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## **Tappan Zee study to take 'several years'**

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Albany – The elaborate study to ease congestion in the Tappan Zee corridor, the Hudson Valley's heaviest-traveled highway, has now cost \$23 million and entered its fourth year with no end in sight

Originally, the New York State Thruway Authority and Metro-North Railroad and their consultants said they would be prepared to decide in December 2005 whether the 50-year-old Tappan Zee Bridge would be repaired or replaced with a new bridge or tunnel with or without commuter rail, light rail or express bus service

Not anymore.

"Because this decision will affect the community for many, many years, we want to take the time to do it right," said Casey Cannistraci, a spokeswoman for the Thruway Authority

"There is more substantial research to be done – not only in cost, but also in environmental issues and transportation performance – before we find the corridor-wide solution that best meets the needs of the region in the most effective way possible "

The decision to abandon the December 2005 date in favor of an indefinite timetable became public in roundabout fashion.

First, oversight of the environmental review process was transferred to the state Department of Transportation from the two agencies in December. Then, the Thruway Authority adopted a \$2.1 billion capital program that calls for a significant investment in the bridge over the next six years.

Several people involved in the process said disagreements between the Thruway Authority and Metro-North had stalled the study and precipitated the DOT's takeover but the DOT discounted that scenario.

"It's not that the other two agencies cannot do it," said Peter Graves, a DOT spokesman. "The project encompasses an entire corridor from Suffern to Rye – it's more than a bridge or a railroad – and the thinking is that the DOT will keep the study focused on its corridor aspects."

Graves said the DOT will select a project manager from its staff in the coming weeks and put the study's conclusion now as being "several years" away.

Ramesh Mehta, the director of the Thruway Authority's New York division, said \$140 million of the \$728 million in the capital program for his 178-mile section of the highway is earmarked for the bridge.

Mehta said the rate of failure of the Tappan Zee's components – deck, steel work and concrete substructure – has accelerated and can't wait for a decision about repairing or replacing the existing bridge. That decision won't be made for another two or three years – and at that point, the design, engineering and construction will still take at least 10 more years.

Cannistraci said the consultants who were hired to conduct the environmental review process are working on the so-called alternatives analysis. The analysis will distill the 150 or so alternatives that the public suggested for study in 2003 to a handful, each of which is expected to cost at least \$1 billion.

From that handful, several will be selected for exhaustive review in a draft environmental impact statement, which, in turn, will lead to a final statement and a decision.

All of this, she added, "could take a couple years or more to complete."

The alternatives analysis will be presented to the project's stakeholders, representatives of civic organizations and government agencies in the corridor, and the general public when it is completed.

Again, there is no timetable for this to happen, but Cannistraci said the commitment to an unprecedented level of public outreach hasn't changed. The last public meetings about the project were held more than a year ago.

"We will continue to involve the public at every turn," she said.

In addition, detailed information about the project continues to be available at outreach centers in Tarrytown and Nyack and at [tzbsite.com](http://tzbsite.com). The centers' hours of operation are listed on the Web site.

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