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Regional Plan Association Policy Statement on the proposed
New Jersey Turnpike widening between the Garden State Park-
way and Route 3, west of the Lincoln Tunnel.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority has proposed a doubling of the width of the Turnpike between the Garden State Parkway and Route 3, which leads to the Lincoln Tunnel. The cost is something over \$300 million. The original turnpike cost was \$279 million.

Arguments For the Widening

The Authority explains that traffic already is at capacity and beyond at some hours, that an increase in traffic can be expected as four Interstate highways are connected to the Turnpike over the next year or two, and that it is necessary to decide promptly how wide the Turnpike will be in the long run so the interchanges can be designed efficiently now.

The Authority also notes that the proposed route has the advantage of a relatively clear right of way which can be acquired easily and relatively cheaply.

Furthermore, the northern portion of the New Jersey Turnpike has been designated as Federal Interstate Route I-95, a route which parallels the Turnpike from the Pennsylvania line to Bound Brook swinging east to join the Turnpike. This is apparently because under current fiscal policies, New Jersey does not have sufficient funds to finance its 10 percent share of the federal Interstate system plus

other needed highways receiving only 50 percent state matching funds or wholly paid for by the State. (The portion of the Turnpike which is designated, I-95, will receive no federal funds because it is a toll facility.)

Given the financial restrictions imposed on Turnpike improvements to assure the Turnpike's continued ability to repay its bonds, the only feasible highway construction that can be built promptly within the Turnpike Authority's financial capacity is the doubling of the Turnpike on the existing alignment between the Garden State Parkway and Route 3.

Traffic Projections

None of the agencies that must be relied on for transportation data in Northern New Jersey--the Turnpike Authority, the New Jersey Highway Department and the Tri-State Transportation Committee--has yet published figures detailing the number and type of vehicles expected to use the Turnpike on this stretch over the coming generation, with their probable origins and destinations. Nevertheless, it seems likely to the Regional Plan staff that there will be a substantial increase in bus, auto and truck traffic in this corridor, and the magnitude suggested by the Authority's proposed six-lane addition does not seem unreasonable.

Arguments Against the Widening

However, there are several objections that might be made to the proposed widening.

First, because of the stringent financial limits on the project, it will be an ugly facility. It will be over 200 feet wide, almost solid paving broken only by narrow barriers. There will be no

landscaping between the four sets of three lanes nor alongside them. The highway will be at least as wide as two-thirds of the length of a football field or a whole north-south Manhattan block--almost solid paving running through an area already bereft of greenery and natural beauty. This at a time when the President has declared a policy of beautifying the nation's free interstate highways.

Second, the proposed route does not appear likely to promote the best use of the Hackensack Meadows, on which the governor is even now awaiting a development report. The Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce has objected that Newark's plans for the Meadows would be disrupted by the proposed alignment. Probably a route along the western edge of the Meadows--instead of doubling the expressway east of the Meadows--would be more likely to encourage and serve the Meadow's development.

Third, the Port of New York Authority has objected to the proposed widening because it will induce extra traffic to try to enter the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels. These facilities already are at capacity during many hours of the day. The Port Authority argues strongly against adding additional river-crossing capacity at either of these points. The Turnpike Authority considers the widening as primarily a service to vehicles going from one point to another in New Jersey--not as a service to traffic bound for Manhattan. Since the projected origins and destinations of the anticipated traffic have not been published, we can only speculate, but the fact that the proposed widening would end at the approach to the Lincoln Tunnel where the Turnpike would suddenly revert to six lanes implies that a good deal of the traffic is expected

to use the Lincoln Tunnel. Otherwise, where is it coming from or going to at the northern end of the double width?

An alignment west of the Meadows north of the Newark airport would better serve distribution of intra-New Jersey traffic.

Fourth, the Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce, the Port of New York Authority and the Newark Evening News all have raised questions about whether the proposed widening is as pressing as several other routes in the same part of New Jersey, one of which we note is the Hoboken freeway, connecting approaches to the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels. If the Hoboken connector could be built as a section of the Turnpike, it should be as a toll facility with revenue bond financing.

Fifth, the Turnpike has been closed by smog in whole or part twenty-six times the last quarter of 1964 and once, over its entire route, thus far in January. It would seem to be advisable to see whether a more smog-free route exists before committing large-scale funds to an artery that had to be closed an average of twice a week for three months running.

Conclusion

The Turnpike Authority is to be commended for planning to meet the probable traffic increase before serious bottlenecks occur. However, the stringent financial limitations placed on the proposal because they must be financed by revenue bonds have made the present plan unsatisfactory.

If, however, the widening south of the Newark airport can be built with adequate landscaping, this part of the proposal would seem satisfactory.

The widening north of the airport, however, does not seem justified in the light of the possible funneling of added traffic to Manhattan, the probable better alignment west of the Meadows, and the possible higher priority of other Northern New Jersey routes.

The weaknesses of the Authority's proposal reflect the faults of New Jersey's highway financing generally. State highway revenues allocated to building of all classes of highways are insufficient to match federal money even though the state needs to contribute only 10 percent to the federal government's 90 percent in building the Interstate system of toll-free highways.

Therefore, in this instance, the state's total highway investment has had to be conditioned to fit a route and design that can be financed by revenue bonds. In this case, we believe that investment is wrong--south of the airport in design, north of the airport in location and priority. Only with adequate state highway funds can New Jersey's transportation investment be allocated reasonably and efficiently.