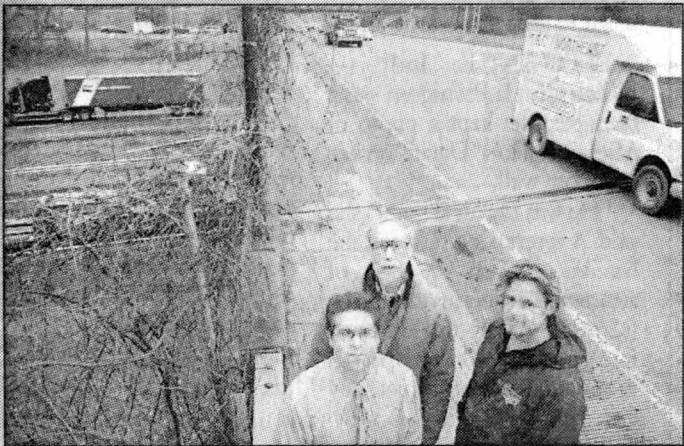


PHOTOS BY PAUL BUCKOWSKI/TIMES UNION

EXIT 24, a 1950s-designed interchange that links the Thruway and the Northway, has had trouble meeting rising traffic demands.

Hamlet wary of one ramp too many



DAVID REID, left, chairman of the McKownville United Methodist Church board of trustees; **Don Reeb**, center, of the McKownville Improvement Association; and Renaissance Floral Design owner **David Michael Schmidt** in McKownville.

Guilderland *Possible new Thruway-Northway connector troubles some McKownville residents*

By CATHY WOODRUFF
Staff writer

It sounds like a frazzled commuter's dream — a high-speed “flyover” ramp that links the Thruway and Northway, and bypasses the bottleneck at Exit 24. But to folks in the hamlet of McKownville, that prospect is as soothing as a motorcycle without a muffler.

Already, the hum of traffic from the two interstates and

Western Avenue can compete with the hymns during Sunday services at the McKownville United Methodist Church, said David Reid, chairman of the church board of trustees.

“I can only imagine what a four-lane highway bridge going over Western Avenue one-tenth of a mile from our sanctuary would do,” Reid said.

The location of the possible Thruway-Northway flyover for E-ZPass, one of several ways the state Thruway Authority could relieve the strain on its busiest interchange, is strictly a guess. But Don Reeb, president of the

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THRUWAY: Authority calls angst premature

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McKownville Improvement Association, sees no way a flyover could miss the hamlet of about 950 homes that borders the western edge of Albany.

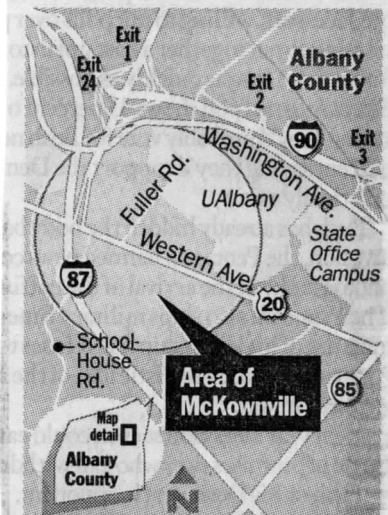
"I assume they're going to have to take out that whole set of houses on Schoolhouse Road," said Reeb, a retired University at Albany economics professor. "The loss of the buildings and the noise are really a concern."

A Thruway Authority spokesman said the neighborhood association members are leaping to premature conclusions about how the authority will proceed after it completes its \$725,000 Albany Corridor Study early next year and does follow-up analysis.

"We're nowhere near being able to say what we're going to put in there yet," said Terry O'Brien. "It might not be a flyover at all. It might be putting in barriers to allow highway-speed E-ZPass," or some other as-yet unknown option.

The Thruway, through a contract with Clough, Harbour & Associates, embarked on the corridor study in April 2002, looking at ways to cut congestion and to improve safety along a 25-mile stretch between Exit 21A south of Selkirk, where the Berkshire Connector begins, and Exit 25A in Rotterdam, where the Thruway links with Interstate 88.

Each year at the crossroads of interstates 90 and 87, 13 million vehicles pass through Exit 24. On an average day, 75,781 vehicles travel the section between Schenectady's Exit 25 and Exit 24,



placing it among the busiest segments of the 641-mile-long Thruway.

In recent years, traffic movement has been revolutionized by an explosion in the use of E-ZPass, which allows drivers to go through toll plazas at low speeds without stopping for tickets or paying tolls.

Yet, most Thruway interchanges were designed in the 1950s, making them poorly suited to today's congestion and traffic trends.

O'Brien said changes will be recommended as a result of the study — and he acknowledges that the flyover idea has generated much of the early interest and discussion — but nothing has been designed at this point.

“There are all sorts of ideas that might alleviate the situation, and a flyover would just be one of them,” he said. He discouraged Reeb's conclusion that Schoolhouse Road buildings would have to be sacrificed, even if a flyover were planned.

Reeb's not so sure. He believes there must be some conceptual sketches drawn to show the most practical routes for a flyover, even if they aren't full-fledged designs.

The tangle of highways through McKownville already is dizzying, Reeb noted, and he said the geometry of adding yet another layer certainly would be complex.

The authority's first meeting outlining possibilities and soliciting public comment for the corridor study took place in June, and O'Brien said another public meeting probably will be held next year, when the study is complete.

The study is expected to lay out several options — three to five “concepts” for each interchange. Those ideas might then be winnowed to a few for examination in an environmental review process, O'Brien said. “That would include public hearings, again, as it always does,” he added.

The Thruway Authority recently established a Project Advisory Committee made up of representatives from cities, counties and towns in the study area and assorted transportation agencies and providers. The group is scheduled to meet in January.

Reid said an early warning on any plans that could affect McKownville is especially critical for the church right now, as a yearlong renovation and expansion study is being completed. Depending on the scope, the project could cost the parish as much as \$1 million, he said.

“I would have reservations about recommending to the congregation doing something that expensive if we are going to have a four-lane highway bridge and all the traffic associated with it here,” he said.