

DRAFT

Group visioning discussion broken down by corridor subarea sections: Northern, Middle and Southern:

US 9W Public Workshop #1 December 12, 2006 Meeting Notes

Group # 1 Facilitator: George Leveille

Northern Section

- Explore a frontage road concept, similar to the one in place along Washington Avenue Extension, with 9W as the main line.
- Reconfigure 9W to include 4 travel lanes with a center turn lane along 9W main line, lined with sidewalks and trees
- Install roundabouts at intersections to increase traffic flow and result in intersections that work better.
- Reduce single family homes and curb cuts along this section
- Relocate Glenmont Elementary School

Central Section

- Widen 9W main line and line with trees/try to create a streetscape similar to the one found on Route 9 south of Saratoga Springs (which includes a landscaped raised median)
- Route 9W is the thoroughfare with off-line hamlets which are connected via multi-use paths
- neighborhood scale services are appropriate/desirable for this section as are small scale businesses and retail within a pedestrian friendly environment
- use access management techniques which include planned/adequately spaced intersections
- parks and a golf course could be considered within this portion of the corridor

Southern Section

- This section is appropriate for rural hamlets and villages with a traditional feel
- A pedestrian friendly environment and small scale retail are desired here.
- Lessen single family uses on 9W main line
- Reduce truck traffic

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**Group # 2
Facilitator: Jim Donovan**

GENERAL NOTES

Most of the group appeared to be from the central or northern sections and consequently wanted to discuss these areas more than the southern section. The group agreed upon:

- The continued need for a Selkirk Bypass;
- The appropriateness of the central section as the location of the Selkirk Bypass,
- The inappropriateness of the proposed northern alignment for the Selkirk Bypass,
- The need to focus on hamlet or village like development throughout the Route 9W corridor, and
- The need to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians in and across the corridor.

The group accepted the guiding principles with almost no discussion.

VISION FOR THE NORTHERN SECTION

The group generally agreed that they felt that Glenmont should grow into a walkable village. Development should be kept to a smaller scale with no more big-box development allowed. The group had differing opinions on the exact nature of the village, differing on specifically how small development should be and how much through traffic should be allowed. In general, trucks on this portion of Route 9W were seen as a negative. To increase the pedestrian scale of the Glenmont Village area, most thought that trucks should be removed from Route 9W if possible. This could be accomplished either by way of a north-south bypass further to the east as recommended in the earlier Route 9W report, or by the creation of the Selkirk Bypass far enough north to capture trucks that would otherwise go north on Route 9W through the northern section.

The Glenmont area should have sidewalks along Route 9W as well as Glenmont Road and Feura Bush Road. The Intersection of Route 9W, Feura Bush Road and Glenmont Road also needs to be upgraded to make it safer, for vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. Bicycles should be allowed along every street; they should be able to go everywhere that cars can go. There should also be an off-road system of bicycle paths to allow those less capable bicyclists access to the village.

There was some support, but not total group consensus, for the creation of a Route 9W boulevard in this section.

There was also limited support for moving Glenmont School. Some felt the area was becoming too developed and the school should move. Others felt that it would fit into a village area and should remain. The school needs to have full sidewalk connections if it is to remain.

VISION FOR THE CENTRAL SECTION

The open character of Route 9W in the central section should be preserved. Development should be away from the road, with few driveways intersecting Route 9W. Route 9W itself, according to more than half of the group, should be a boulevard in this section. There should be a complete bicycle and pedestrian network between developments on either side of Route 9W, with crossings of Route 9W at strategic points. An off-road north south bicycle and pedestrian spine to serve as the main north south link also needs to be developed. (This may not be needed if the boulevard concept is developed and bicyclists and pedestrians can be safely accommodated within the Route 9W right-of-way.)

This central section is the most appropriate location for the Selkirk Bypass, but the current “northern alignment” is not the location for it. A Bypass in this section would reduce truck traffic in the northern section more and it would also help increase economic development potential. There should also be more development potential added to the Bender School District.

VISION FOR THE SOUTHERN SECTION

Many in the group thought that the rural nature of the Selkirk hamlet should be preserved. Others thought that the southern section provided an opportunity for a second commercial focus area in the Route 9W corridor. Commercial development in the southern section would reduce the need for people in the southern section to drive on Route 9W to the northern section.

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**Group # 3
Facilitator: Dave Jukins**

Group primarily made up of residents, three of whom lived outside of the immediate corridor. Three participants lived in the southern part of the corridor. The business and development community was also represented (Price Chopper and a consultant). One SAC member and one Planning Board member participated in the group. Just about everyone contributed to the discussion, but a few were very shy. All were respectful of each other's opinions.

Issues Recap

Three issues topped the list. Pretty much the entire group identified congestion in the northern part of the corridor as the prime concern. Some suggested that perhaps poor signal coordination was to blame for part of the problem. Some complained about the lane layout of the 9W/Feura Bush intersection. One or two mentioned that development in the middle third of the corridor could grow traffic enough to warrant some type of action.

Almost half of the group expressed concern about the absence of safe walkways and bike paths, noting that it is unsafe for children to move between neighborhoods. Pedestrians were observed in the Walmart area walking across 9W.

Most of the group understood the benefit of constructing a Selkirk Bypass/new interchange, although no one in the group lived on Maple Avenue. It sounded like there was more support for a northern alignment. A few politely expressed concern that residents in the Clapper Road area were not given sufficient opportunity to voice their opinion (under DOT's abbreviated process).

A number of other issues were mentioned as well: (1) vehicles using Walmart parking lot to avoid traffic signals; (2) the inconvenience of Bender Lane's one-way restriction (by a resident of Bender); (3) jughandle traffic conflict; (4) Price Chopper access needs help; and (5) Bethlehem Town Center berms along 9W (too high?).

The impact of the Coeyman's Landfill was raised. The study group was encouraged to at least consider the possible impact (with respect to trucks preferring a southern vs northern Selkirk Bypass alignment).

Sentiment for looking for an alternative site for the Glenmont School or finding ways to better integrate it into the corridor was raised.

Visioning Results

Guiding Principles

There seemed to be general support for the principles as we laid them out. There were no suggestions to change them. (I don't think they understood the role they (the principles/framework) are expected to play in leveraging public money at the CDTC table, but they did understand that money is tight and the process competitive).

Land Use

The group pretty much unanimously understood the benefit of continued economic development in the corridor. At the same time, they wanted the Town to be careful and selective:

- they are not interested in consuming every bit of open land
- rural preservation (not necessarily open space) was important to southern residents
- understood the necessity and benefit of environmental protection, not only of the natural environment but also of the human and built environments.
- most didn't care, but a vocal few voiced "no more" big box. No one spoke in favor of more.
- Strong interest in better building and site design.
- wished to limit any additional retail to land north of Beacon Road.
- Supportive of the hamlet concept but unsure we can pull it off.
- Voiced support for an "aesthetic standard" for site design similar to Colonie's.
- move Glenmont School; Becker location ok

Transportation

- Acknowledged the need for more information before forming an opinion, but was supportive
 - of a Selkirk Bypass that would move trucks off of 396 as well as 9W. Stressed the importance
 - of not moving problem from one area to another. Cost and how to pay is a concern.
- suggested
 - we look at an alternative closer to Wemple Road.

- would like to see 9W widened, but only where "necessary". Like the idea of boulevard and streetscaping. Understand that widening just to widen could create new problems.
- very skeptical of roundabouts, although a few were brave enough to voice support.
- general support for making the entire corridor walkable (but did not offer specific ways to do it). Acknowledged treatments would differ in each segment. The use of shoulders for cycling received cool response; separate path preferred.
- return Bender Lane to two-way operation. An alternative of constructing a road linking Bethlehem Center and Kenwood was mentioned; two-way Bender was preferred over investing a lot of money in a new road.
- no specific changes to the jughandle were raised (but it was raised as an issue for some). Two-way Bender looked at as an alternative to using jughandle.
- better land use connections; limit new driveways and consolidate wherever possible.
- improve intersection at 9W/Price Chopper; roundabout a possibility?
- there was interest in expansion of transit service (no one argued against the idea). Opportunity for park-ride/carpool lot in partnership with private development

Roadside Treatments

- more landscaping, especially trees
- preferred natural buffer instead of man-made berms
- safe buffer between road and sidewalks
- lighting

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Group # 4
Facilitator: Anne Benware

This group included mostly residents from the northern and southern sections, as well as some local business people interested in real estate. Some people indicated they had participated in the Town's Comprehensive Planning process and also had attended previous NYSDOT-run Selkirk Bypass meetings. Coming to a resolution regarding the Selkirk Bypass was the most important issue to several people in the group. In addition, with some prodding by the facilitator, the group stated that they did agree with the guiding principles.

Issues Recap

- The proximity of housing to existing 9W is a concern regarding improvement concepts (that would widen the roadway) as there may be too many impacts.
- The Comprehensive Plan and resulting new zoning does not fit with a two lane road design. Either cut back on the zoning densities or add roadway capacity. Some people proposed a four lane Route 9W throughout its length in the Town of Bethlehem.
- Regarding the Selkirk Bypass, some in the group suggested saving money by not doing anything.

Northern Section

The group had the following ideas:

- Explore use of one-way pairs with the existing 9W allocated to southbound traffic and a new road for northbound traffic. This could result in less property impacts by focusing on the east side where there is a lot of land.
- Run Route 9W parallel to the Thruway on vacant land by creating a second north/south road.
- At the current junction of Rte 32 and 9W (the jughandle area) install two roundabouts; one at the Jug handle and a second near the vacant funeral home.
- Separate local and thru traffic (put thru traffic below grade?) and focus on bicycle and pedestrian walkable areas.
- Consider creating a park along the 9W corridor with a farmers market for a local agricultural "showcase". One potential location would be between the two roundabouts proposed above.

Middle Section

The group had the following ideas:

- A new Thruway interchange around Wemple Road would not be a good idea as it would bring more through traffic through Town which is not solving the problem.
- Create identifiable hamlets and connect them to surrounding residential areas. These hamlets should be separated by open space.
- A potential park location was identified for the area across from the Soccer Plex on Wemple Road.

Southern Section

The group had the following ideas:

- Some participants stated a preference for a southern Selkirk Bypass alignment that would parallel the railroad tracks and use railroad right of way. The thinking is that this would avoid Rte 9W altogether. As part of this Exit 22 should be enlarged.
- Environmental constraints must be considered on lands around the Thruway where there are slopes and wetlands. It may be that this area is not conducive to rural light industrial/industrial uses.

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**Group # 5
Facilitator: Jeff Lipnicky**

The following bullets summarize the main ideas that evolved from the visioning session conducted within group # 5. It should be noted that there was not necessarily consensus on all these items. Additionally, these items are presented in no particular order of importance and are broken down by corridor section: Northern, Middle and Southern.

Northern Section

- Transportation improvements and design of the corridor in general should take into consideration the needs of an aging population.
- The use of service roads should be considered as a means to connect developments and relieve traffic pressure on Route 9W.
- The potential use of roundabouts should be explored at major intersections to relieve congestion and improve traffic safety. The group suggested the Rt. 9W/Feura Bush Road intersection and the intersection of Rt. 9W/Rt. 32 as potential locations.
- Sidewalks should be installed along Rt. 9W, Feura Bush Road and Glenmont Road.
- The issue of how to pay for necessary improvements in the corridor needs to be addressed. One suggested approach is to allow for and encourage potentially large-scale non-residential development in this section of the corridor. Such development would help fund improvements. Reduction in the “red tape” of the development review process was also suggested.
- Identification of appropriate commercial development sites to support the BSCD tax base.
- Future land use in this section should take advantage of the highway capacity that exists in the reverse direction of the commute.
- What this section of the corridor will look like is important and development of appropriate design standards should be explored.

Central Section

- Development in this section of the corridor should be more hamlet oriented and focused on smaller scale businesses.
- One suggestion is that the hamlets should be generally planned out as part of a more comprehensive planning process, potentially to the point that they are shovel ready. It was also suggested that there be predetermined general design standards for the hamlets, while at the same time maintaining some degree of flexibility.

- Explore the potential benefits of a roundabout at Wemple Road.

Southern Section

- The major priority in this section remains the removal of truck traffic from Rt. 396.
- One suggested development form is to locate attractive less intense development along Rt. 9W with higher intensity uses set further back from the road.
- Light industrial identified as a potentially appropriate land use in the vicinity of the rail yards and new Selkirk bypass.
- Locate all utilities underground in all sections of the corridor. Explore possible use of tax incentives to do so.