules that can be delivered to help communities implement TOD. My colleagues at the Planning Department and I have been working very closely with this team – providing input on the substance of the training modules as well as working with communities to identify locations for potential TOD's.

Bee-Line Bus Analysis

I analyzed existing ridership on the Bee-Line bus system to determine which stops were most heavily utilized, as well as how that utilization has changed over time.

Conferences

I attended numerous conferences, including

- A conference by the Manhattan Institute on Public-Private-Partnerships
- A forum on Transit Oriented Development – Making the Connections – hosted by the NYU Wagner's Rudin Center
- The Regional Plan Association's Regional Assembly
- APA NY Metro Chapter's Biennial Planning Conference.

All of these conferences helped increase my understanding of TOD as well as helped me learn strategies to assist our communities in implementing TOD.

Looking Forward

While we accomplished a lot over the past year – there is obviously a lot more to do. First and foremost, we have to continue to work with the communities directly affected by this project as well as continue to work with the TOD training team put together by NYSDOT. We need to provide both with support and guidance and at the same time urge our communities to take full advantage of this opportunity.

We also need to take the route and station planning that we have done and integrate it into the existing Planning Department website. We should build on the wealth of existing community information on the site by adding interactive models of potential BRT route and station options as well as different alternatives for redevelopment. This will help communities visualize these improvements and compare their impacts.

Finally, we need better understand the movements within the corridor. One way to do this is to utilize the new LEHD data made available by the Census Bureau. This data pairs, for the first time, an individual's place of residence with their place of employment down to the census block level. In fact, the county has just partnered with the South Western Regional Planning Authority of CT to begin studying this data and making the most of this powerful new tool.