

Re-Working the Thruway in the Capital District

Don Reeb (Tuesday, August 10, 2004, 2pm)

The New York State Thruway serves two sets of clients—the local commuters and the long distance traveler. Toll booths were designed to be used by the latter, not the former. Thus the long tie-ups at Exits 23 and 24 and 25. Construction of higher speed EZPass lanes will not eliminate the problem anymore than the EZPass itself has eliminated the tie-ups. There are too many travelers who do not use EZPass.

At the Thruway meetings February 24, May 11 and May 12 to discuss the Albany Corridor Plan the Thruway planners brought forth a superior plan for the Thruway in the Capital District. The Thruway planners termed it the Two Barrier Concept. As a title that is not a winner, but the plan is.

Imagine that all the toll booths were removed at exits 22, 23, 24, and 25A but the entrance and exit ramps remain as they are. The Thruway would still connect to the Northway just as it presently does, for example, but there would be no toll booths at exit 24. Without toll booths all vehicles traveling only between these four exits would then travel free. This would be of enormous benefit to local commuters and local businesses—in money and especially in time. No traffic tie-ups at toll booths, no added accidents or air pollution at toll booths because there would be no toll booths.

To safeguard Thruway revenue the Thruway planners propose that rather than travel free between these four exits there be a reworking of the tolls. Those entering at exit 23 would not get a Thruway “ticket” but would pre-pay a round trip toll—a toll equal to twice the present toll between exit 23 and exit 24. Those entering at exit 25 would do the same, pre-pay for a round trip to exit 24. Those entering at exit 24 and 25A would not pay any toll and there would be no toll booths at these exits since there would be not Thruway “ticket” to hand in and no payment upon exiting the Thruway. (There would be no surcharge if you traveled from exit 23 to 25 and no toll at all if you traveled just the one way, from exit 24 to 23 or from exit 24 to 25.)

Because the toll is prepaid for the round trip when you enter you only have one stop rather than four stops for the usual round trip commuter journey, a huge savings in time. (EZPass users would proceed as now and be charged a round trip toll). A second major saving would be in construction costs. The Western Avenue flyover would not be necessary. The flyover is opposed by my neighborhood, McKownville. We have over two hundred petitions asking that it not be built. All of our local and State elected officials have joined us in opposing the construction of the Western Avenue flyover. Property values at Stuyvesant Plaza Executive Towers and other nearby commercial property would not be threatened. No flyover to cause increased noise in my neighborhood. No vast expense for new construction for bridges in the sky, which is what a flyover really is, and reduced air pollution from reduced traffic tie-ups

The Thruway in this proposal recognizes that commuters have different needs from long distance travelers. The Thruway planners should be applauded. They have created a truly superior plan.

For long distance travelers there would be two new toll booth complexes (barriers)—one near exit 22 and the other near exit 26. Vehicles passing through these would stop and pick up a ticket or pay a toll, just as travelers now do when entering or exiting the Thruway, or use their EZPass if they are a subscriber.

The bulk of the Capital District commuters will find their commuting time reduced because their would be fewer toll booth stops in their commuter journey while long distance traveler will find their travel time (marginally) increased because there would be two new toll booth complexes to pass through. There should be no significant differences in out-of-pocket costs for anyone.

This plan deserves far more support from the public—hopefully it will now get it.