



# 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.

1040 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS (39th Street) • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10018 • (212) 398-1140

## NEWS RELEASE

Chairman  
William S. Woodside  
Chairman  
American Can Company

No. 1438  
May 11, 1982

For Further Information:

Richard T. Anderson or William B. Shore  
(212) 398-1140 (office) (212) 398-1140 (office)  
(914) 738-5160 (home) (914) 531-0053 (home)

FOR RELEASE: a.m.'s Sunday  
May 23, 1982

OFFICE GROWTH NEAR AIRPORT MAY NOT BE BEST FOR WESTCHESTER, REGIONAL PLAN GROUP WARNS; ASKS FOUR-STEP PROCESS BEFORE KEY DECISIONS ARE MADE

Regional Plan Association warned the County Executive and Board of Legislators in a nine-page statement released today that the large-scale office growth underway, proposed and being planned for the Westchester Airport area may do more harm than good to the County. The civic research organization--oldest regional planning agency in the country--recommended a four-step program of County action on office location:

1. The County Executive and Board of Legislators should appoint a Task Force to lead them in considering for amendment or approval the County Planning Board's concept of a County settlement pattern. Once that is decided, they should take steps to implement what they approve.
2. The State Department of Transportation should analyze transportation alternatives for central Westchester in the context of Statewide capital demands, comparing costs of facilitating auto travel with the costs of encouraging jobs to locate where they can be reached by public transportation. This should build on the County-sponsored study already underway.
3. The County should promote Westchester's downtowns as the desired location of offices, retailing and specialized activities that require large numbers of residents to support.

4. The County should aggressively practice its housing policy, restraining any encouragement of jobs where there is little municipal effort to stimulate housing that will match the jobs within the area.

The critical issue right now, the Association said, is whether to build a road from prospective office sites near the Airport to a new interchange at I-684.

The Association cited the Westchester County Planning Board's development guidelines, Assumptions, Goals and Urban Form, which warned in 1970 that: "A shift from concentration of development in cohesive centers to a spread-out, campus-oriented, auto-dominated structure, if only limited to the presently undeveloped portions of Westchester, can lead to many problems in the future, including providing adequate public utilities, increased dependence on the car and its concomitant increase in traffic problems."

The Association's view is that Westchester County should use its leverage to induce firms to locate office jobs in its urban downtowns rather than around the Airport. If that succeeded, Regional Plan said, the County's transportation, environment, housing and social conditions all would benefit.

Regional Plan Association's recommendations have no governmental authority, but many have been followed by public and private agencies, e.g., the choice of downtown Stamford for GTE's national headquarters, which set off dramatic growth of offices, retailing, cultural facilities and housing there; large park acquisitions in the 1920s and the 1960s, following Regional Plan open space reports; saving commuter railroad service in the early 1960s when railroad companies went bankrupt.

The Association's "Future of Westchester County" Conference in March 1971 attracted 1,600 residents. Written questionnaires following presentation of alternatives and small-group discussion of them revealed strong support for the Association's recommendations that offices, retailing, higher education, health services and the arts be located

primarily in White Plains and secondarily in the other potentially strong downtowns, New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Yonkers, Mount Kisco, Peekskill and Port Chester. Such a pattern, the Association explained, supports public transit, keeps opportunity within range of everyone in the County--the old, young and handicapped as well as the poor--and protects open land and the beauty of the County.

The Association's recommendations have been discussed with County Executive Alfred DeI Bello and Andrew P. O'Rourke, Chairman of the County Board of Legislators. A presentation to the full Board of Legislators has been promised by the Chairman. Previously, the issues were debated by some 200 business and government spokesmen in June 1980, at a conference at American Can headquarters in Greenwich.

William S. Woodside, Chairman of American Can Company, is Chairman of Regional Plan Association. The previous Chairman, William M. Ellinghaus, President of American Telephone & Telegraph, is a resident of Bronxville.

The statement is attached.

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

/dr

# Regional Plan Association

1040 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10018 • TELEPHONE: (212) 398-1140

WESTCHESTER AIRPORT AREA DEVELOPMENT  
A Statement by Regional Plan Association to the  
Westchester County Board of Legislators  
and the  
County Executive

March 1982

Central Westchester--with crowded highways, lengthening trips to work, and reported difficulty in filling some office jobs--faces an addition of 25,000 or more new office workers around Westchester County Airport, in Rye Town and Harrison, if projected office growth materializes. A Westchester County study estimates that 25,000 more jobs would mean about 17,000 more peak-period trips in the area, nearly all by automobile.

Should the County be encouraging such development, particularly through a County-sponsored new road connecting to a new interchange on Interstate 684? Could such office development be accommodated in nearby downtowns? Or does Westchester's economic future lie primarily in the Airport area?

Regional Plan Association has been reviewing these issues in consultation with many public and private leaders in both Connecticut and Westchester. We find that prospective office development in the Airport area would contradict the County Planning Board's development policy, Assumptions, Goals, and Urban Form, which calls for a commitment to downtowns and prevention of urban sprawl. It would violate also: the main principles of the County's Housing Policy; the official regional plan approved by the three states through the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission; and the urban policies enunciated from time to time by the State of New York. Such development would clash with the land-use policies of neighboring Greenwich and Stamford as well as with the State of Connecticut.

The Association recommends that the County and municipal governments involved delay further approval of actions that would lead to new office development until careful cost/benefit analyses are prepared by the County Planning Department related to the many questions involved. Utilizing such information, Regional Plan proposes a four-part County program:

1. A County-municipal Task Force on the Future of Westchester established by the County Executive and Board of Legislators to consider the Planning Commission's plan and ways to implement it; this could lead to a public conference on the issues, similar to Regional Plan's 1970 Future of Westchester County Conference attended by 1,600 people.
2. A State Department of Transportation analysis of transportation alternatives for central Westchester, comparing opportunities for increasing public transit use with facilitating greater auto travel, and building on the current County-sponsored consultant study, "Westchester County Airport Vicinity Area Traffic."
3. A County-sponsored promotion of Westchester's downtowns for office jobs, retailing, and specialized activities, in cooperation with the County's major cities and the private sector.
4. Aggressive implementation of the County Housing Policy, involving the County's principal employers in support and possibly sponsorship of housing.

The basis for these recommendations follows.

#### Recent History

Urban policies at all governmental levels increasingly are calling for centralization of development and avoidance of urban sprawl. That has been the key component also of Regional Plan Association's Second Regional Plan for the New York Region. The benefits of concentrating growth, especially in existing downtowns like White Plains and New Rochelle, are many. Public transportation is facilitated because destinations are concentrated; economic and social opportunities are brought together for people from all walks of life; valuable open land is preserved from needless sprawl development; and efficient use of scarce public resources and existing private investment can be achieved. Much of America's development continues in decentralized fashion, but a change toward centralization is beginning to take hold. After many years of effort, downtown White Plains and downtown Stamford are achieving their potential. Smaller downtowns do work.

But the easy way is still new development on open land, especially with close-in areas like the towns of Harrison and Rye near Westchester Airport--whose large-lot housing requirements have kept out residents, despite proximity to large concentrations of jobs and services. Proximity to central Westchester and access to the Airport are leading developers increasingly to the Airport area. Three years ago, the County entered into an agreement with Rye Town to encourage such development. That agreement has led to the current proposal for a new access road from Rye Neck to Interstate 684. More than any other single public investment question, use of County and State transportation funds for the proposed road and connection to I-684 is the key to Westchester's future development course. Regional Plan believes that downtown alternatives should be considered before the countryside is further urbanized and auto travel induced.

#### Office Potential

Present plans for office development in the Harrison/Rye area could easily result in eight million square feet in the coming years. This estimate is based on surveys prepared for the Westchester County Airport Noise and Land Use Compatibility Planning Study and other reports. Some of the projects, such as the Royal Executive Park, are being pursued actively. Others are less advanced. But the trend is clear and undoubtedly would be accelerated by new highway access.

Beyond that, future office development in the Airport area is wide open. The Cross Westchester Expressway Study - East of White Plains identified 3,000 acres having commercial development potential. Depending on zoning changes and other factors, office floor space could be from 11 to 26 million additional square feet. This would lead to new employment of 33,000 to 79,000 jobs and peak-hour traffic of 22,000 to 48,000 vehicles. Such extensive development obviously would take some time to mature, but the stage is being set now. County leadership will be instrumental.

### Housing Needs

The housing market in Westchester and Fairfield Counties is unusually tight. Westchester's overall vacancy rate is less than five percent and is much less in the Airport area. Despite a drop in population, the number of households in Westchester has increased substantially, while net housing units have scarcely increased at all. Current sales prices of existing homes in Westchester average around \$135,000, and the average in Harrison and Rye is more than \$150,000.

Large corporations have identified lack of affordable housing as a major obstacle to locating and expanding in Westchester. This is especially true around the Airport. According to the Southwestern Area Commerce and Industry Association of Connecticut (SACIA), affordable housing is so scarce that employees are now commuting up to 60 miles from their homes to their jobs. Some corporations have cited a 60 percent turn-down rate from executives asked to relocate to Westchester and Fairfield Counties.

The Westchester Housing Policy calls for coordinating housing with community development. It states, "The county will provide its services, resources, and influence to support additional local development in Westchester where such development is closely coordinated with the provision of adequate housing for the workers and managers employed by new economic activities. The working of the County Industrial Development Agency, the Office of Economic Development, and the economic development assistance of the State and federal government that the County can influence will be targeted to support jobs producing activities that are planned in conjunction with adequate supportive housing." But the land surrounding the Airport that is slated for development is not suitable for housing because of the noise generated by Airport activities, and these municipalities have resisted housing appropriate to their locations.

The County Housing Policy estimates that 50,000 housing units in the next 10 years will be adequate to ease the housing situation. This estimate takes into account an annual growth rate of one-half of one percent. All of the municipalities have submitted the number of

housing units they expect to see constructed in the next 10 years. The total nearly reaches the 50,000 estimated need. Harrison estimates an increase of 660 units over the next 10 years. Rye Town estimates a total of 51. At this point in the implementation of the Housing Policy, not all the communities have submitted locations for estimated units. But it is clear that housing availability cannot be used as a supporting reason for locating offices in the Airport area.

### Transportation Issues

The Airport area already is facing recurrent traffic congestion. According to the 1978 Cross Westchester Expressway Study by the Westchester Planning Department, 94 percent or more of employees in the area travel to work by automobile. Only one corporation had a lesser proportion (82 percent), and this was due to a van pooling program where the corporation supplies the vehicles. Much of the local opposition to increased office development is based on the traffic it will generate on already congested roadways. Several recent studies have shown that traffic in the Airport vicinity has grown significantly along major traffic arteries, including I-684, I-287, King Street and Anderson Hill Road.

The announced transportation solution is the proposed connector road from Rye Town to I-684. According to the Environmental Impact Statement for Royal Executive Park, which would add 360,000 square feet of office space in the first phase and another 450,000 to 900,000 square feet in the second phase, the new road would provide a means for traffic from the project to reach the area expressway network directly. The road is estimated to cost \$3.5 million. Alternative alignments are under study. Whatever the route, a full interchange would be created with I-684 south of the Airport. New York State Department of Transportation officials have not yet indicated their willingness to build the interchange. But now is the time for the State, County, and municipal governments in the area to agree on whether it should be built. Building the interchange and connecting road will be a clear signal that the area is ripe for commercial

development. Not building these facilities will be an equally clear indication that the County and State wish to pursue their stated Center-oriented development policies.

The other major transportation issue in the area is proposed improvement of the Hutchinson River Parkway. The State Department of Transportation has developed four alternative schemes for improvement of the Parkway between the Cross Westchester Expressway and the Cross County Parkway. The alternatives include: (1) reconstruction as a six-lane divided facility at an estimated cost of \$80 million; (2) reconstruction to six lanes with a new alignment, also for \$80 million; (3) four-lane reconstruction at a cost of \$75 million; (4) repair eight accident spots for \$50 million.

Although public hearings have yet to be scheduled, with construction beginning in late 1983 or early 1984, already there is organized opposition to a six-lane roadway. The Association to Preserve the Hutch contends that "an expanded Hutch will increase traffic flow, speeding and accident rates (which is at present the lowest of all Westchester roadways); increase noise and air pollution as well as soil and water pollution due to the increase in congestion of salt, oil, and gas in surface runoff."

The Hutchinson Parkway already is congested at peak hours. Daily traffic has increased from 18,000 in 1963 to 58,000 in 1980. Development in central Westchester has increased traffic considerably in recent years, and the Department of Transportation estimates that a reconstructed four-lane parkway would be overused immediately after completion. There are few alternatives to automobile transportation to dispersed office sites, and proposed additional office development would only exacerbate the situation. Ride-sharing programs are beginning to have some impact, but it is modest. For example, the Metropool Program based in Stamford presently carries 600 riders in vans and expects to carry 2,000 by the end of 1982. There are individual corporate ride-sharing programs, but none carries more than a small fraction of trips to work. The scatter and spread of housing make ride-sharing very difficult.

So widening the Hutch is the only way to decongest it, and the immediate issue is whether speeding the travel of 50,000-75,000 persons during peak hours is more important than the beauty of the existing Parkway and the cost and disruption of reconstruction. But the longer-term issues may be more important. If office construction continues in the Hutch corridor, reconstruction will not speed peak-hour travel for very long, and we will again have to ask about the relative value of reconstruction, to widen it further. We have to ponder whether, if the County and State delivered a message to developers: "we'll widen it this time, but no more auto access for more offices," would the message be heeded? Or would developers continue to behave as they have in the past, paying no attention to public land-use plans and urban policies that state in strong language that public investment will go to improving access to cities, not to jobs scattered through the countryside. In the past, they have assumed that when their development produces auto congestion, the public will eventually support more highway space and save their investment. And they have been right. Perhaps developers will only believe the message: "We will NOT widen the Hutch and never again will public investment follow development. Read our County, State and regional plans and believe them."

The proposed State DOT analysis of transportation alternatives in central Westchester should be completed before action is taken on the Hutch. The real question is whether widening will accomplish anything more than short-term traffic decongestion.

#### Airport Role

The Westchester County Airport is a distinct asset for the Westchester/Fairfield area, if it is properly developed and operated. The County has resolved to maintain the Airport as an economic stimulus to the area, preserving its general aviation status and resolving interstate conflicts about the Airport's land use implications and noise impact.

The County considers noise control and land use compatibility

two of the most important objectives of the Airport Master Plan and the Land Use Compatibility Study it undertook recently. The Master Plan recommends that the Airport remain a general aviation airport serving approximately the same mix of light aircraft, corporate aircraft, and air carrier service as at present. It proposes to lessen the noise impact while accommodating the anticipated increase in activity by leaving one of the three existing runways closed and constructing a parallel runway adjacent to runway 1634. This is intended to permit the separation of heavy turbine aircraft from light aircraft and result in a substantial reduction of aircraft noise.

Organized citizen groups contend that the Airport Master Plan did not take airline deregulation into consideration and, once the improvements proposed in the Master Plan are implemented, the Airport will be used intensively, adding to noise problems as well as road congestion.

The Airport's future is still far from certain. The County Planning Department is sponsoring a Generic Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Assessment (EIS) that will address many questions that Regional Plan and others have raised. This EIS should be incorporated in the County Plan, which is being revised by the Planning Department.

One question is what Westchester plans to do with the Air National Guard site it recently acquired and whether the County will continue to pursue its policy of requiring corporations that use the Airport to build offices there.

#### Downtown Alternatives

In the past, the County has expressed a commitment to existing cities. The County Plan recommends that "existing centers be expanded and intensified and urban fragmentation avoided. Development of new centers should be discouraged and support provided to existing centers to accommodate significant intensification." Then why is the County not using its leverage to encourage office location in city downtowns

instead of in the countryside? The answer usually is: private investment doesn't want to go into the cities; it prefers the green vistas, without social problems, found outside cities.

But recent events suggest that such a preference is not universal. Stamford, White Plains, New Brunswick, Newark all are getting substantial office construction. Stamford has seven major corporate headquarters in a downtown that once was far less attractive than New Rochelle, for example. If the State keeps its promise of investment priority for the cities, recent history suggests that it will be possible for the County to follow the Planning Board's plan without losing prospective development. White Plains--which has demonstrated it can attract downtown activities--can absorb more office space with good design and stepped-up public transit.

Perhaps the most fundamental problem is Westchester's heavy reliance on property taxation at the municipal level. For decades, communities in competition for ratables have been forced to accept poorly located developments in order to balance budgets for schools and other services. Areawide results are unplanned, if not chaotic. Statewide equity in school financing would go a long way toward overcoming this problem. Another answer is tax-sharing programs, such as practiced in the Hackensack Meadowlands and Twin Cities. We urge the County to study the options.

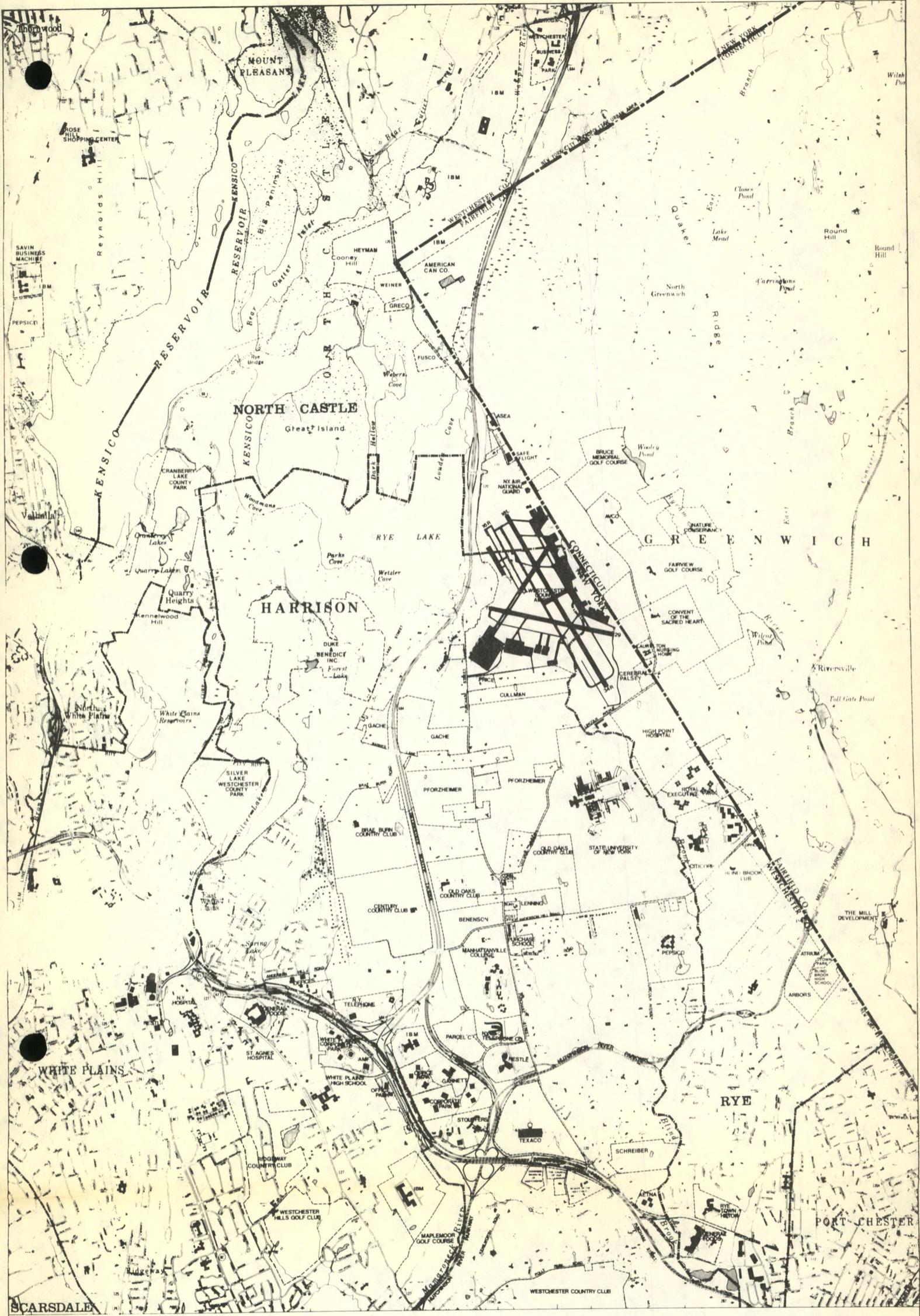
#### Next Steps

Regional Plan encourages the County to heed the Planning Board's development plan, which states: "A shift from concentration of development in cohesive centers to a spread-out, campus-oriented, auto-dominated structure, if only limited to the presently undeveloped portions of Westchester, can lead to many problems in the future, including providing adequate public utilities, increase dependence on the car and its concomitant increase in traffic problems."

Westchester County has within its power the influence necessary to limit office development in the Airport area and to attract office growth to existing cities. To achieve these ends, the Association suggests action on the proposed four-part County-sponsored program.

A map of the Westchester Airport Area, prepared by the County Planning Department and J. Michael Divney Associates, is attached.

RTA/lc



- STATE BOUNDARY LINE
- CITY/TOWN BOUNDARY LINES
- LAND DEVELOPMENTS
- R.O.W. HIGHWAYS, PARKWAYS
- WATERBODIES
- WATERSHED LANDS
- IMPOUNDMENT AREA FOR 100 YEAR STORM DAM LOCATION

**AIRPORT ENVIRONS  
WESTCHESTER COUNTY**  
AUGUST 1980

SOURCE  
THIS MAP WAS PREPARED AS A JOINT EFFORT BETWEEN THE OFFICE OF J. MICHAEL DIVNEY ASSOCIATES, PLANNING CONSULTANTS AND THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING. THE MAP IS INTENDED SOLELY TO ILLUSTRATE PROPOSED AIRPORT AREA DEVELOPMENT WITH THE INCLUSION OF SUCH PLANS ON THIS MAP NOT BEING ANY INDICATION OF EITHER MUNICIPAL APPROVAL OR STATUS OF CONSTRUCTION. MATERIALS USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS MAP WERE OBTAINED THROUGH THE OFFICES OF OWNERS, DEVELOPERS, PLANNING AND LEGAL FIRMS ASSOCIATED WITH EACH PROJECT, BUT ACCURACY MAY VARY.