

EVENTS & CONGESTION

Project Character

I-1. Provide a brief summary statement that describes the project, including its location, objective(s), and what will be achieved if the project is selected. The project's objective(s) should not convey or implicitly assume a predetermined result or recommendation. 5 points

The limited street grid in New Paltz's Village core, with one major west-east route -- Main Street/ Route 299 -- offers travelers, including visitors, only one primary way to access regional open space and recreation environments to the west within the Town, including major cultural events at Ulster County Fairgrounds, off Route 299, on Libertyville Road/ County Route 8. There is a significant, long-standing problem of this Main Street corridor frequently experiencing congestion on weekends. Strategy is needed that defines alternative ways to alleviate non-recurrent congestion and proactively address event traffic management and mitigation.

Since it is not readily feasible to build new highway capacity, there is a need for a comprehensive event traffic management and parking study. This plan will help ease peak congestion and support enhanced tourism, including as enabled through walking, bicycling and transit modes. The Plan will gather baseline information, taking-off from the 2006 New Paltz Transportation Land Use Project. It will provide market analysis, contingency planning, feasibility study, outreach, and strategy formulation for establishing a multi-stakeholder process to cooperatively and proactively manage special event traffic and peak-level visitation, including at the Fairgrounds, Minnewaska State Park, Mohonk Preserve, the Huguenot Historical Society, SUNY-New Paltz, and other events, such as offered by the Chamber of Commerce. The Plan will present alternative strategies to manage traffic flow along Route 299 corridor and the other key aspects of the area transportation network.

I-2. Describe (a) the issues and trends that give rise to the need for this project, (b) efforts to date to address them, and (c) why it is important to advance the project at this time. 15 Points

The 2006 Draft Phase C Report of the New Paltz Transportation Land Use Project, pages 133-134, a project funded by NYSDOT, identifies the most acute traffic congestion as occurring in New Paltz on weekends and during special events. It notes that traffic during special events and weekends measures 10-40% higher

than normal PM peak hour traffic with resulting network effects. Residents and visitors alike experience frustration from being stuck in traffic. The business community feels the impact through loss of business from residents who avoid going into town at peak traffic periods and from visitors who are intent on getting out of the traffic tie-ups. To address problems, the Transportation Land Use Project, a decade ago, recommended a multi-stakeholder project, led by the Village and Town, to establish baseline data and provide specific plans to manage special event traffic and peak-level visitation at key venues as well as to manage traffic flow along the Route 299 corridor (Ibid). The problem of congestion since then has not gone away - the County's recently drafted 2040 Long-Range Transportation plan shows 299, as critical corridor, as reaching its highest level of Average Annual Daily Traffic in 2011 for the period 1999 – 2011 (page 54).

Congestion does not fit well with an image of the region of having high quality access to world class recreation and open space amenities in and around the Shawangunk Ridge. Greater New Paltz's and Ulster County's economies are dependent on recreation and tourism. Exit 18 on the Thruway is the start of the Shawangunk Mountain Scenic Byway. Main Street (NYS Route 299) is a major gateway for a portion of the 20-plus million inhabitants of the NY/ New Jersey area that seek to visit the vast open spaces and trail systems of the Shawangunk Ridge, the rest of Ulster County and the broader central Catskills region.

Since the Transportation – Land Use Plan was completed 10 years ago there have been active and continuing efforts, led by the joint Village and Town Transportation Implementation Committee (TIC), to improve area traffic management, including on Route 299. Examples of efforts are: improvements to lane configurations and signal timing; deployment of intelligent transportation systems (ITS) development on NYS Route 44/55 by the State Park; establishment of a Loop Bus within the core of New Paltz; and County leadership to construct a new Route 299 bridge over the Wallkill River with enhanced bicycle and pedestrian capacity and improved sightlines.

Yet, as evidenced by congestion observed on a recent Columbus Day weekend and the preceding and the following weekends, problems of weekend peak congestion remain. In October 2015 the Governor pledged to turn Minnewaska State Park, the oldest and second largest state park, which is estimated to

contribute \$12.3 million in annual economic impact, into a “Gateway” park using the Parks 2020 Plan. In cooperation with non-profits and donors, the Governor is preparing to invest \$7.3 million for new park amenities including a visitors’ center, in order to turn it into a more modern, year- round destination. There is a need to help visitors get to and return from tourism destinations like the Park conveniently and to achieve congestion management and coordinated parking and intermodal offerings so that the public can enjoy area parks and are also tempted and comfortable stopping-in and enjoying New Paltz’s restaurants and stores, rather than fearing they must push on in order to avoid congestion.

Moreover, the local communities and County have been actively planning and building-out a premiere non-motorized network. Accompanying enhancements in recreation and non-motorized transport supply, there have been major efforts to enhance and sustain tourism economic development. In order for the New Paltz community to foster and accommodate more diverse events, there is a need for strategies to more effectively manage and distribute all types of trips and minimize undesirable congestion, including impacts on residential areas.

I-3. Explain how this project will (a) help to fulfill any of the 8 Goals and Objectives in Chapter 2 of UCTC’s Draft 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (http://ulstercountyny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/planning/LRTP_Draft_081915.pdf) and/or (b) is recommended as part of any other UCTC Plan. **15 points**

Considering the proposed final draft of Rethinking Transportation: Plan 2040, page 89 notes that Ulster County completed a travel time survey in 2011 which shows recurring congestion in the Route 299 corridor for most of its length in Lloyd and east of the Village of New Paltz. This confirms continuing need for the study.

Overall, the proposed project is consistent with multiple goals within the 2040 Plan, particularly Goal 5 – Mobility Reliability: Provide for efficient and reliable travel by all modes by investing in strategies that mitigate both recurring and non-recurring congestion. Other goals of the 2040 Plan that it fits with include: Goal 2 – Economic Vitality: Invest in transportation system improvements that are necessary to support the current regional economy and make strategic system investments to support future economic growth; Goal 3 – Safety: Improve safety of all users of the transportation system by responding to identified safety deficiencies and proactively addressing future safety needs; Goal 6 – Accessibility

and Connectivity: Create and maintain a well-connected transportation system that provides access throughout Ulster County for people and goods travelling by all modes; Goal 7 – Protect and Enhance the Environment - Contribute to making Ulster County a sustainable place by protecting and enhance the natural and built environment, reducing greenhouse gas and other motor vehicle emissions, supporting sustainable construction and maintenance practices, and coordinating land use and transportation plans.

Considering objectives associated with Mobility and Reliability Goal 5, this project would mesh with 5.1 – Address Recurring Congestion which aims to reduce vehicle-hours of delay that occur as a result of recurring congestion on principal arterials and arterial streets. It also fits with Objective 5.2 – Address Travel Time Reliability which aims to improve the reliability of travel time on principal arterial highways to an averaged travel time index of 1.25 by 2025, and maintain that level to 2040. It is also quite conceivable that by aiding congestion management the project will also advance progress against the final associated objective for facilitating ‘Freight Mobility’.

Since the TLU Plan was completed in 2006 (which was a planning and policy initiative facilitated with assistance from UCTC), there has been continuing effort by the joint TIC to advance transportation enhancements and safety improvements. This includes its attempt to advance the project proposed herein in 2010, when it was unable to gain sufficient traction. There are now strong indications of support in the community. Moreover, addressing this issue should aid safety for non-motorized modes, which is particularly relevant since it is reasonable to expect marked increases in the incidence of walking and biking trips within and through the community. There would certainly seem to be safety risks to active transport modes in a congested transport environment.

II-1. Describe how the project will facilitate the effective and efficient use of public resources to (a) improve the safety of transportation services and/or facilities; and (b) enhance community character and quality of life. **30 points**

This project will provide for more efficient use of public resources. It is a coordinating study that involves optimization of resources. There will be many benefits from congestion management, including in terms of community character in perceived quality of life and visitor experience. It is more cost-effective to manage and coordinate traffic than establish new highway capacity.

One unique opportunity is a large supply of surface parking in the community, used during peak weekday periods, such as at SUNY-New Paltz, New Paltz Central Schools, and the BOCES facilities, that may, with advance coordination, be available for utilization on weekends when there are low levels of use directly by owners.

Congestion does not jibe well with the small town and open space ambiance of the community. It seems there could be increased reliability of travel time within the corridor if users are presented with knowledge of preferences for navigating through the community. Likewise, it is desirable for users to achieve awareness of different ways to access and leave events and know about alternative options for reaching destinations, such as the SUNY campus, during events.

Providing visitors with enjoyable, convenient and efficient ways to park and get out of their vehicles, including by accessing transit to get to events or destinations, should provide for reduced trips within the corridor at periods when congestion is likely to be high. It can also provide a new base of users for the transit system, which in-turn can be developed to more fully support an effective and efficient overall system of local transportation. Transit development and supply offers a compelling way to reduce the prevalence of vehicle trips that inefficiently consume highway capacity.

This project will define strategies for reducing variability of travel time through focus on the active management and operation of the transportation system on weekends. Study of trip origins and destinations will establish baseline data on patterns of transport. Likewise, opinion research and market analysis can inform what is bringing people here and provide insight into trip characteristics. This type of information will also be useful for shepherding desirable economic development and enabling and managing diverse recreational and cultural offerings, at the Fairgrounds, at SUNY, at distributed locations like farms and wineries, including events that may rely on the highway network like marathons and bike races.

II-2. State how the project increases mobility or usage for any of the following: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, or freight. **5 points**

There seems to be strong support for utilizing active transport and transit within the community. Evidence of this is the annual increases in weekday ridership on

the Loop Bus. Another indicator of interest in transit is the strong take-up of the newly offered enhanced weekend service. A congestion management system with satellite parking connecting people to the bicycle and pedestrian networks and transit offerings could provide enhanced markets for the area retail service sector as well as a greater base of transit users.

With messaging about where visitors can park, such as within a distributed system of parking lots, including at various educational institutions that are not typically going to have a need to use surface parking on weekends, as well as information and instructions on alternate routes and for how to use transit and the non-motorized trail system, it may even be possible to leverage enhanced transit that will enable growth in recreation visitation without undesirable congestion at trailheads and major recreation amenities such as Mohonk Preserve or Minnewaska State Park. Moreover, an enhanced network range or increased transit trip frequency could benefit interested local users, such as students or households without cars, as well as tourists.

There is no doubt the 'final mile' of freight delivery is a challenge within New Paltz, along Main Street and within districts immediately adjacent to it. Consider that the corridor is situated in a historic town center with imperfect and in many places constrained layouts. Not only do commercial service vehicles get caught-up in congestion, but there is potential for poorly timed or positioned deliveries to impact traffic, such as by impeding flow. Actions to reduce congestion on weekends would clearly benefit this mode as well as aid quality of life for the residents of these areas.

III-1. Provide a step-by-step outline of the primary tasks necessary to conduct the project as you currently envision it. Tasks should be sufficiently well-defined to allow UCTC to: (a) understand how the proposed project leads to expected accomplishments (see below) and (b) how the project will be conducted and monitored . **5 points.**

The consultant should advise a steering committee on the tasks and sequence of tasks needed to develop this project. Sub-tasks involved in the study should include market analysis, baseline studies of congestion, inventorying of satellite and downtown parking supplies and demand, estimations of arrival and departure routes by mode, site-specific analysis by mode, capacity analysis, and mitigation planning.

Case study method is desired. It can be a means to provide recommendations and examples for alternate routing, alternate routes, signing, parking, shuttles. It may also be a platform to explore the potential of actions like local-regional coordinated permitting, temporary regulations, and structuring pre-awareness for visitors. It will also be beneficial for this project to demonstrate examples of typical traffic management plan components covering topics like: feasibility analysis, site planning, incident response, and contingency planning, as well as methods for evaluating post-event performance.

It seems that pursuing this project, that will be policy and social planning/ behaviorally-based, can provide cost-beneficial solutions to congestion management compared with making physical enhancements. The project appears to offer an effective and efficient platform for action because there are many willing partners who see a need to deal with weekend congestion and who want to help identify and implement possible improvements and mitigation.

In terms of enhancing community character, congestion on Main Street has been evident for decades. The 1994 Village comprehensive plan discusses the essential role of Main Street and its congestion. The transportation land-use plan was precipitated to help address congestion. Congestion is a complex problem that may require implementation of a variety of strategies to reduce it; yet, since the TLUP, there has been much progress in internet technology/ information technology and intelligent transportation, as well as development of the loop bus and transit systems of the community. This means there is a strong platform for planning additional measures to reduce and alleviate congestion.

In terms of quality of life, the village and town have been cooperating on a great number of projects, advancing local government efficiency on many fronts. This project involves the next step in a multi-sector partnership involving inter-municipal collaboration, as well as cooperation with numerous institutions to coordinate use of facilities, such as parking supplies, and develop ITS and transit to help direct visitors to parking and help people find alternate routes and get them out of their cars and walking and using bicycles and transit.

This study could alleviate congestion in some neighborhoods as well as promote safety by helping ensure that the collector routes maintain that level of function. In other words, it can help ensure the through- and visitor-traffic does not shift to

more residential streets within the limited grid of the village and town. Moreover, it ensures that people seeking to access Main Street can do achieve it without the risk of having to sit for prolonged periods in traffic.

III-2. List the project's anticipated accomplishments and final deliverables (guidelines, ordinances, recommendations, concept plans, etc.). Explain how the completed project and its recommendations and deliverables will be applied, implemented, or carried forward. **10 points**

The study and plan product of this project should present baseline analysis and modeling to identify possible impacts associated with alternative strategies to reduce, direct and coordinate traffic associated with events, as well as traffic bound for the major recreational areas, farms, or other seasonal destinations. Included in analysis will be methods and measures for reducing undesirable congestion and traffic in residential areas, or on roads or parts of the transport system that are not well-suited to accommodating flows during peak periods.

The plan would define detailed strategies for managing traffic associated with events and seasonal traffic generators and provide for management of general, chronic congestion that happens within periods of peak visitation. The plan should identify resource needs and roles. Ideally, it will identify forms of communication and coordination that can be applied by event proponents, tourism agencies, tourism venues and the municipalities to help inform transport system users about ways to optimally shape their activity patterns. It will also define different ways to advance holistic traffic mitigation, addressing the topic generically, as well as by providing suggestions for how to provide traffic management and congestion avoidance within specific parts of the community.

It is requested that a case study approach be applied. By selecting one event and delving into it, there can be exploration and demonstration of stakeholder roles, resource allocations, and the sequential actions and techniques that may be used to achieve desired effects. It is envisioned that model tools can be developed, such as communication pieces. There can be examples provided of the types of tactics that may be applied to promote desired behavior, including through the application of intelligent transportation system techniques.

Of prime importance is finding ways for desirable events and economic development to occur along with management of event traffic. A case-based approach can explore how to build collaboration among agencies at the local-

regional- and State-level. This would include communications between the local highway superintendent and DPW, local and County Planners, as well as the County Highway Department, UCAT and NYSDOT. Finally, it is conceived that the municipalities could welcome a model local law that would provide criteria and a process for reviewing event traffic impacts and the issuance of coordinated event permits.

III-3. Name the contributors of any additional sources of funding and/or provide qualifications for Individuals that will provide in-kind contributions and specify whether their support is confirmed or anticipated. **5 points**

There are no additional sources of funding identified for this project at this point. It is envisioned there will be a local project steering committee led or assisted by long-time TIC Chair Gail Gallerie. Village of New Paltz Municipal Planner, David Gilmour, AICP, would lead day to day project development. Besides institutional and elected leaders, it is envisioned there would be NYSDOT, local planning board, highway, business owner, non-profit and facilities personnel involved within a steering group.

III-4. Identify the level of support from elected officials and municipal decision makers. Describe the outreach efforts (public meetings, advisory groups, survey, Internet, etc.) that will be used to reach the general public and the project stakeholders, including individuals, community organizations, underrepresented groups, and businesses affected by the project. **10 points**

The level of support from the Mayor and Village Board for this project is high. Likewise, the level of support from the Town Board appears to be equally high.

In September 2015 the village's municipal planner identified that that UPWP call for projects would be forthcoming and started coordinating with the TIC as well as the joint Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee who have reviewed this project and offer their support.

The notion for this study germinated with the TIC, however, it was not able to get traction with this project in 2010. The level of joint support from the municipal administrations is encouraging as evidenced by letter support for this project respectively provided by each body.

A multi-stakeholder engagement process is contemplated for furthering this project. Based on preliminary indications, there should be strong take-up by diverse groups and institutions. Besides the two aforementioned boards and committees, groups contacted and showing interest at this stage include: SUNY

New Paltz; Mohonk Preserve; Historic Huguenot Street; other divisions within county government and NYSDOT.

The public outreach efforts that would occur as part of this project should be defined by the selected consultant working in cooperation with a local project steering committee. As indicated, given that events are conducted by a variety of institutions, it is expected that building awareness and support for project implementation will depend upon involvement by many groups to get the project off the ground. It is critical to facilitate involvement by diverse players, such as within hotel/lodging industry, Main Street businesses, well as the arts and entertainment and nonprofit sectors. This includes because community groups sometimes hold events like Taste of New Paltz and Rib Fest at the Fairgrounds.

Examining how other communities provide for event traffic management, it is also important to have broad expertise available. Roles to include at the table include: facilities personnel, police, and information-technology specialists, as they can help consider contextual circumstances and needs. Furthermore, solutions to congestion will rely on publicity on the World Wide Web, deployment of intelligent transportation and other aspects of cooperation, including even at the level of information presented by merchants to customers.

The ability to build collaboration in the community across sectors will be essential to future success and sustainability in managing congestion associated with events and peak period visitation. It will be important that the consultant and steering committee have a strong public information and engagement program structured into the overall project design. All in all, this project could set the stage for additional multi-sector cooperation that will enhance overall community economic development and foster strong and smart relationships between transportation, land-use and community activities.