

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS REGARDING PROPOSED FREIGHTWAY PROJECT

Here are my additional comments. The basic point of these comments is to explain what I see as a possible consensus path in light of the many constraints that limit this project and to ask for a reality check.

1 The Many Constraints Suggest That There is a Narrow Path at Best

Here is a list of constraints and concerns. There are certainly others.

- The Board has the self-imposed constraint that a Freightway development must improve commuter parking, bring vibrancy to the Village Center and provide a positive net fiscal impact to the Village and the School District. There have been repeated assurances particularly on the last point, that there must be a net fiscal benefit relative to just dealing with the existing parking
- The public clearly has concerns regarding the financial and non-financial impacts on the schools.
- There are concerns about aesthetics, traffic, parking and overall disruption.
- I have to believe there are certainly economic, legal and operational constraints that various experts have been explaining to the Board if not yet to the general public.
- I have heard that Metro-North wants to add a third track that would go on the western side (the Freightway side) of the current tracks.

Based on the reality that there are so many constraints and concerns, I have personally reached the conclusion that there is only going to be a very narrow path toward any consensus project. I have to believe the Board is looking for that narrow path and is open to suggestions that help in determining the narrow path if it exists at all.

From the Perspective of the Visioning Study, Scenario 2 is the Best Starting Point

The Visioning Study is helpful, because it lays out four scenarios for the overall physical scope of possible developments, as summarized in the following grid.

		Platform Across the Tracks w Vehicle Access to Scarsdale Avenue	
		No	Yes
Current Garage	Repair & Rehabilitate	Scenario 1	Scenario 2
	Demolish & Replace	Scenario 3	Scenario 4

In terms of these options, I think the consensus path rules out the three scenarios other than Scenario 2. Scenario 2 is not perfect, as I will explain, but in terms of the Visioning Study it is a starting point toward the consensus narrow path that might exist.

Ruling Out Scenarios 3 and 4 Primarily on Fiscal Grounds. The larger scenarios, Scenarios 3 and 4, appear to present much more fiscal risk and uncertainty than Scenarios 1 and 2, which maintain the current garage and limit development to the Open Lot.

First, if we were only looking at the garage and not a development project, I am sure almost everyone would agree that we should not demolish and rebuild a garage now, at cost of \$25 million. I am sure the preference would be to just do a renovation now, limited to the \$2.4 million or so that is now already in the capital budget, and wait maybe ten or 15 years to do a demolition and rebuild, if it is even necessary at all.

As far as the garage itself is concerned, Scenarios 1 and 2 are just doing the renovation now. The work on the current garage would be limited to the budgeted \$2.4 million or so, and *we could this do ourselves, separate from any new project*. Thus, to show a net fiscal benefit, the development of the Open Lot itself would have to demonstrate no upfront cost, or any cost, to the taxpayers, and an ongoing fiscal benefit at least equal to the current net income (revenue - expense) of the parking lot.

By comparison, Scenarios 3 and 4 would be in lieu of our own demolition and rebuild of the garage at perhaps \$25 million, and *they require us to commit to that now*, not ten or 15 years from now if ever. They are also substantially more complicated in terms of demonstrating the net fiscal benefit. For example, as discussed in my earlier comments, there is considerable complexity and uncertainty in showing a net fiscal benefit if the idea would be to pay for the \$25 million indirectly, through increased school costs and taxes.

I also have been informed that it costs much more to build below-ground parking than above-ground parking, so the actual construction cost that has to be funded, mostly below ground in a larger project, exceeds the cost of an eventual ten or 15 year rebuild above ground.

Not to mention the non-financial concerns regarding a larger projects – crowding, disruption, train platform and the fact that we just do not want a large residential complex.

So, bottom line, I think that if there is to be a consensus path it will be necessary to rule out anything like Scenarios 3 and 4.

Ruling Out Scenarios 1 and 3 Primarily on Village Center Concerns. I understand the perspective that this project is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to connect the two sides of the tracks. The pictures in the Visioning Study for Scenarios 2 and 4 present the attractive possibilities, including a plaza and park, if we build a platform across the tracks. I also understand the perspective that any new development will only worsen traffic on Garth and Popham unless it also includes new vehicular access from and to Scarsdale Avenue, as also shown for Scenarios 2 and 4.

Scenarios 1 and 3 do not provide any sort of bridging or platform to connect both sides of the tracks or any vehicular access, so at this point I would rule them out as part of a consensus path.

In ruling out Scenarios 1, 3 and 4 am not saying that Scenario 2 as it appears in the Visioning Study is perfect, as discussed next. I am saying that in terms of the overall physical scope it is the best starting point.

2 Scenario 2 is Still Not Perfect

As compared to the Scenario 2 as it appears in the Visioning Study, I think a consensus path, if it exists, should also address the following.

- Provide a convincing assurance/guarantee regarding the school financial and non-financial impacts.
- Limit residential capacity to less than what is in the Visioning Study and invite more non-residential uses.
- On aesthetic grounds, do not put a multi-story residential building above the tracks. This would be way too urban, like above the Cross Bronx near the George Washington Bridge.
- Another RFP might make sense unless there is an offsetting concern that the developers will all just stop taking us seriously.

Furthermore, and most important, there is a real risk that the idea of the platform over the tracks will encounter opposition along the lines of the opposition to the “tunnel” in years back. It would be necessary to guarantee that no one would go under the platform for normal use of the station and the area. It would be necessary to guarantee that there would be no access for vagrants or even congregating teenagers. The size of the platform should perhaps be reduced from what appears in the Visioning Study.

3 Please Inform Us Now If Our Expectations are Not Realistic

I have attempted here to explain what I think might be a consensus path. I am sure you are getting many comments from many people about their expectations and constraints.

So, my request to the Board as a next step is quite limited. I am not asking the Board to do any new work that has not already been done. I am not asking the Board to answer questions that it does not already have the answer to. I am not asking for any projections or pro formas that do not already exist.

I am only asking the Board to give us a reality check, now, based on what the Board already knows from its research and the input it has received from experts and staff. For example,

- What legal and financial structures were considered? What are the most realistic?

- Have you updated and expanded the quantitative estimates in the Visioning Study? In particular, Tables 8, 9, 10 and 12.
- Based on what you learned from experts and the data that you assembled, were you able to conclude that some suggested uses and improvements are so obviously unrealistic that it is pointless to pursue them?
- What exactly are the residential age and occupancy constraints that can be imposed?
- Generally, if the particular narrow path that I have identified is unrealistic because of known constraints, please say so.
- Even more generally, Board, please tell us what you learned. We are eager to hear from you.

Again, I am only asking for information that the Board already has.

Sharing the information and providing the reality check may deflate my suggested path or the overall public wish list, but if these are not realistic and not plausible, than being realistic is what we should be doing right now. It may be that there are so many irreconcilable expectations and constraints that the highest and best use of Freightway is as a garage and a parking lot and that Scarsdale lives within those limits.

Respectfully,

Michael Levine
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