

Draft US 9W Corridor Profile

Advancing the Town of Bethlehem's
Comprehensive Plan



Selkirk Bypass *Review of Prior Work*

Prepared for:

The Town of Bethlehem
&

The Capital District
Transportation
Committee (CDTC)

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I. INTRODUCTION

The following historical summary of the proposed Selkirk Bypass has been put together for the current Town of Bethlehem Route 9W Corridor Study. As part of this study, the Town, together with the study advisory committee is now continuing the examination of the previous work on the Selkirk Bypass in order to understand how the various alternatives may fit into the future plans for the Route 9W Corridor area as laid out in the Town's Comprehensive Plan. According to the Town's adopted Comprehensive Plan "determining an alignment that would have the least negative impact on local residents and environmental resources should be a priority. And in addition to the potential of this alignment to solve the Selkirk truck issue, it should be studied for its potential transportation, land use, and economic development impacts throughout the 9W Corridor."

Consequently, an objective of the current Route 9W Corridor Study is to develop community consensus on the most appropriate location of a Selkirk Bypass and a corresponding concept level plan along with a cost-benefit analysis to determine its financial feasibility.

The purpose of this summary is only to present an overview of the past work that has been done to date and is not intended to identify a recommended course of future action. Before a recommended course of future action can be identified additional work must be completed. The 9W Corridor Study will take the work completed by NYSDOT to the next level, evaluating traffic, land use, financial and general environmental impacts of the candidate alignments.

II. BACKGROUND

Over ten years ago, the Town of Bethlehem, with the support of the Capital District Transportation Committee proposed the Selkirk Bypass to reduce heavy truck traffic through the residential areas of the hamlet of Selkirk. The hamlet is a compact, tightly settled, residential community of between 700 and 1000 persons located along Route 396 in the southeastern portion of the Town of Bethlehem. Residents living adjacent to NYS Route 396 (Maple Avenue), continually expressed concerns about excessive noise, air pollution and safety problems attributable to the high percentage of trucks using Maple Avenue to access the NYS Thruway, the Selkirk rail yards and other industrial areas within the Towns of Bethlehem and Coeymans. Maple Avenue is a relatively narrow, windy road, with a number of sharp curves, numerous curb cuts and until recently, an absence of sidewalks. (**Figure BP-1** highlights that portion of NYS Route 396 that passes through Selkirk. This figure also highlights the existing interchanges on the NYS Thruway and the location of industrial areas and the Selkirk Rail Yard.)

These concerns stem from the fact that NYS Route 396 serves as a major truck route providing access between NYS Thruway Exit 22 and industrial areas in both the Town of Bethlehem and Town of Coeymans. Major industrial entities accessing the Thruway through

Selkirk include Conrail, G.E. Plastics, Callanan Industries, Owens Corning, Atlantic Cement, and numerous trucking and warehousing establishments in the vicinity of the Selkirk Rail Yards. Classification counts conducted by NYSDOT in May of 1990 indicated that Route 396 through the hamlet of Selkirk was carrying in excess of 525 trucks per day. This truck traffic accounted for almost 20% of the total traffic volume on the roadway. This compared to a 7% NYSDOT reported average on major State highways in the Capital District. These concerns remain today. According to NYSDOT's 2005 Highway Sufficiency Ratings Report, truck volumes remain above 20% along this roadway.

Responding to growing concerns, the NYS Route 396 issue was originally investigated by the Town in its 1989 Route 9W Corridor Study which recommended that a bypass road be constructed around Selkirk to minimize truck traffic impacts on the hamlet and to facilitate access between the NYS Thruway and the Town's industrial area. Subsequently in 1991, at the request of NYSDOT the Town of Bethlehem conducted an origin/destination study of truck traffic passing through the hamlet of Selkirk in order to identify the impacts that a truck ban on NYS Route 396 would have on truck traffic and surrounding communities. The study concluded that a truck ban on Maple Avenue would divert truck traffic onto Route 9W, Route 32 and possibly Route 143 in the Town of Coeymans. The Towns of Coeymans and New Baltimore responded negatively to the proposed truck ban stating that it would simply shift the truck traffic from one town to another. Area business responsible for generating truck traffic also unanimously stated that a truck ban on NYS Route 396 would seriously affect their businesses. Due to these comments, the truck ban option was not pursued further.

In 1993, the Capital District Transportation Committee acted to add the proposed Selkirk Bypass project to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for Federal funding. The original proposal was to construct a bypass road immediately south of the hamlet. Subsequently, the project went through the NYSDOT Scoping process to determine the project objectives, design criteria, feasible alternatives and cost estimates. After a public work session, NYDOT investigated a broader range of alternatives to address the community's concerns. These included a northern bypass alignment and an alternative that would rehabilitate/reconstruct NYS Route 396 on an improved existing alignment.

In 1998, NYSDOT began a *Preliminary Design Report and Environmental Assessment* for these alternatives. Consultants working on the project for NYSDOT conducted at least one local public work session as part of the development of the Preliminary Design Report. **Attachment BP-A** contains the announcement of the public information meeting and a summary of the comments received at the meeting. Based on this work, NYSDOT issued a draft Preliminary Design Report in November of 1999. Further work on the design report and environmental assessment however, appears to not have been carried forward beyond this point.

In 2001, NYSDOT revisited the project with the completion of a **White Paper**, *P.I.N. 1347.07, NYS Route 396, Us Route 9W to NYS Route 144, Town of Bethlehem, Albany County*, on the alternatives. The White Paper summarized the work that had been previously completed, and did not include new analysis work.

As part of the Town of Bethlehem Route 9W Corridor Study, the Town, together with the project steering committee is now continuing the examination of the previous work on the Selkirk Bypass in order to understand how the various alternatives may fit into the future plans for Route 9W.

III. ALTERNATIVES PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED BY NYSDOT

The **White Paper** mentioned above, included descriptions of two feasible alternatives for the Selkirk Bypass in addition to the No Action Alternative:

- The Northern Alignment (Alternative 3C); and,
- The Southern Alignment (Alternative 3A).

Figure BP-2 shows the location of these two alignments, along with the Middle alignment (Alternative 3B) which is described in the White Paper but later dismissed from further consideration.

The Southern Alignment starts just south of the Pictuay Road intersection with Route 9W; the alignment includes a rerouting of the western end of Pictuay Road to the South. This alignment continues east gradually turning towards the northeast. It intersects NYS Route 396 close to the intersection with Wood Street. The remaining route follows the existing right-of-way of NYS Route 396 east to intersect with NYS Route 144. **Attachment BP-B** found at the end of this report, is Appendix B from NYSDOT's 2001 White Paper and provides a more detailed description of the Southern Alignment.

The Northern Alignment extends Creble Road east of Route 9W. The extension crosses the north-south section of Clapper Road at the midpoint and continues east to cross the NYS Thruway north of the Clapper Road Crossing. The extension continues east to intersect NYS Route 144 opposite John Domanico Drive. A modification to the Northern Alignment includes the addition, at some future time, of a new NYS Thruway interchange at the location where the Northern Alignment crosses the Thruway. **Figure BP-2** includes a depiction of the possible new interchange with the Northern Alignment. **Attachment BP-B** also provides a more detailed description of the Northern Alignment.

IV. PREVIOUS ANALYSIS

The *Preliminary Draft Design Report & Environmental Assessment (PDD)* provided an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the two alternatives. This information was based on conditions at the time of that analysis in 1999. **Table BP-1** summarizes the information contained in the PDD and updates it as needed to reflect current conditions. **Table BP-1** also provides additional comparison information based on the current availability of additional information.

None of the relevant studies that examined the Selkirk Bypass provided firm recommendations as to which alignment is preferred. In the description of the Alternatives in the **White Paper** Appendix, the text ends with the statement that, “This alignment (The Northern Alignment) is being considered the most feasible and prudent option and will be progressed through the report.” The configuration of the proposed Northern Alignment does not include the new interchange with the NYS Thruway, but indicates that it could be constructed at some point in the future. The main body of the **White Paper** text itself, however, stops short of including a final recommendation as to which alignment is most appropriate. The **PDD** also includes no conclusion as to which alignment would be most appropriate.

V. RECENT CONSIDERATIONS

The Selkirk Community, through the Town of Bethlehem, initiated the Bypass project based on quality of life issues. Since it was first considered in the early 1990s, changes in the Town have increased the relevance of the project to the entire Town. The Town of Bethlehem 2005 Comprehensive Plan made significant changes to the Town’s overall land use plans. Of importance to this discussion is the creation of a Mixed Economic Development District west of the NYS Thruway and east of Route 9W south of Glenmont. This new district was created as proposed in the update to the Town’s Zoning Law, also enacted in 2005. **Figure BP-2** shows the overall extent of the Mixed Economic Development District as well as the other zoning districts in this section of Bethlehem.

The success of the Mixed Economic Development District will be tied, at least in part, to ensuring easy access to an efficient, regional transportation system. Some local stakeholders in the Town believe that the current indirect access to the NYS Thruway will hinder the future development of the Mixed Economic Development District. The implementation of the Selkirk Bypass, therefore, is seen as providing a means of rectifying this situation. In particular, a more northerly alignment than the existing northern alternative, which could also include the creation of a more efficient access to the NYS Thruway further north than the existing access, would provide immediate, direct access to an efficient, regional transportation system – the NYS Thruway. Consequently, the Selkirk Bypass project has taken on new significance in the last few years. In addition to alleviating truck traffic currently passing through Selkirk, the Bypass may also play an important role in the Town’s future economic development as well. This has led to a desire to consider an additional northern alignment alternative beyond those initially identified by NYSDOT. This additional alternative could include a location near Wemple Road, for example.

**Table BP-1
Updated Comparison of Feasible Alternatives as Identified in NYSDOT's 1999
Preliminary Design Report and Environmental Assessment**

	SOUTHERN ALIGNMENT	NORTHERN ALIGNMENT
ADVANTAGES	<p>Generally meets Project Objective of reducing truck traffic on Maple Avenue, except for segment from TEPPCO property (Paulsey Court) to Route 144.</p> <p>Benefits majority of residential property owners along Maple Avenue.</p> <p>Removes an at-grade railroad crossing from the State Highway System and provides two new bridges over the railroad to improve traffic safety.</p>	<p>Meets Project Objective to reducing truck traffic on Maple Avenue and providing a safer Access Highway for larger dimension vehicles from US Route 9W to NYS Route 144.</p> <p>Removes truck traffic from the more residentially developed part of the Hamlet of Selkirk.</p> <p>Removes an at-grade railroad crossing from the State Highway System and provides a new bridge over the railroad to improve traffic safety.</p> <p>Provides an east-west truck route connecting NYS Route 32 to US Route 9W and NYS Route 144 for improved access to the Thruway from the Selkirk railroad yards. Improved Access Highway for larger dimension vehicles that may facilitate increased intermodal freight.</p> <p>Allows for the future addition of a new NYS Thruway interchange connected directly to the bypass.</p>
DISADVANTAGES	<p>Does not fully meet Project Objective to reduce truck traffic on existing Maple Avenue; homes between TEPPCO and Route 144 do not see much benefit.</p> <p>Requires the incorporation of one non-standard radius horizontal curve on the eastbound approach to the bridge over the Thruway.</p> <p>A few homes along the south side of existing Maple Avenue (between railroad crossing and TEPPCO) would have a road in front and behind their properties.</p> <p>Reduces the length of the passing zone on Route 9W due to</p> <p>Much of new Bypass alignment would be on high fills (approximately 30 feet) to provide the required twenty-foot vertical clearance under the new bridges for railroad clearance.</p> <p>Increases truck traffic on a short section of Rte 9W.</p> <p>Affects TEPPCO property which is a unique industrial operation. Mitigation measures have been incorporated to relocate & widen their driveway.</p> <p>Potential visual impacts due to high fill. Requires the construction of a two bridges over the railroad.</p>	<p>Construction costs greatly exceed allocated funding on the Transportation Improvement Program.</p> <p>Requires the relocation of one residential home at the intersection of Route 9W and Creble Road.</p> <p>Increases truck traffic on a short segment of US Route 9W and NYS Route 144.</p> <p>Requires the construction of four bridges, one over the Vlomankill, one for the Thruway over the Bypass, one for the Thruway access road, and one over the railroad.</p> <p>Routed through areas that are currently zoned as residential areas.</p> <p>Requires construction of new NYS Thruway interchange to serve as a viable, convenient bypass.</p> <p>Significant wetland impacts associated with western end of the alignment and around the proposed NYS Thruway interchange.</p>

	SOUTHERN ALIGNMENT	NORTHERN ALIGNMENT
ISSUES	<p>One potentially historic property along Old Ravena Road will be affected by new alignment. May need to look at minimization and mitigation to this site.</p> <p>Location of intersection at Route 9W. To reduce potential problems with an offset intersection with Pictuay Road, it requires the relocation of a segment of Pictuay Road west of Route 9W to meet up with the new Bypass alignment and the removal of a segment of Pictuay Road east of Route 9W with revised driveways to several residential homes.</p> <p>The least cost construction alternative. The cost however, is likely to increase from \$7 million shown on CDTC's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), to between \$12 and \$14 million based on recent experience with road construction projects in the region.</p>	<p>The proposed location of the intersection at Route 9W is in close proximity of the Route 9W bridge over the Vlomankill. Until future bridge work is required, the existing bridge width limits the length of the proposed southbound left--turn lane.</p> <p>The greater distance and new interchange significantly extends the time line for construction.</p> <p>This alternative would require a new Thruway interchange. The cost of full implementation of this alternative would fall between \$21 and \$24 million. This option can be staged.</p>

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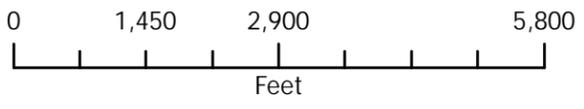
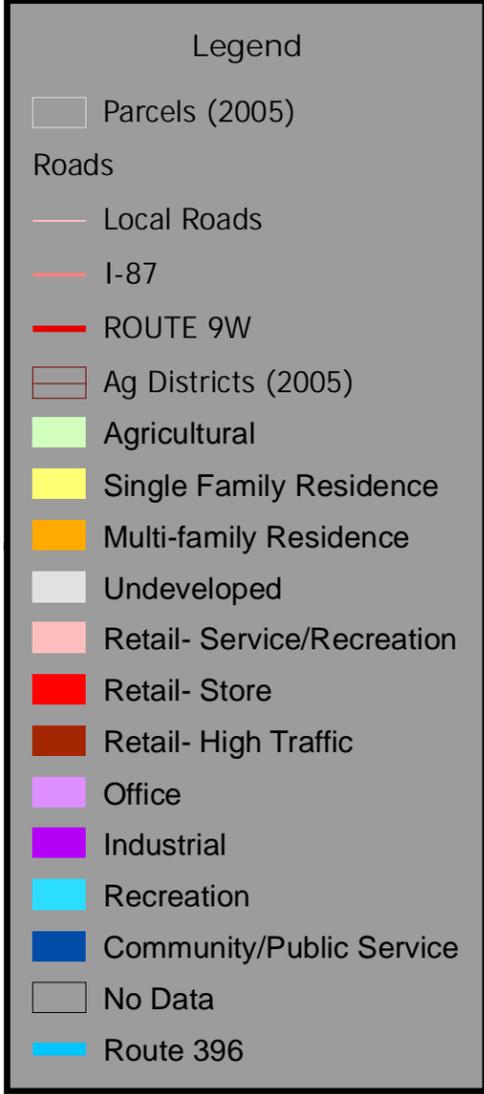
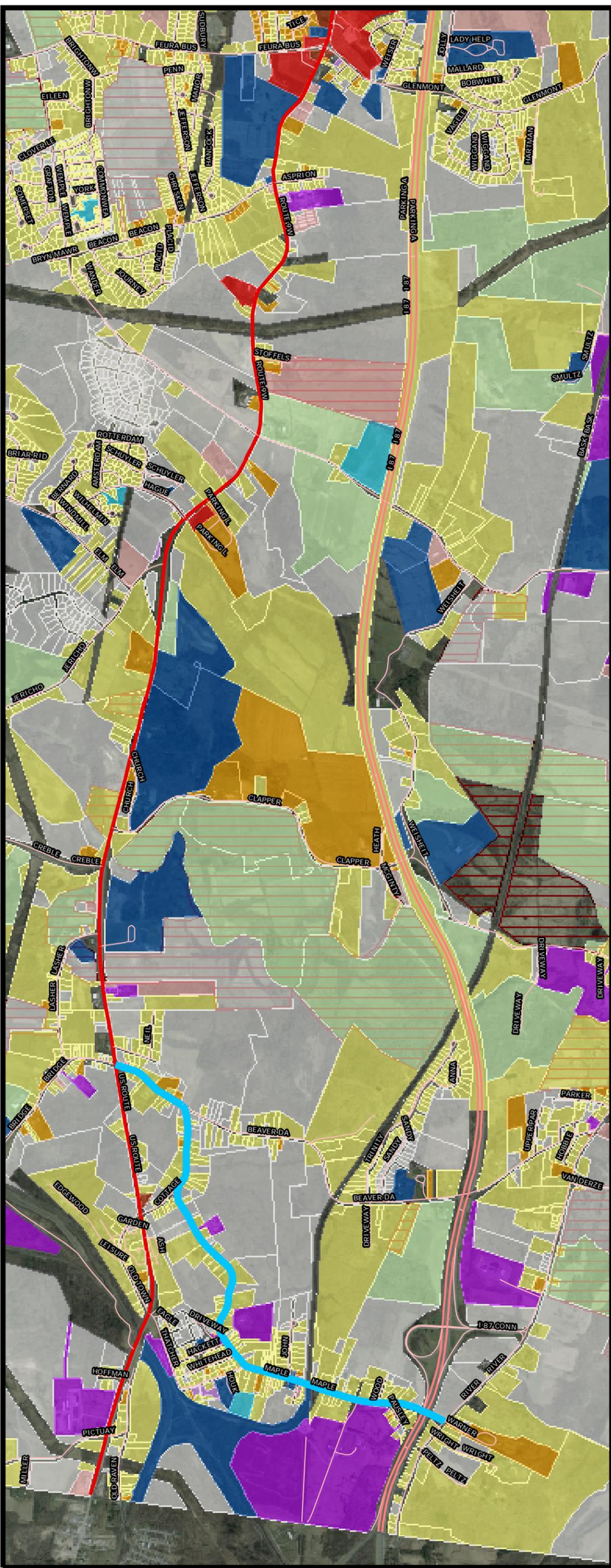
**Attachment BP-A
Public Information Meeting Announcement and Comments**

TO BE ADDED

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**Attachment BP-B
Southern & Northern Alignment Descriptions**

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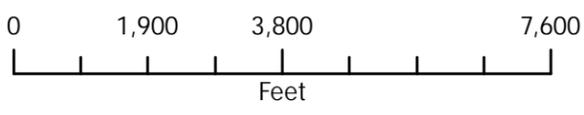
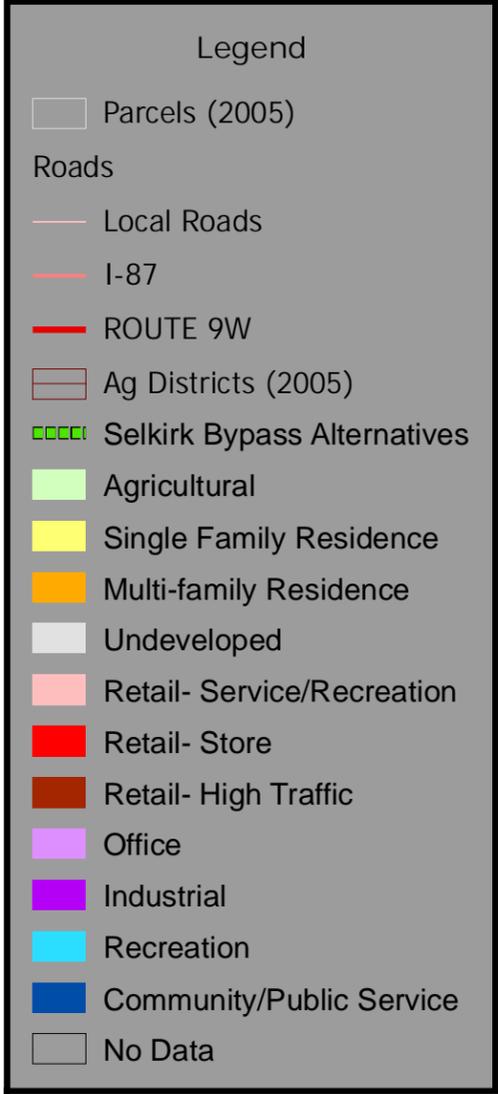
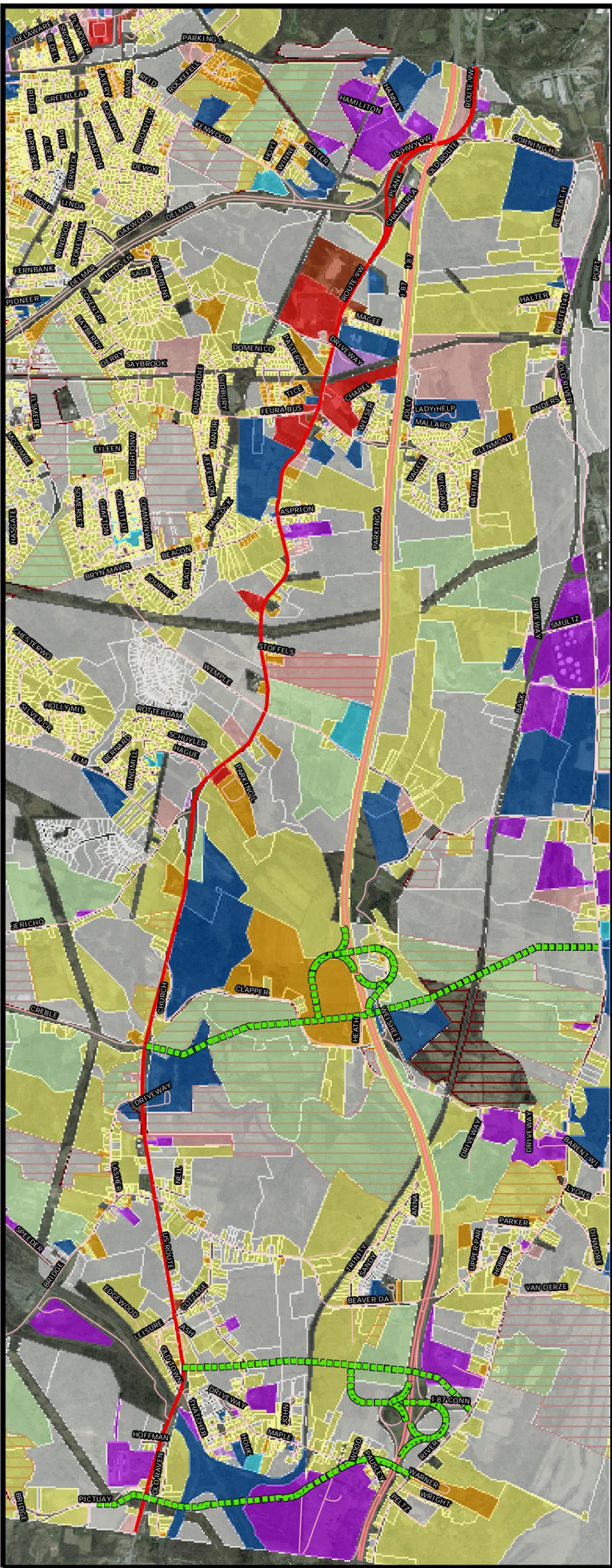


SOURCE:

NYS Route 396 in Selkirk

ROUTE 9W CORRIDOR STUDY
Town of Bethlehem, New York
Capital District Transportation Committee

NOVEMBER 20, 2006
FIGURE: BP-1



SOURCE:

Selkirk Bypass Alignment Alternatives