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**Chairwoman, Rockland County Legislature**

**Tri-State Transportation Campaign Conference**  
**Exploring the Potential for BRT & TOD in the I-287/TZB Corridor**

**November 15, 2013**

Good morning!

I may be partly responsible for this Symposium because Veronica got tired of hearing me expound so many times about the epiphany which occurred when Tri-State T.C. ran a conference in White Plains at the County Center in 2007 which opened eyes to what Bus Rapid Transit really was: expert speakers, film footage of places around the world that utilize and love BRT--really trains on wheels which are comfortable, cost-effective and provide a flexible system with attractive stations. It changed the mindset of the DOT team then in charge of planning for the bridge and mass transit.

So, thank you, Veronica and Tri-State for holding this Symposium here in Rockland, I suspect that this day will have the same effect on our audience and I look forward to hearing the speakers.

Like many people who live or work in the Lower Hudson Valley, I am at once thrilled and concerned about the construction of a new Tappan Zee Bridge. Thrilled because I have been involved with this project since I first heard Governor Pataki off-handedly say on the radio that a new bridge would be built. That was 1998, and I almost drove off the road. Thrilled because the design is beautiful and will match the majesty of the Hudson River it spans. Thrilled because so many construction jobs are being created. Thrilled because it will have safety features like shoulders and breakdown lanes. Thrilled because it will provide a place for walkers and bicyclists. And thrilled because the potential for innovative and speedy transit is boundless—and if accomplished will maximize the investment in the bridge.

I'm concerned, however, that we not lose the opportunity at this moment in time to think regionally and to strengthen transit solutions for west of Hudson riders. I'm concerned that the cost of the bridge not be borne by Rockland and Westchester commuters in the form of high tolls. I talk about Rockland and Orange a lot, because we are transportation orphans on the west side of the Hudson, with limited commuter options to Manhattan

Back to 1999 and 2000: local officials in Rockland and Westchester got together and formed an ad hoc group on behalf of residents, called GUARD—with the mission of trying to get county executives, state and federal officials to help fund independent studies on traffic, environmental issues, potential transit ridership—studies that the public could rely on. We worked together for several years but never succeeded in getting the funding, although it was a start at raising public awareness of the developing project. Then later under a different Governor, a number of us were appointed to the Westchester-Rockland Task Force to work with DOT, then the lead agency. Although many people decry the years of studies, the process was a model in the way citizens were brought into the process on Stakeholder Working Groups, helping to avoid the acrimony of a Robert-Moses-style approach.

Governor Cuomo became the fourth Governor to tackle the bridge issue following Governors Pataki, Spitzer and Paterson; to his great credit, he cut through the red tape and logjams to get the bridge off the ground on a federal fast-track. But initially, plans for mass transit and highway improvements were put on hold, if not scrapped. Thanks to Tri-State Transportation Campaign, RPA and others of us trumpeting the importance of mass transit, the Governor set up a MTTF in January with the task of coming up with plans for transit and how to fund it by the end of this year.

Veronica and Tri-State have been very helpful to the process in many ways-because of deep and broad knowledge of transportation systems and because Veronica and her predecessor have not been shy about speaking truth to power. I have done the same over the years calling attention to the disparities in transit options for West of Hudson riders. Last month I told the MTTF, of which I am a member that it must take this opportunity to address the many solutions that have been offered to improve transit, saying

Rockland has limited commuter options to Manhattan that don't involve the New Jersey Transit System; so when it comes to service improvements this reality makes Rockland an orphan without loving parents: not fully embraced by New York, and not part of New Jersey. The final report must address two travel markets that are vital to our commuters; Rockland to Westchester and Rockland to Manhattan.

Recent demographic reports indicate that Rockland is an aging community. We are very happy that many seniors choose to age in place; but to remain vibrant, Rockland needs to keep and attract younger residents as well.

The beauty of Rockland and its relative proximity to the high-paying jobs in New York City should be attracting droves of young professionals. But once they find out about the cost, the length of time, and the extraordinary hassle of commuting from Rockland to Manhattan, we know many of them are discouraged and choose to settle elsewhere.

Recently, CNBC ran a Fast Money column about Rockland resident Richard Walsh. Richard is one of 17,000 residents who commute to Manhattan; he goes to lower Manhattan five days a week. His round trip lasts about four hours every day, often standing the entire way and then walking a mile to save subway costs because his commute already costs \$400 per month!

Current estimates indicate that approximately 17,000 Rocklanders commute into Manhattan every weekday, and another 11,000 commute into Westchester. The number of commuters could be substantially higher if efforts were made to improve journeys.

I appreciate the support and activism of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. If they—if we-- are squeaky wheels, it is with the best of motives: to get people out of their cars, to deliver world-class transit options and to help the Empire State thrive economically.

Thank you.