NYSDOT Project Gets Green Light

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) has initiated the Bruckner-Sheridan Expressway and Commercial Access to the Hunts Point Peninsula Preliminary Design and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess current and future conditions and identify solutions to the problems that affect the Hunts Point area and the Bruckner-Sheridan corridor. This project is intended to create improved access for both people and freight throughout the Hunts Point area, as well as improve the efficiency of local streets and highways. The EIS will target a cross section of the Bronx community to bring together various interests including those of the local residents, businesses and commuters. The main focus of the project is to develop an environmentally friendly, economically enhancing and financially viable plan that will bring these varying interests together.

The project will look at improving the overall operation and safety of this corridor. NYSDOT will also work closely with the current NYC Parks Greenway project, which is focused on creating community access to parklands throughout the Bronx.

A Hub of Residential and Economic Communities

The Hunts Point area of the Bronx is one of the most dynamic and growing sections in New York City. This area is both residential and commercial and is surrounded by two major transportation corridors: the Bruckner Expressway (Interstate 278) and the Sheridan Expressway (Interstate 895). More than 130,000 vehicles use these highways every day. Commercial and residential interests have fueled much debate as both seek to co-exist in the same vicinity. The Hunts Point area is a major economic focal point of not only the Bronx, but of New York City. The Hunts Point Peninsula alone generates 77,000 vehicles per day, including 15,000 trucks.

Both the Hunts Point Meat Market and Hunts Point Produce Market are located on the peninsula. These two markets each have over 50 wholesalers and are two of the largest in the world. Over the next several years, the commercial activity in the Hunts Point Peninsula area will increase dramatically with the relocation of the Fulton Fish Market. Added traffic on already congested roadways and local streets will further affect the environment, safety and overall quality of life for residents. Additional automobiles and trucks will mean longer transit time for the movement of goods and added costs for businesses.

Throughout the history of Hunts Point, finding a balance between neighborhood and commercial interests has been sought. Once the Fulton Fish Market moves in, three of the largest food markets in the world will call the Hunts Point Peninsula their home, and while these markets will contribute greatly to the economic growth and viability of the area, they also may create significant congestion that could adversely impact the quality of life for local residents.
With such a wide range of issues affecting the peninsula, the goals and objectives for the project address a mix of issues including environmental conditions, quality of life and safety while ensuring that the economy of the Bronx is strong. Through public forums, a website, a stakeholders committee comprised of residents, elected officials and businesses, and through a wide range of additional outlets designed to gather input from as broad a range of interests as possible, the study will focus on ways to:

- Effectively move residents in faster, safer and easier ways by improving the existing roadways, bridges, public transit, bicycle paths and pedestrian walkways. This will include improvements to the Bruckner-Sheridan Interchange and local arterials and improved access into and from Hunts Point.
- Reduce the number of accidents in the area and increase pedestrian safety at busy intersections, such as at Bruckner Boulevard and Hunts Point Ave.
- Support economic development by providing easier access to and from the Hunts Point Peninsula, while eliminating bottlenecks conditions along various routes traveled by commercial vehicles throughout the peninsula.
- Enhance the quality of life for the residential community by reducing the volume of commercial trucks off residential streets and easing congestion for motorists traveling through the area.

The primary study area includes the Hunts Point Peninsula and the surrounding highways and local streets leading into the peninsula. However, any changes created in this corridor may have effects on the larger Bronx community. Therefore a larger secondary study area is also being identified. This secondary study area runs from Harlem River Drive and Triborough Bridge on the west, and extends to Long Island Sound and the Throgs Neck Bridge to the east, running north and south from Tremont Ave to the East River.

An Important Part of the Process — YOU!
The NYSDOT urges you to play an active role in this project. The project is designed to incorporate the thoughts, concerns, ideas and opinions of the people who live and work in the Hunts Point Peninsula. Goals and objectives will be developed based in part on input received through the public outreach process. Constituents will have the opportunity to comment on and rank the objectives, so that there will be a comprehensive list that reflects the community’s interests. Everyone from residents, to elected officials to businesses are urged to offer their input, which will provide guidance in progressing the EIS or pinpointing where revisions need to be made.

Additionally, the list of alternatives under consideration will shrink or grow based on input received through the scoping process. Through public input, the area under study may decrease or expand, new alternative solutions will be discussed at length, and new light will be shed on current alternatives as the community comes together to work with NYSDOT to improve transportation to and through Hunts Point.

NYSDOT is currently in the process of preparing a Scoping Document for the Environmental Impact Statement. This Scoping Document will be published and made available to the public in early 2003. A series of public scoping meetings will be conducted to gather comments on the document and on the overall approach to the project. Thus broad participation is critical in shaping the course of future work.

To ensure that the most inclusive base of input is gathered, the NYSDOT will establish a stakeholder committee, comprised of elected officials, local businesses, community organizations, community boards and residents. The committee will meet regularly over the course of the EIS. This committee will assist NYSDOT by informing them of issues and concerns that should be included in the project and by formulating the goals and objectives that it would most like to see included as part of the project. The committee will also be used to measure how well the community at-large is informed and on the ways NYSDOT can expand their public outreach to inform those not initially involved in the EIS.

In addition to the stakeholder committee, an advisory committee will be formed, comprised of federal, state and city agencies. The advisory committee will act as an outlet to review the progress of the study and make additions or adjustments where determined. Special task forces with special issue focuses may also be created.

In addition to producing and distributing bilingual (English and Spanish) public information materials, a website has been established which will allow visitors to post their comments, questions or concerns. The site, www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/bese/index.html is already up and running.
Taking All Aspects Into Consideration: The Environmental Review Process

NYSDOT will begin the Environmental Review Process with the creation of a Scoping Document which identifies the transportation problems in the study area, the project goals and objectives, possible alternatives under consideration and the scope of the environmental analyses.

The Environmental Review Process is the method by which NYSDOT will formulate its Environmental Impact Study (EIS). The EIS will include: a discussion of the study’s purpose and need for alternatives under consideration; clear identification of the affected area to be studied, examination of short-term and long-term impacts the alternatives may have on the environment; and a record of the public outreach process, which includes scoping—the process used to solicit public input on the issues and alternatives to be examined in the EIS.

All alternatives identified will be evaluated regarding their various indirect and direct impacts in a number of areas including social, economic, environmental and transportation impacts as well as construction impacts, noise impacts, any effects on public spaces and park land, impacts to land use and affects on neighborhood character. All alternatives will be studied and used to determine which alternatives will be the most beneficial to residents and businesses in the area.

The scoping document is currently in the development stage and will outline the details surrounding the analyses followed though for each alternative in the EIS process. Public scoping meetings will be held in early 2003 where the community will have their first chance to play an active role in the progress and direction of the EIS by engaging NYSDOT in a meaningful exchange of ideas and concerns through a series of public forums.

Finding Alternatives For Your Consideration

Various alternatives have already been identified through past studies. The findings of the past studies will be used as a starting point and will be included with new alternatives that are developed through the extensive public scoping process. The list of alternatives and solutions will be refined throughout the scoping process as the public’s comments and suggestions are taken into consideration.

Some of these alternatives include:

- **No Action** - An analysis of the current infrastructure and the likely state of the area’s infrastructure, levels of congestion, etc., in the future without any improvements.

- **Transportation Systems Management** - This would provide a strategy to make the most of the current transportation network with minimal capital investment. Emphasis will be placed on operating improvements and strategic upgrades such as the installation of various traffic control devices (i.e. traffic lights and street signs) throughout the corridor.

- **Build** - These include the long-term alternatives and are more detailed and complex.
  - Reconstruction of the Bruckner-Sheridan Interchange at Edgewater Road and the reduction of through traffic on local streets by creating various flyover structures. This alternative was identified in the Expanded Project Proposal and will be further investigated during the EIS Process.
  - Construction of Leggett Avenue Ramps at the Bruckner Expressway is also aimed at reducing through traffic on local streets with the construction of various fly-over structures. This was identified during past public involvement and will be expanded upon during this process.
  - Construction of an access road/rail improvement to Hunts Point from Port Morris along the water and rail lines.
  - Demapping the Sheridan Expressway.