

Public ponders and protests Thruway plans

By Nicole Fay Barr

At least 100 people, many from Guilderland, voiced concerns Tuesday about proposals to improve the Thruway. They spoke at a meeting in Colonie, given by the Thruway Authority, designed to solicit public input to aid in the process of choosing final plans, which could take years.

Each represented an individual section of the Thruway that is being studied — Exit 23, 24, and 25; mainline barrier concepts; and tandem lot concepts.

More people crowded around the Exit 24 station than any other. Several told *The Enterprise* that they couldn't get close enough to see the plans or ask questions.

'It was a shock to me.

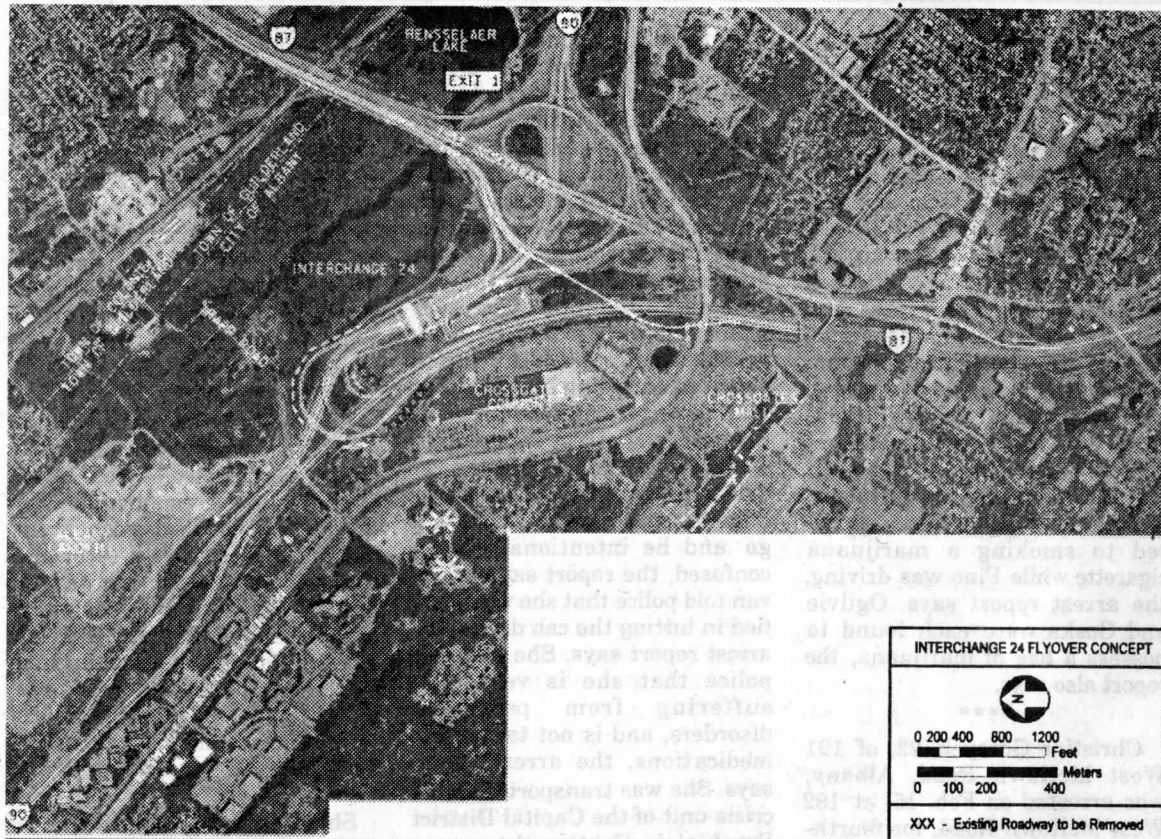
It goes right through my kitchen.'

Many were worried about a flyover near Exit 24 proposed to run along Schoolhouse Road in McKownville. Residents said it will bring more noise and pollution to their already disturbed neighborhood.

"The residents of McKownville, all 925 of us, all dogs, cats, everybody is opposed to this flyover," Don Reeb, president of the McKownville Improvement Association, told Thruway work-

For Exit 24 in McKownville, which links traffic from the Thruway to the Northway, to Interstate 90, or to Western Avenue in Guilderland, there are four proposals; these were narrowed from 15 ideas. All four proposals would expand the toll plaza and move the Thruway ramps further west.

This exit is the highest priority for the Thruway because it receives the most traffic congestion



The Thruway's flyover proposal for Exit 24 in McKownville.

ers, receiving applause from the crowd.

Others objected to proposals that weren't largely discussed at the meeting. Chris MacDermot, who lives on Stanford Drive, showed *The Enterprise* a sketch for a proposal to reroute the entrance and exit lanes for Exit 25. Part of the proposed road runs directly through MacDermot's house.

"It was a shock to me," he said. "It goes right through my kitchen."

While many asked questions at the meeting, answers were few. Plans to improve the Thruway are still conceptual, said Chris Ryan, a planner working with the Thruway.

The purpose of the meeting, he said, is to allow the Thruway Authority to sift through its proposals by weighing each one against public concerns.

Ryan asked those in attendance to fill out a form stating their concerns about the proposals. These comments will be compiled and reviewed by the end of May, he said, and more public meetings could be scheduled then.

Proposals and protests

At Tuesday's meeting, audience members could view maps of the different plans and ask Thruway representatives questions.

The perimeter of the room was lined with five separate stations.

at peak times. While parts of the Thruway will need reconstruction within the next decade, traffic around Exit 24 will reach "unacceptable levels" within the next two years, officials said.

One proposal is to simply move the Thruway ramps west of Rapp Road. The other three proposals involve creating separate E-ZPass ramps.

E-ZPass is a system where drivers attach an electronic device to their windshields. The device is scanned as the vehicle goes through entrance and exit tollbooths on the Thruway. The driver only has to slow down to pass through the tollbooth and is billed monthly for the toll charges.

One of these three concepts is called the "flyover concept." However, all three involved some type of extra flyover ramp in McKownville. Reeb pointed this out during the public comment period of the meeting.

In October, Reeb and Guilderland Supervisor Kenneth Runion wrote letters to the Thruway director, asking him to consider alternatives other than the flyover.

At Tuesday's meeting — which was attended by Runion, several town workers and activists, and county officials — a handful of people spoke against the flyover.

David Reid, chairman of the board of trustees of the McKownville United Methodist

Church on Western Avenue, said his fellow church members oppose the flyover.

Currently, he said, with the Thruway and Northway ramps running through this part of Guilderland, "the noise is tremendous."

"Trying to have a conversation outside of the church is virtually impossible," Reid said, adding that, in the summer when windows are open, traffic can be heard from inside the church.

Richard Cross, also of Guilderland, said at the meeting that he is "underwhelmed" by the information he was given.

"There's no concern of noise on Schoolhouse Road," Cross said. "...I find it a little troubling. It doesn't seem that you put reports together that are very revealing." Reeb stood again and asked if the Thruway had planned on putting noise barriers up while it does construction on the highway.

"I can't give you a definite answer," said John Brizzell, of the Thruway Authority.

Most of the questions Tuesday night were scarcely answered. A woman wrote each question and concern on a poster-size tablet for the Thruway Authority to review later.

Another Thruway representative, Lee Ecker, however, said that the authority's biggest priorities were to limit noise and visual disturbances to residents

and to respect right-of-way access, wetlands, and the Pine Bush.

Exit 25

and other concerns

For the Thruway's Exit 25, five plans have been narrowed from 15 originally proposed. Each would expand the toll plaza.

Traffic using Exit 25 to leave the Thruway is going to Schenectady by Interstate 890; to Rotterdam by using Route 7; or to Guilderland by using Route 146. A major problem is that vehicles access both routes 7 and 146 by Curry Road.

Most of the plans proposed include separating the access to the roads.

Another problem with Exit 25 is that each toll is congested at peak traffic times. This causes traffic to back up onto the Thruway's exit ramp. Also, traffic backs up at the intersection of Curry and Carman roads.

Some of the proposed changes to Exit 25, however, show new access roads built through homes and neighborhoods. This makes residents, like Chris MacDermot, uneasy. He speculated, however, that most of Tuesday's meeting would be dedicated to discussing the flyover.

He was right. During the first question-and-answer period, no one asked about Exit 25.

There were many questions asked about funding and suggestions made for alternative plans.

Thruway workers kept saying, however, that this is all preliminary and real plans are unknown.

"It's important to remember that these are just concepts," said Ecker. "Nothing is set in stone. No detailed surveys were taken...We have a long way to go."

Additional concepts

Other plans for improving the Thruway include two proposals (narrowed from 29) for Exit 23. Both plans would move the toll plazas to the south side of the Thruway and directly connect Interstate 787 with the Thruway toll plaza.

Another idea, favored by Reeb and many Guilderland residents, is to eliminate all or some of the tolls between exits 23 and 25A. Drivers would pay at mainline barriers and not have to stop and pay tolls in between.

While this would make traffic flow more smoothly, Thruway officials say there are a few problems with this idea. For example, federal legislation would be required to address the toll-free access to Interstate 88.

Also, the barrier concept is not consistent with the Thruway bond resolution. The Thruway Authority has a contract with the purchasers of its bonds and this cannot be broken without the consent of the majority of the bondholders and the approval of the Thruway board.