



Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

REGIONAL PLAN RESTATES OPPOSITION TO COMPLETION OF I-95, I-287

Attached is the current issue of the Association's publication, The Region's Agenda.

Regional Plan asserts that completion of I-95 and I-287 will not produce construction jobs in the immediate future. Three to five years of planning and environmental assessment are needed before construction can be resumed.

If the highways are completed, they would encourage further out-movement from New Jersey's developed areas--urban and suburban--wasting existing public facilities, weakening the economy of the older cities, increasing public transit operating subsidies because riders will decrease, and increase energy use and pollution.

In contrast, transferring the Interstate funds to priority highway and transit projects would provide more immediate blue collar work and a stimulus to New Jersey's future economy, which must be based on stronger central cities which work efficiently.

Attachment

IN NEW JERSEY: I-95, I-287 ORDERED COMPLETED; REGIONAL PLAN DISAGREES

New Jersey's Governor Byrne has instructed Commissioner of Transportation Sagner to proceed with the planning for completion of I-95 and I-287. Regional Plan Association opposes their completion:

1. Given the probable continuation of zero population growth in Northern New Jersey and the whole New York Urban Region, this expensive investment in undeveloped territory is not needed.

2. Were it built, jobs and housing would be drawn out of existing cities and suburbs. This would:

- leave wasted facilities for sewerage, water, transportation, schools and streets while new are built, in large part at federal and State expense;
- further weaken the economy of the old cities;
- take away more jobs and services from the large minority of city residents who do not own cars, because public transportation cannot carry city residents to scattered jobs and services along a highway;
- increase public transportation subsidies, because transit will still be needed in cities and close-in suburbs but will have fewer riders;
- further separate old and young, rich and poor, black and white by providing outside the old cities all the urban facilities needed by suburban and exurban residents so they have no relationship to the cities;
- unnecessarily invade natural countryside; and
- increase energy use and air pollution.

Proponents Argue:

Proponents of these two highway segments argue that they have been on the books a long time and people have made location decisions on the assumption they would be built. Somerset County planners argue that their plan was based on I-95. The added highway links, particularly I-287, might attract businesses related to the whole Northeast because that link would complete the Interstate network and is near the center of the Boston to Washington Corridor. With unemployment in the Region above the national average, they argue, no step offering some hope of added jobs should be ignored.

Regional Plan Responds

Regional Plan is skeptical that these links would make the difference between a firm locating in the Region or not. What is more likely is that factories, offices and housing will be attracted out of the older cities and suburbs. Over the middle- to long-run--and these highway links won't be completed for over half a decade--this Region's strongest economic assets are what remains of the compact development in and around its cities and the public transportation network that is supported by that compact development. With factory employment declining all over the country, manufacturing seems a poor hunting ground for this Region to make up its employment losses. Instead, Regional Plan suggests that this Region build on its strength--office jobs in city centers that can be served by good transit in a world of uncertain energy supplies. New Jersey cannot compete with the sunbelt by imitating its spread-city, all-auto pattern.

The Immediate Issue

The immediate issue in New Jersey is: should the Environmental Impact Statement and design work go forward, at consid-

erable expense, or should these highway segments be declared unwanted now, so the money from the federal government can be transferred sooner to highway segments and public transportation that would strengthen, not weaken, New Jersey cities.

Although the Governor's decision to go ahead appeared to be in response to pressure for construction jobs, probably it will be four to five years before construction could begin. The comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for I-287 are just being reviewed by the Department of Transportation; for I-95, a contract to draft the EIS has just been signed. It is not expected to be completed before the end of 1977. Court challenges then would not be unlikely.

The segments ordered to be completed are: I-287 from Montville to Mahwah in Bergen, Passaic and Morris Counties and I-95 from Hopewell to Piscataway in Mercer and Somerset Counties. Regional Plan has suggested that since I-287 now terminates "in the middle of nowhere," it might be extended six miles only--to N.J. 23 in Riverdale.

Regional Plan's Considerations

Regional Plan's decision to oppose completion of the two highway segments was difficult. It provoked considerable response, both positive and negative, and so has been reviewed several times by our Executive Committee and Board of Directors.

The Association originally supported both highways, when the Region was expected to grow to 30 million or more. But when the Region stopped growing in the early 1970's, the Association took a second look. Now, all development on the Region's periphery means a loss of population in the older cities and suburbs. Social, economic and environmental interests all argue for keeping development from spreading.

An Alternative: Land-Use Controls

It would be possible to build the highway links and still avoid the spread of development that would be expected with completion of these highways if state or regional land use legislation had the strength to prohibit office parks and shopping centers and housing along the route. But the State Legislature has transferred this power to municipalities and hesitates to take some of it back. One lever the State retains is providing the facilities development needs, so this must be used to avoid inducing housing, factories, offices, shopping and motels to move out of the older cities and suburbs.

We conclude, therefore, that the best interests of New Jersey and the Tri-State Urban Region are best served by immediate declaration that I-95 and I-287 will not be built and transfer of the federal funds to public transportation and to highways going to city downtowns.



THE REGION'S AGENDA

REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION
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A periodic report on progress and problems in implementing The Second Regional Plan, identifying obstacles that readers might help to overcome.