

The Westway Project Acquisition Progress Report

by Joseph A. Fogarty

Since the 1950's, it has been apparent that the elevated Miller Highway along the western edge of Manhattan needed replacement or major rehabilitation.

New York's controversial Westway project is a prime example of a new era of urban highway planning and design. The wide range and sophistication of community interests which have had to be dealt with, and the need to comply with exacting Federal standards for environmental quality significantly altered the traditional approaches to highway building.

Since the 1950's, it has been apparent that the elevated Miller Highway along the western edge of Manhattan needed replacement or major rehabilitation. The existing structure had been built for passenger cars only in the '30's and '40's, and the heavy usage (approximately 110,000 cars per day) and corrosive saltwater air were causing significant and rapid deterioration.

This problem was recognized by several government agencies and the unusual magnitude of the problem was recognized by the Tri State Regional Planning Commission in 1966 which concluded "that the needed highway renewal coupled with new land uses provides an unparalleled opportunity for civic improvements." During the 1960's, New York State assumed responsibility for the unprecedented undertaking and worked out a financial "trade-in" arrangement with the Federal Highway Administration.

Through the agreement, monies which were initially allocated for several New York City Interstate Routes, determined to be both costly and disruptive, were reallocated for this essential

The Westway Project is a major highway replacement project being built for New York City. Joseph A. Fogarty is Associate Right-of-Way agent for the Property Services Bureau of the New York State Department of Transportation. This article first appeared in the April 1982 IRWA News and Views, Empire State Chapter 18 Newsletter, of which Fogarty is editor. Research and the map were provided by AASHTO Quarterly, January 1982.

improvement. As part of the "trade-in" agreement, interstate designation and funding was ultimately obtained for a 4.2 mile corridor extending from the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel (at



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Manhattan's southern tip) to the Lincoln Tunnel-42nd Street vicinity.

During the early 1970's, State and City officials reached preliminary accord and established an organizational and policy framework for the proposed project. These agencies identified and agreed upon a number of criteria to create an improvement that would satisfy the greatest number of needs. From its very inception, the project was immersed in controversy, and much planning and discussion was required to develop the five following alternate design proposals:

1. MAINTENANCE - repair and maintain existing six lane facility.
2. RECONSTRUCTION - a major rebuilding of existing facility, salvaging as much as possible of the elevated structure, and constructing new roadway decks in accordance with present safety standards and designs.
3. ARTERIAL - tear down the elevated structure and construct a six-lane atgrade arterial with two-lane service roads along each side, and a subway transit-way under the street.
4. INBOARD - a new six-lane, partially depressed highway close to the present location including a

separated two-lane transit-way for express buses, and a reconstruction of the surface street under the Westside Highway viaduct.

5. OUTBOARD - a new six lane, partially depressed highway near the present pierhead line with design elements comparable to the Inboard Alternate.

During the early part of 1974, a series of public hearings were conducted, and twenty-five city, state and federal agencies provided detailed comments concerning the proposed improvement. The wide variety of opinions made unanimous agreement impossible to achieve. However, with the collapse of a section of the existing highway in December '73, the Maintenance and Reconstruction Alternates became much less viable. After the structure's collapse, the elevated highway south of 46th St. was closed, and this served to further underscore the need for rapid action. Through the review process, the surface arterial was criticized as creating a physical barrier between the City's westside residential communities and the Hudson River, and the Federal Highway Administration indicated that neither an elevated highway, nor a surface arterial

would meet federal noise and air quality standards.

On March 7, 1975, a decision favoring Westway was made by Governor Carey and former Mayor Beame. Through this action, the State and City of New York jointly endorsed the project and firmly rejected the alternate option of transferring the interstate fund allocation to mass transit. The project's planning was continued and a design alternate was selected. The Westway's final alignment (north of Battery Park Complex) will be midway between the pierhead line and the present highway, and will ultimately connect the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and the existing Miller Highway at 46th Street. The new highway will be depressed for just over half of its 4.2 mile length, and will have four connections (or interchanges) with existing city streets: The first will be located at the project's southern tip and provide access to the Battery Park Underpass and West Street; the second will be located in the mid-southern zone, and will connect the traffic corridor with Canal Street and the Holland Tunnel; the third will be in the central zone and will allow access to and from the City's major meatmarket district and the

