

**Town of Guilderland
Comprehensive Plan Update
Transportation & Mobility Subcommittee
Meeting No. 6**

Location: Town Hall

Date: October 4, 2023

Time: 6 – 8 pm

Present: Richard Brustman, Lisa Hart, Pat Slavick

Absent: Erin Nievels, Gus Santos

Speaker: Karen White, Guilderland Resident

Meeting Discussions

Ms. White shared her concerns as noted below regarding **Objective 7: Have the Thruway better serve Guilderland and the other localities it passes through. Configured in the 1950s as a rural interstate between Albany and Schenectady, it inadequately serves this now urbanized area. Adding lanes and removing local tolls will draw traffic off nearby arterial roads. The State did this for the Buffalo and NYC areas and should now do it for the Capital District:**

- Rte 155 truck traffic would be an issue. She noted that there were downed wires when a tractor trailer turned into Luigi's from Old State Road.
- Town roads are not built for heavy truck traffic.
- There should be a balanced approach.
- The first concern should be public safety.

Next Steps:

- Thoughts and strategies previously identified by each subcommittee member on how each of the objectives might be implemented are included on Pages 2 through 6 of the minutes. As noted on September 20, 2023 Meeting Minutes, each subcommittee member was assigned objectives as follows:
 - Erin: Objectives 1 and 4
 - Gus: Objective 8
 - Lisa: Objectives 2 and 3
 - Pat: Objectives 5 and 6
 - Rich: Objective 7
- The draft minutes, including implementation thoughts/strategies, will be circulated to subcommittee members for review first. After each subcommittee reviews and concurs, the minutes will be re-circulated with cc to Supervisor Barber and Jessica Montgomery.

Meeting Adjournment: 7:30 pm

Next meeting: TBD – if needed

Minutes prepared by: Pat Slavick

Updated 2000 Comprehensive Plan B.2 Transportation and Mobility Goal

Provide safe, convenient, and efficient transportation options for people and goods within, through and around the Town of Guilderland, which are supportive of the Town's future land use plan and which minimize the impact of traffic on the Town's character and quality of life.

Thoughts/Strategies Identified by Subcommittee Members On How Each Objective Might Be Implemented

1. Promote an attractive and efficient transportation network that integrates pedestrians, bicycles, automobiles and public transit.

Increase the number of 'Share the Road' signs on some Town roads where there are no sidewalks. There are two currently yellow 'Share The Road' signs on Willow Street, which indicate a person walking, a person biking and a person driving. There is one sign going in each direction between Western Avenue and Siver Road.

For new housing developments and apartment complexes being constructed, look into integrating shared paths (bike and pedestrian) and sidewalks being a mandate to be built into the plan connecting the new neighborhoods to the existing neighborhoods/sidewalks close by.

Explore ways to increase public transportation West of Rt. 155 on Western Avenue and Carmen Road. Having increased public transportation routes will benefit our expanding Town and it is more environmentally friendly vs everyone driving a car.

DRAFT

Establish clear responsibilities within town agencies to coordinate between modes, develop and stage and implement connectivity projects. Consider new town funding sources for non-highway mode projects; e.g., Transit Tax districts, Employer transit fees and zoning breaks for non-car travel accommodations.

2. Enhance pedestrian mobility in all areas of Town. Expand sidewalk and multi-use trail system to better link community centers, shopping and employment areas, recreation areas, and neighborhoods.

For the protection of children and young adults especially, the areas in Town should be marked where there are schools, playgrounds, and parks with traffic signs and road markings that are visible for the driver so they know they are going into a "special zone" where there are children either walking or biking.

Develop walkable nodes of neighborhood businesses that would then be connected through regional mobility networks (e.g.; small grocery store, small strip mall with the neighborhoods, etc.).

Bikes and paths:

- For workers, customers, and school kids, particularly important to low income workers.
- Should be available during all seasons by plowing.
- Encourage bike racks/safe storage for workers.
- Inclement weather backup system.
- Landscaping and route signing for trails.
- Trail maps on phone apps.
- Integrate pine-bush trails.
- Identify and prioritize “nodes” (E.g. the library, schools, parks, large shopping plazas) to assure easy access from the ped/trail system.
- Create programs for neighborhood, businesses and organizations to “adopt” and care for individual trail and sidewalk segments.

3. Explore ideas to improve the pedestrian experience. On arterial roads this may include traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures, reviews of speed limits, street landscaping and visual aesthetics.

Evaluate some of the busiest intersections and possibly change the timing of the traffic lights to allow for more time for pedestrians to safely cross that intersection.

Alternative vision for existing structures in town might engage developers in our community’s vision for change.

Install benches under trees around town for people to rest on their walks.

Install more bike racks around town near businesses.

Request NYSDOT to do specific pedestrian needs studies. Vest pocket parks, benches, summertime floral displays. Encourage pleasing and coordinated architectural motifs. Timely sidewalk snow plowing, regular reviews of sidewalk inventory for needed repairs, sweeping and signing. Historic sign/markers and displays geared for pedestrians. Maybe require or incentive businesses keep adjacent trails/sidewalks clean and passable.

4. Create a town-wide network of bike routes composed of trails, sidewalks and low traffic streets. Design it to encourage errands and other short-trip trip travel, not just recreational use. Take special care to safely accommodate electric bikes and to assure the safety of school age children.

Have multi-use paths and increased sidewalks, especially in areas of the town where public transportation (CDTA) routes have been cut and decreased. Example: West of Rt. 155 via Western Avenue.

Look to tie in Town wide network of bike paths, and sidewalks connecting Guilderland to the *Albany County Rail Trail*. Guilderland can join neighboring towns and cities: Bethlehem, Delmar, Voorheesville and the City of Albany. Have designated parking areas in Guilderland near the paths - Voorheesville and Slingerlands have parking areas set up for individuals and families to park and ride on the path.

Have CDPHP Bike Share Programs at different locations throughout the Town, (Examples: Hamilton Square, Hannaford on Carmen Road or Town Hall, on Carmen Road near new Roundabout at East/West Lydius Street), as many busses do not go past this location on a regular basis, especially on weekends.

Begin a Townwide incentive, "Bike Guilderland Week". Bike Guilderland Week is held one week per month, 12 months a year. Encourage residents to participate in this fun and healthy program, asking them to share about it on Social Media to promote this idea. Participation would be required at least one day during the designated week. Develop a cool hashtag for people to use: #GuilderlandBicycleWeek.

Residents who bike to work or bike to shop during the designated weeks can register their treks online with the Town. We could have an MS Forms site created to capture this data. After 12 months, those who participated in all 12 months of biking can earn a cool 'patch' and certificate from Town Board Members at a presentation at a Town Board Meeting or maybe a presentation at one of the pavilion's at Tawasentha.

The Town can blast out reminders to all residents about Bike Week- be on the lookout for neighbors and friends on bikes and don't forget to 'Share the Road'.

Have a contest for patch design from Town residents. Have Town members vote on top 5 patch designs to pick a winner.

Work with the school district to make network infrastructure work for school needs and school bus routes. (e.g.; fewer school bus stops by having safe routes for students to do more walking.) Electric bike charging stations in commercial areas. Trail blazers and pavement markings as needed.

DRAFT

5. Identify programs and incentives to reduce traffic on arterial roads, single-occupancy vehicle use in particular. For example, demand transit (i.e. CDTA Flex,) work from home days, and enhanced bus services where densities support it. Also work with state transportation agencies to assure early deployment of beneficial technologies such as advanced signal control.

Work with CDTA to bring weekend bus service to Hamilton Square, and areas beyond Crossgates, and an express bus to downtown Albany/return to Guilderland for residents who work in downtown Albany. Riders currently have to take 2 buses to get to downtown Albany or other areas. If a bus is late, riders will miss the bus they need to take at the next pickup location. There are 3 buses in that run directly from Bethlehem to downtown Albany.

Develop a program such as the Universal Bus Pass for encouraging large employers (Walgreen, Market 32, apartment complexes, etc. and business associations) to establish a partnership with CDTA to subsidize transit fares (and services) for low wage service workers. Leverage from the Downtown Albany Business Improvement District, Capital District Chamber of Commerce and Walmart in Glenmont and Washington Ave. how this program can be used in Guilderland.

Autos and transit: Bus shelters, CDTAFlex, Electric Drive Share, and installation of Bike Cycle! stations in parks.

Construction of higher density housing to encourage increased public transit ridership.

Have NYSDOT regularly review its oversize load routes and permitted times of day.

6. Make sure the transportation needs of the town's retail, commercial, and service businesses are met so they may prosper. And actively coordinate pedestrian, bicycling and transit amenities with residential and commercial development proposals.

Encourage connecting and sharing of proximate parking lots in commercial areas. Have business events that offer discounts to people arriving by bicycle.

Better, attractive pedestrian connections for the stretch from Stuyesant Plaza, past Crossgates, to the trendy jewelry shops, bistros and other businesses on Western Ave.

CDTAflex and bus service during the week and weekends at retail, commercial and services businesses.

7. Have the Thruway better serve Guilderland and the other localities it passes through. Configured in the 1950s as a rural interstate between Albany and Schenectady, it inadequately serves this now urbanized area. Adding exits and removing local tolls will draw traffic off nearby arterial roads. The State did this for the Buffalo and NYC areas and should now do it for the Capital District.

Background:

When the Thruway was planned in the 1940s, the area between Albany and Schenectady was predominantly farmland. There is only one exit between their downtowns. Subsequent Capital District freeways, built in the 1960s and 70s, anticipated and provided for urban growth by having exits every couple of miles. Thus the region's northern and eastern suburbs have freeways that relieve their arterial streets.

In the ensuing 70 years Guilderland's population of 7,000 went up over five-fold, gaining over 30,000 more, and Colonie's gaining 55,000 more. Yet these urbanized towns have no urban freeway, only a rural one designed to discourage local travel.

DRAFT

Concept:

The objective is to better integrate the Thruway (I-90 and I-87) into the Capital Region's transportation network by transforming it from an inter-regional limited access facility into one also serving regional traffic. Such means involves repurposing the Thruway between Exit 22 (Selkirk) and Exit 25A (Schenectady) by removing tolls on local traffic and adding several exits. This will draw traffic off nearby arterial roads in Bethlehem, Albany, Colonie, Guilderland, and Rotterdam.

Benefits:

The principal benefit is the elimination of circuitous and inefficient travel burdening nearby arterial roads, mainly Western Avenue in Guilderland, Central Avenue in Colonie, Route 9W in Bethlehem, and several arterial streets in Albany. It's also a chance to better connect the Thruway with the many warehouses and truck terminals along the corridor.

Drawing traffic from the local system means fewer total vehicle miles of travel. The Thruway's wider lanes and controlled access will improve net safety. Ancillary benefits are safer local streets, less fuel consumption, reduced travel times, and lower pollution. Opportunities for trails, small parks, and other amenities may arise during design.

Staging:

A project of this scope will take a decade to fully develop, design and build. However, it can be done in stages to bring some early benefits.

The first stage is to eliminate tolls for local traffic, to be done as soon as possible. The existing electronic tolling system makes this relatively easy. That system is already programmed to make travel free for one local exit pair (between exits 24 and 25A, but not including 25.) It should be reprogrammed to make travel toll free for vehicles that both enter and leave the 24 mile stretch from Selkirk to I-88 in Princetown. This would preserve Thruway revenues derived from long haul traffic using this stretch.

The second stage, planning and building new exits at key points, would take more time and resources, but it would have a more significant impact on reducing congestion on arterial roads and improving mobility for local residents. At least four or five new local arterial connections should be considered, and more if suburban growth continues. It may also be worth considering extending the toll-free stretch to Amsterdam in the west and to Coeymans in the south.

Implementation Considerations:

A project of this magnitude requires strong support from the general public, elected officials, and various government entities including municipalities, regional authorities, State and Federal agencies.

Federal and State highway funding is limited and allotted by region, so a coalition among municipalities and other groups is needed to compete successfully for Capital Region funds.

State-level policy decisions will also be necessary, such as who will maintain the free Thruway section, how that maintenance will be funded, and how to minimize the impact on Thruway revenue.

General Strategy:

DRAFT

The first step is to develop and demonstrate strong public support for the concept. This means creating awareness of the opportunity among those that will benefit. Point out that there is precedent for toll-free Thruway sections, as evidenced by the existing toll-free sections in the NYC suburbs and Buffalo. Form working groups with benefiting towns and interested organizations. Get press coverage and lobby political leaders for their support. Finding champions in both the Legislative and Executive branches of State Government is essential.

Soon after, work with the State and the agencies that will develop and implement the concept. These agencies want to help but have their own set of concerns, such as capital finance limitations, loss of revenue, institutional and legal barriers, and negative impacts on particular constituencies. Help them develop the information they need to prioritize the concept on the Capital Region's transportation agenda.

Overall, the proposal to remove tolls and add exits on the Thruway between Exit 22 and Exit 25A is a sound one that would have many benefits for Guiderland and the Capital Region. It is ambitious but it is doable.

8. Support planning efforts with adjoining municipalities and regional entities such as: Albany County, the Capital Region Transportation Council (CRTC), the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the New York State Thruway Authority.