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Tappan Zee short list coming

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THE JOURNAL NEWS
(Original Publication: February 18, 2005)

MONTEBELLO — The state Department of Transportation will likely take over the Tappan Zee Bridge study by April 1, after 15 alternatives for whether to repair or replace the bridge are cut to about five, the agency's top Hudson Valley official said yesterday.

The short list was due last July, but differences between the New York State Thruway Authority and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the two agencies working on the project, have slowed the decision-making process.

"There's been significant tension in the project and it hasn't moved as fast as people wanted," DOT Regional Director Robert Dennison told members of Leadership Rockland, a not-for-profit organization that educates emerging leaders in the community. "We don't suffer from the single focus of the other agencies. The DOT's concern is the whole trip. It goes beyond the highway. It goes beyond the train."

The short list will mark the start of the most detailed review of the options to date — down to whether land will have to be taken and how a new crossing would affect traffic during construction.

Public meetings on the remaining alternatives should take place before schools close for the summer, Dennison said.

Among the options being considered are renovating the existing bridge or building a new span that would include either a commuter rail link to Metro-North Railroad's Hudson line, a high-speed light rail line or a dedicated busway from Suffern to White Plains.

State officials decided in December to have the DOT oversee the project, but so far have not named a project head. Dennison said he expected that person to be announced when the DOT takes control.

"They're still going to be involved," Dennison said of the Thruway and the MTA. "It's their facility and their need."

Dennison said he was hopeful a decision could be made within the next two years on what will happen to the 49-year-old bridge. The Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration are the agencies that will make the final determination, he said.

The original schedule, which officials have since called too optimistic, projected a decision by the beginning of 2006.

Any strategy to include the private sector in building and operating a new crossing would take place in the latter stages of the environmental review, Dennison said.

The price tag for a new crossing has been estimated at \$3 billion to \$20 billion, depending on how much public transit infrastructure would have to be built. Repairing the 3-mile span has been estimated at \$1 billion.
