

June 9, 1999

*American Littoral Society
The Baykeeper
Church and Clergy Fighting Back
Friends of the Passaic River
Greater Newark Conservancy
Hispanic Development Community Center
Ironbound Community Corporation
New Community Corporation
Newark Environmental Coalition
Newark Fighting Back Partnership
Regional Plan Association
Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Weequahic Park Association*

The Honorable Sharpe James
Mayor, City of Newark
City Hall
920 Broad Street
Newark, New Jersey 07102

Anthony Machado, Chairman
Newark Planning Board
920 Broad Street
Newark, New Jersey 07102

Re: Newark Economic Development Land Use and Transportation Plan

Dear Mayor James and Mr. Machado:

We write to express great disappointment with the Newark Economic Development Land Use and Transportation plan, which was directed by the Engineer's Office and funded by federal transportation funds at a cost of about \$1 million. Parsons Brinckerhoff was the principal consultant on the study.

We have concerns about several of the recommendations of this Transportation Plan and therefore object to its being included in the forthcoming City Master Plan as the transportation or circulation element. Although we have many concerns about the study and resulting plan, which are detailed in the attachment to this letter, the principal reasons for our objections are as follows:

The Plan Serves Cars, not Newarkers (Who Walk and Use Transit)

Newarkers tend to use transit or their feet to get around—more sustainable modes of transportation than driving alone. Of the 48,000 people employed in Newark who live in Newark (1990 Census), 41% drove alone to their jobs, while 57% took the bus or subway, walked to their jobs, or carpooled. Development both downtown and in “nodes” identified for development should take advantage of the very high walking and transit usage rates and encourage trends in this direction by planning for better bus service and providing friendlier walking conditions. The Transportation Plan does not do this, and in fact, in both downtown and neighborhood node development scenarios, the Plan assumes that between 61% (citywide) and 69% (node development) of the people accessing new jobs will drive to work. This assumption either means that non-Newarkers (who tend to drive more) will fill 2/3rds or more of those new jobs, or that the planners over-estimated the amount of driving that will occur to access these jobs, if Newarkers hold a greater share of the jobs. Either way, the assumption skews the plan’s recommendation toward more expensive highway investments to serve an additional 58,000 more vehicle trips per day (some estimates run as high as 71,000 new vehicle trips), and away from improved walking conditions and better transit, which should be the top transportation investment priorities.

Pedestrian Safety Is Not Prioritized

The Transportation Plan does not adequately address the fact that Newark has the highest pedestrian fatality rate in New Jersey—almost 900 people are hit by cars each year in Newark. City-wide traffic-calming measures need to be undertaken immediately. Just one paragraph of the Plan is devoted to Newark’s sad record in terms of pedestrian safety. The recent N.J. Department of Transportation Study of the 100 least safe pedestrian hotspots in New Jersey focused on Newark and Irvington first; the department has made recommendations to move forward with traffic-calming and other capital and engineering improvements for a handful of identified intersections. These intersections are barely mentioned in the Transportation Plan and others on the hotspot list are not mentioned at all, with the exception of a conceptual proposal to traffic-calm Broad Street. The fact that NJDOT had to study Newark’s dangerous intersections to determine how to improve safety is the equivalent of the state taking over Newark’s streets to improve their safety. An improved walking environment is crucial to making Newark more amenable to investment; Newark shouldn’t miss an opportunity to improve street safety.

The Study Did Not Proposed Solutions for Better Bus Service

Improving bus operations is a major need within Newark and from surrounding communities to Newark and a major opportunity to improve the modal market share necessary to achieve the goal of less traffic congestion downtown without costly new highway additions. Bus routes throughout Newark and especially those leading downtown are slow, some very slow. Walking is often faster. Transfers leave people waiting in inhospitable places, especially in cold or inclement weather, and waste even more time. Information about service and transfer points is spotty at best. Since we are unaware of any major push to improve bus operations within Newark by NJTransit in terms of more and faster service, this study was our best hope of accomplishing that.

Yet the Transportation Plan virtually ignores the need for improved bus service to and within Newark. Aside from three minor bus service proposals, and rhetoric about bus lane enforcement and the need for timed transfers, the Plan describes problems but offers no solutions. Overall, we are extremely disappointed at the low level of study that has gone into the transit section of the Transportation Plan.

Truck Traffic Should Be Controlled and Port Vehicles Should Use Alternative Fuels

Newark does not need more trucks, especially heavy diesel-fueled tractor-trailers that cause great wear-and-tear to local streets and pollute residential neighborhoods and busy downtown streets with toxic particulates (fine soot). While trucks are vital to commerce, and to port development, they must also be recognized as a noxious use that should be controlled and routed appropriately away from the downtown and residential neighborhoods. The Plan should explicitly state that port-related development that utilizes rail, lessens truck trips and increases alternative-fuel vehicle trips will be expressly encouraged by Newark's zoning, fiscal and regulatory policies.

We suggest that the city identify strategies for 'green' port development of the type used in Corpus Christi, Rotterdam and several other cities. The use of clean-fueled trucks, light-duty vehicles, tugs, switching equipment and the like at port facilities and nearby related developments is well on its way in other port cities. Some European cities limit access to urban centers to clean-fuel trucks and vehicles. Since Newark and Elizabeth are both part of the US Department of Energy's Clean Cities program, which promotes the use of alternatives fueled vehicles, Newark should be primed to move forward with such a model program. At a bare minimum, the City's Plan should call for these strategies to be explored and implemented wherever feasible.

Newark Is Not A Parking Lot

The Transportation Plan recognizes that limiting the supply of parking is the only way to encourage more people to take transit into Newark, but in the short-term, the Plan encourages 5,000 *more* parking spaces to be built. Newark already has 19,000 parking spaces in the central business district alone—land which could be put to valuable economic development that would bring to Newark higher and better tax rates than surface or structured parking. The entire central business district can be accessed by rail, bus and subway. Less workplace parking could be achieved by incorporating parking maximums (rather than minimums) into the forthcoming Master Plan and zoning or site development ordinances, and by requiring businesses to pursue incentive programs now available under federal tax laws, such as Transitchek, NJTransit's Business Pass program, and "cash out" parking. Instead vague lip service is paid to "transportation demand management" measures the plan.

Bicycling Should Be Encouraged, not Dismissed

As a city with a compact, grid-oriented street layout, Newark has the opportunity to make bicycling a realistic and convenient transportation option. Combined with extensive transit service in the form of buses, trains, the City subway, PATH, and future NERL, bicycling has significant potential to move people cost-effectively and cleanly— with no increased VMT and reduced pressure on parking. We recommend several steps that should be

aggressively taken to improve Newark's bicycling environment in the attached set of comments. The Plan unfortunately dismisses bicycling as a serious transportation mode to be accommodated with bicycle lanes and paths and mandatory locker and rack facilities because of the low profile of cycling in the last census, but it is widely understood that cycling was under-represented in that census due to poor sampling techniques. There are lots of cyclists on Newark's streets—they take up less room and have far less impact on the city and the environment than cars and trucks. The Plan should follow our recommendations to facilitate cycling.

Irvine Turner Boulevard Should be Traffic-Calmed

The Plan proposed creation of a high-traffic thoroughfare between I-280 and I-78 along Irvine Turner Boulevard. We reject that proposal. Irvine Turner Boulevard is already the scene of high-speed high-volume car traffic, as well as pedestrian crashes and deaths as motorists trying to access I-78 and other destinations conflict with people crossing the Boulevard. It is unthinkable that Newark would propose additional traffic for this residential neighborhood bounded by shopping centers, apartments, schools and play fields. Instead, Newark should focus on calming traffic on Irvine Turner Boulevard. The Boulevard is too wide and it encourages speeding.

Traffic Will Worsen Downtown under the Proposed Plan

Three transportation scenarios were modeled for the “design year” (2012)—a mere 12.5 years from now. They included 13 projects that were designed to increase the network efficiency and were thus added to the base year of 1990 in the model. One was NERL, the other 12 were highway and road projects that will cost about **\$ 660 million**, according to the estimates in the Transportation Capital Improvement Program of the Plan at pp. 9-11. After this huge expense, and assuming job growth and development that Newark fervently desires, traffic not only won't improve much, it will worsen in some places. McCarter Highway will go from 25,900 trips/day in 1990 to between 58,900 or 63,400 trips/day in 2012 (depending upon the alternative).

This is clearly unacceptable. The traffic will lead to more calls for more expensive, polluting and energy-wasteful highway and road network “improvements” after 2012. Newark's revitalization will have begun in the wrong direction— car-and truck-dependent development that will ultimately choke further revitalization efforts. Newark needs a new direction, and the transportation planners haven't provided one. They have treated it as a car-dependent suburb rather than one of the nation's most transit-rich cities.

Conclusion

In summary, we think the Transportation Plan needs substantial revision. We would like to work with City officials and Newark's engineering department to accomplish that. We'd like to have a meeting with you to discuss the plan's shortcomings, and why we don't think, in its present form, it should be included in the City's master plan as the transportation element, or form the basis of proposed Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) capital requests. We certainly cannot support such capital requests where they will only lead to more traffic and pollution.

We will call shortly to follow up on our request for a meeting. Thank you in advance for taking time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

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