



## What's the city's plan for handling traffic for big North Shore projects? (editorial)

Traffic Bay Street

Traffic from the morning commute is pictured on Bay Street in St. George. *(Anthony DePrimo)*

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Don't listen to us. Listen to the experts: Staten Island needs a traffic plan as it gets ready for the New York Wheel, the Empire Outlets and the rest of the development that is bringing a billion dollars in investment to the North Shore.

But the city doesn't seem to get it.

The one constant among Staten Islanders' gripes about their home borough is traffic:

Traffic on local roads that turns what should be a 10-minute trip into an hour-long odyssey.

Inexplicable traffic on the Staten Island Expressway, no matter what time of day or night you try to use it, no matter what day of the week or season of the year.

And then there are the instances of zombie-apocalypse traffic whenever there is a rush-hour accident in Brooklyn, or a vanload of paintball-gun-toting "terrorists" being sought, or a spill of pineapples in the roadway.

And have we mentioned rain, snow and ice?

What would happen in an emergency?

One little glitch can gum up the works for hours. What if there were a real emergency? We would be trapped.

Which brings us to all that new development on the North Shore. Thousands of people a day are expected to flood the area, by ferry, private car or bus.

Planning and transportation experts say that some type of traffic plan is needed so that the borough isn't choked by the coming throngs.

We know it. They know it.

The City of New York doesn't seem to know it.

Turning the North Shore into a frozen zone could undermine all the good that the borough hopes to see from all the new development.

### **No city plan**

But Mayor Bill de Blasio and the Department of Transportation (DOT) seem blind to the impending problem. No traffic plan has been forthcoming from the city.

The Wheel and outlets developers have hired traffic engineer Sam Schwartz, "Gridlock Sam," to mitigate the impact that the new traffic will have on the borough.

Mr. Schwartz did the traffic logistics for Barclays Center and Citi Field, so he knows how to work with big projects. He is well-versed in the Island's existing traffic woes as well, having spent time out here in recent years.

He has recommended traffic-light improvements, re-striping new turn lanes, and expanding and extending existing streets to ensure better access.

In a meeting with the Advance Editorial Board in March, DOT commissioner Polly Trottenberg said that the agency had met with Mr. Schwartz and the city Economic Development Corp., but had no answers to the traffic question yet.

She said she heard the traffic concerns out here "loud and clear" and would "start having ideas pretty quickly that we're going to start sharing."

### **Still waiting for city's ideas**

We're still waiting, commissioner.

But traffic engineers the Advance spoke with said that even if the DOT adopted all those traffic-mitigation measures that Mr. Schwartz suggests, it probably won't be enough to handle the influx of cars into the borough.

That should be a sobering thought for everyone associated with these projects, including our borough officials.

Joseph L. Schofer, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern University with a focus in transportation policy, smartly says that studying St. George alone won't do the trick.

Mr. Schofer says that with visitors expected to come by car from all over the area, a regional study is needed.

It's the same argument Islanders have made about the Staten Island Expressway: It's not a local road. It's a regional one. Its traffic woes have to be looked at in that context.

At the very least, Mr. Schofer said that projects of this size normally warrant a separate traffic impact study. The

Environmental Impact Statement that was part of the transportation analysis for the projects looked at only two dozen intersections north of the Staten Island Expressway.

### **10 intersections to be studied**

It concluded that the proposed project "would add a substantial number of vehicle trips to the study area."

No fooling.

The DOT has required that 10 intersections be studied, but only after the developments open. It could be too late by then.

There is also \$1 million in a traffic-mitigation fund, but DOT has not said how or if it will be used.

### **Why the mystery?**

Jonathan Peters, a professor and chair of the Finance Department at the College of Staten Island, said that one saving grace is the fact that the Wheel and other projects are near the St. George transit nexus, where the ferry, bus routes and the Staten Island Railway converge.

But let's face it: Many off-Island folks are going to drive to the attractions. So are many borough residents themselves; Staten Island is a car culture.

The city, Mr. Peters said, "has to do its job and decide whether it has to do a full-blown traffic study."

That decision should already have been made: The traffic study is necessary, and long overdue.

It's your move, Mr. Mayor.

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