Acknowledgments

Amy Pfeiffer, Director, Office of Downtown Revitalization, Town of Babylon

Diane Thiel, President, West Babylon Main Street Organization

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Regional Plan Association’s work for Suffolk County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) has been carried out in support of the Connect Long Island plan set out by County Executive Steve Bellone. With this transportation and development plan in mind RPA has focused on connecting local needs with regional opportunity. Working with the IDA and municipalities, RPA’s work will:

- Connect Suffolk County’s assets to the New York region’s economy
- Unlock and capture value in and around downtowns
- Enhance downtown live-work-play experience
- Identify key actions needed to promote economic development
Overview: A Center for West Babylon

If one asks the residents of West Babylon to locate the center of their hamlet, most residents would point to the intersection of Babylon Farmingdale Road (State Route 109) and Little East Neck Road (County Road 95). From a land use perspective, this makes sense because this is where most of the shopping is as well as their High School and other community services. It is a strategic location in other ways as well: Within a quarter mile in all directions are compact neighborhoods. Within a half-mile, through walkable and bikable neighborhood streets are the West Babylon Community Youth Center, the Anthony Sanchez Memorial Park, West Babylon Junior High School, the Public Library and other destinations. A little more than a mile away is downtown Babylon and train station, and two miles away, Lindenhurst and its train station. Within a mile there is a beautiful chain of open spaces extending from Belmont Lake State Park, to Southards Pond Park, to Argyle Park adjacent to downtown Babylon and the train station.

But if you ask West Babylon residents where the nearest “downtown” is, they will point to the Village of Babylon, about a mile away. This is where the young residents go to enjoy a night out or catch a train to New York City. That is because the Village of Babylon has a true “Main Street.” buildings define the space of the street by creating a lively, uniform and pedestrian-scaled street wall. There is a diversity of uses mixed side by side in a fine-grained pattern.

In West Babylon, on the other hand, the center is dominated by the two major roads designed for heavy auto traffic, and which between them move on average 36,483 cars a day,1 peaking at 1,745 vehicles during rush hour.2 Buildings do not define public spaces. There is a somewhat diverse mix of uses, but these tend to be in large, single-purpose blocks as opposed to a fine-grained mix. This defeats any real sense of place, let alone a “Main Street” or true village center. This intersection is unattractive and dangerous, in particular for the high school students, teachers, and staff who cross this intersection to shop. And while this location has a lot of commercial activity and civic uses, there are no attractions for young people here. A comparison of the land use and building footprint plans of these two places makes this comparison clear.

1 NYSDOT Traffic Data Viewer, https://www.dot.ny.gov/cdv
West Babylon would like to have a more of a center with its own distinct identity. The transformation of this area may never create a “Main Street” in the conventional sense. There will always be substantial volumes of through traffic. But it is still possible to create a place here that has many of the features associated with a real downtown and still serve existing travel with fewer lanes for cars. This strategic location supports the potential for this center to be:

- safe for pedestrians and bicycles
- attractive
- good for the existing businesses
- enlivened by the concentration of diverse activities
- well connected to the surrounding neighborhoods

At a community workshop that was convened in July, the important point was made that while this intersection is the logical place for a new center, it is not the true geographic center of the entire hamlet: most of the land area and a majority of the population lives north of Sunrise Highway (Rt. 27). Discussions about connectivity and programming need to engage this part of West Babylon as well if this is to be a true center for the entire hamlet.

3 A four lane arterial roadway with signals is capable of serving between 3,200 – 4,000 vehicles an hour or between 800 – 1,000 vehicles per lane per hour.
While there are only a handful of complete successes, this kind of transformation has been implemented before.

**Livingston Town Center**
*Livingston, New Jersey*

Livingston’s business district used to stretch along a 3-mile span with no downtown, pedestrian traffic or community focal point. It was basically commercial strip. The desire for a town center came out of a community visioning process, and the site envisioned for the town center was a deteriorating shopping plaza. In 2000 local officials declared the plaza site an area in need of redevelopment. After legal disputes with the plaza owners, the township and owners reached an agreement in 2002 for a redevelopment plan and developer group. They also increased the project size beyond the plaza to also include the surrounding undeveloped lands. The mixed-use project contains 2-to-4-story red brick buildings matching the township’s Federal-style municipal building. To address neighbors’ concerns about increased traffic, developers widened roads near the project.
**Excelsior and Grand**  
*St Louis Park, Minnesota*

This is a new town center that was created along a very wide, high-volume road lined with strip-retail uses. These uses were replaced by mixed-use buildings that defined the space of the street as well as a new public space that links to places beyond the corridor. The roadway continues to be a high volume road. But the lanes were narrowed and rationalized, traffic-calming measures, including on-street parallel parking, were introduced to create a pedestrian experience; transit was properly accommodated.

**Main Street**  
*Ossining, New York*

The Village of Ossining sought to revive their historic town center, which is centered at the complex 5-way intersection of Main Street, Central Avenue, Spring and Brandreth Streets, typically called Spring and Main Streets. Several mixed use developments have been built surrounding the intersection, filling in vacant lots between historic storefronts. The intersection is a 10-minute walk from the Metro North Hudson Line station and a block from the Bee Line Bus transit center, yet the intersection was unsafe for pedestrians, with blind turns for drivers and long crosswalks not aligned to the sidewalk. The city employed the use of state grants to pilot a traffic calming design. The intersection traffic calming included:

- Painted extensions of the curb line.
- Crosswalks aligned for clear and straight walking paths
- Improved turning movements for drivers by clearly delineating travel paths through the intersection.

The Village is also in the midst of approving a full Complete Streets policy, incorporating street design elements like those used at Spring and Main Streets throughout the village to improve walking, cycling and transit. The after photograph below shows the temporary pilot design employed on the north side of Main Street.
York Boulevard
Highland Park, Los Angeles County, California

York is an arterial roadway that connects several suburban communities from Eagle Rock in the west to Highland Park. An intervention called a road diet, created a three lane road, one center turning lane with bike lanes and parking on both sides along an 1.3 mile segment of York Boulevard. Compared to an adjacent segment of the boulevard without the road diet, researchers found that the road diet led to increased property values by as much as 18% per square foot and increased sales for businesses, with sales tax revenue up 27%, five years after the street was restriped.  

![Pre-Road Diet](image)

Two auto lanes in each direction, shared with bicycles

![Post-Road Diet](image)

One auto lane and one bike lane in each direction, plus a center turn lane


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Untying The Knot: Roadway Reconfigurations

Existing Conditions
As long as the current “bow tie” highway configuration remains - the disorienting and unattractive sea of asphalt in which people, bikes and cars movements are in constant conflict – a center of any kind cannot be achieved.

We are suggesting two alternative ways of reconfiguring these roads both of which rely on the same basic strategy: to eliminate the bowtie crossing by creating two new conventional “T intersections” where Babylon Farmingdale Road meets Little East Neck Road to the north and Great East Neck Road to the south. In both of these alternative configurations, the full range of pedestrian and aesthetic improvements described below would be deployed. (see D. below)
Alternative 1

**T-Intersection Crossing at Millard Ave**

This alternative is the more conservative of the two in terms of the impacts on privately held land. At the south end of the crossing, the intersection with Great East Neck Road would be moved farther north to create a new 4-way intersection with Millard Road. A small portion of the front lawn of the High School would be used to make the geometry of this turn possible. However, the small leftover green space just north of the Hess station would become larger, including the space reclaimed by the existing right turn ramp that is no longer needed. Access to the school would remain largely as it is except that egress would be moved farther south on Great East Neck Road to maximize the distance from the new intersection. At the workshop, there was some preference for moving the school access road farther south as shown in this alternative.

At the north end of the crossing, the current access road just north of little triangular “gateway park” would be widened to create a more substantial T-Intersection between Babylon Farmingdale Road that Little East Neck Road. The portion of Little East Neck Road that currently extends south of his point would continue to provide access to Claire Court, but it can now be reduced in width and the gateway park enlarged, creating a more pleasing frontage for the houses on Claire Court as well as a more pedestrian-friendly access to the surrounding neighborhoods.

A smaller signalized three-way intersection would connect to the high school access drive.
Alternative 2

**T-Intersection with Expanded School Property**

This alternative is more generous in terms of the area available for roadway reconfiguration and creating public open space. At the south end of the crossing, Great East Neck Road turns across the Speedway Hess property toward a new T-intersection farther south, creating a longer 90 degree approach to the intersection. It also creates a much larger public space in front of the high school.

At the north end of the crossing, and in keeping with Alternative 1, the current access road just north of little triangular “gateway park” is again widened to create a more substantial T-Intersection between Babylon Farmingdale Road and Little East Neck Road. However in this alternative, the portion of Little East Neck Road that currently extends south of his point would be eliminated entirely, creating a much more substantial public space. Access to Claire Court would be from a new 4-way intersection with Babylon Farmingdale Road and the high school access drive. As with the previous alternative, this creates a more pleasing frontage for the houses on Claire Court as well as a more pedestrian-friendly access to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Signal timings between these intersections would be coordinated to balance car thru-put with a safe and pleasing pedestrian environment.
Creating value: induced development impacts

**Redevelopment Along Reconfigured Corridor**

Once the roads are reconfigured, it is possible to balance car movements with “place-making.” As this area begins to claim an identity for itself, property values will increase and land owners and developers will be enticed to create higher-value commercial and mixed-use developments. Design guidelines, such as those described below, will insure that the new developments are oriented to the sidewalks and begin to define the public spaces in a new center where today there is just a formless sea of asphalt.
The portions of these road within the study area are beset by a familiar set of problems:

- redundant and excessively wide driveways that create unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists and create friction on the route as cars enter and leave the businesses.
- lack of pedestrian connections from the corridor to the front doors of the businesses.
- lack of pedestrian connections between adjacent businesses on the corridor, creating additional friction as cars drive between destinations.
- inconsistent and suboptimal placement of buildings relative to the road and to each other.

One of the challenges to retrofitting commercial strips like this is that comprehensive and coordinated redevelopment needs to engage multiple landowners. One of the advantages for this hamlet is that there are relatively few landowners in the study area, and some of these are already at the table with the Civic Association. It is also the case that there is a significant amount of turnover along these kinds of roads, especially among the lower-value retail uses that contribute the least to the character of the road. Therefore, if the proper guidelines are in place, it is possible to shape the incremental transformation of the corridor into a more pedestrian and transit-oriented place.
1. Within the right-of-way

Some of the most transformative guidelines can be done within the public right-of-way of the roads.

Route 109 has sufficient width, both northbound and southbound, to support street design elements that improve walking, biking, transit and driving. South of Park Avenue, Route 109’s right-of-way is 68 feet, with nearly 80% of that space dedicated to car travel in four lanes of varying widths, from 12 feet to as much as 17 feet wide. North of Park Avenue there is 100 feet of right-of-way, capable of supporting more diverse travel needs than the existing five lanes for cars. This section of Route 109 can be adapted to create a welcoming boulevard with a wide median that slows vehicles as they approach the intersection of Little Neck Road and the high school. Additionally, expanding the curb along the southbound right lane of Route 109, adjacent to the school, can better align the curb line to the narrower section of roadway south of Little Neck Road. Aligning the curb line of roadways and making uniform street widths creates predictable travel paths for drivers and pedestrians. And the additional space can be used to create a multi-use path for people walking and biking to the high school and retail uses along the corridor.

Use the following strategies to create a multimodal boulevard:

- Complete gaps in sidewalks
- Widen sidewalks where necessary
- Provide space for bicyclists on multi-use paths and delineate bike lanes on adjacent streets
- Promote cross access to minimize driveways
- Reduce driveway widths
- Use a uniform lane width of no more than 11 to 12 feet, as recommended by NACTO’s Urban Street Design Guide and the Town of Babylon’s Sustainable Complete Streets Policy.
Apply traffic calming tools such as narrower roadway widths, street trees, curb extensions.

Make intersections pedestrian friendly and improve drivers’ visibility of people walking using the following design treatments:

- Reduce turning radii
- Provide clearly marked crosswalks for each point of crossing
- Increase lighting
- Remove blind spots for drivers by T-ing off intersecting roadways

All of these street design elements can be tailored to create a gateway to the community that expresses a sense of “place” where people spend time rather than just pass by. Lighting can be at a lower height appropriate for people on foot or bike. Wide sidewalks can serve as continuations of green space or as public space for benches to wait for buses, rest from walking or socialize at local storefronts. Multi-use paths for cycling and walking can be places of recreation and travel for people on foot or bike. In both alternatives, pedestrian improvements should extend south to Park Avenue since this is the main connecting road to downtown Babylon and the train station.

Example Northwest Landing – suburban community south of Seattle WA on parkway just east of interstate. Photo: Dan Burden

Example median split boulevard in Detroit suburb. Photo: Dan Burden
Little East Neck Road: Before

Right of Way = 68'

Before

RT109 looking south
ShopRite intersection
2. Outside of the right-of-way.

Design guidelines can shape developments and the way they relate to the road and to each other. If additional height and bulk is allowed, this needs to be moderated by design guidelines that would insure the context-sensitive transition to the surrounding single-family neighborhoods.

- Require connections from the sidewalks to the front doors of buildings that are not along the sidewalks.
- Mandate “build-to lines” that require buildings to be in a consistent relationship to adjacent buildings and close to the frontage.
- Require minimum amounts of transparency for buildings along the sidewalk.
- Disallow parking between the street and the building frontages, keeping parking on the sides and behind buildings.
- Require height and setback transitions where new developments abut residential neighborhoods.
- Require cross-access between parking lots to minimize friction on the road.
Getting Started: Implementation

The hamlet already has one of the most important assets needed to make anything happen here: a civic association that has the ability to convene stakeholders, build consensus and continue to advocate for this vision.

There are a range of actions that will be necessary for this transformation to occur. Some of these actions will require a lot of coordination and negotiation among the state and county DOTs. And if a new road configuration is agreed upon, capital funds will be needed. Having said that, there are short and medium term actions which the hamlet can get started on in partnership with the Town.

**Initiate Conversations between the County and State concerning the reconfiguration of the roadways.**

The design suggestions here are plausible but conceptual. The Town and hamlet need to engage the State to test these ideas and to do the engineering studies that will determine the actual roadway geometries and traffic impacts.

**Enable more density**

For property owners and developers to be enticed into redeveloping their properties in the ways suggested here, there must be some incremental value over what exists there now. Additional density and flexibility can be linked to design guidelines that promote pedestrian-oriented buildings and streetscape improvements.

**Put corridor design guidelines in place**

Design guidelines such as those described above are relatively inexpensive to develop and put in place. This should be done so that any new development projects can contribute to the incremental transformation of this place.

**Continue to implement the town’s Complete Streets and Traffic Calming Policy**

The town of Babylon adopted a sustainable complete streets policy in 2010 that “shall provide for the needs of drivers, public transportation vehicles and patrons, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities in all planning, programming, design, construction, reconstruction, retrofit, operations, and maintenance activities and products.” Steps should be taken to develop the complete streets master plan for the town, including not only safety recommendations, but specific design guidance for sidewalks, roadways, transit and bicycle facilities. Lower speed limits and street designs that slow vehicle traffic, as well as policies increasing the enforcement of speed limits can also improving the pedestrian environment.

**Potential Sources of Funding**

**New York State Programs**

**Consolidated Funding Application (CFA):** The CFA has been designed to give economic development project applicants expedited and streamlined access to a combined pool of grant funds and tax credits from dozens of existing programs. The CFA is a modern and easy-to-use online application that allows businesses and other entities to apply for multiple agency funding sources through a single, web-based application. It is the primary portal for businesses to access state agency resources, including resources for community development, direct assistance to business, waterfront revitalization, energy and environmental improvements, government efficiency, sustainability, workforce development, and low-cost financing. Funding is currently available for Transportation Infrastructure Projects.

**Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS):** CHIPS provides State funds to municipalities to support the construction and repair of highways, bridges, highway-railroad crossings, and other facilities that are not on the State highway system. The authorization for the CHIPS Program is contained in Section 10-c of the State Highway Law. Funds are apportioned to municipalities annually by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) pursuant to a formula specified in this section of the Law. Upon approval of the State Budget, NYSDOT determines each municipality’s final CHIPS Capital apportionment for the new State fiscal year and notifies them of the available amount via the letter for the scheduled June payment and a posting to the Capital Apportionment Balances link on the CHIPS website.

**PAVE-NY:** The recently adopted five-year State Transportation Plan (2015/16 – 2019/20) provides $100 million per year through the PAVE NY program to assist municipalities with rehabilitation and reconstruction of local highways and roads. Funds are apportioned by NYSDOT according to the percentage of funds each municipality received under the SFY 2016-17 CHIPS Program. PAVE-NY follows all the programmatic and reimbursement requirements of CHIPS, with one notable exception, eligible project activities are limited to Highway Resurfacing and Highway Reconstruction. PAVE-NY eligible activities
Transforming the Strip

Phase I
Source: RPA

- PROVIDE CROSS-ACCESS
- LANDSCAPE BUFFER AT NEIGHBORHOOD EDGE
- PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS AT INTERSECTING ROADS" CROSSWALKS - TIGHTEN RADII
- MAKE CURB CUTS NARROWER
- CREATE CONTINUOUS SIDEWALKS
- ELIMINATE / CONSOLIDATE DRIVEWAYS
- DEVELOP SIDEWALKS TO STOREFRONTS

Phase II
Source RPA

- STREET TREES ALONG SIDEWALK
- NEW DEVELOPMENT TO "BUILD TO" SET-BACK LINE
- NEWLY ASPHALT FOR GREEN ZONE ALONG SIDEWALK

are eligible for reimbursement as of April 1, 2016. A CP75 form has been created to submit reimbursements under the PAVE-NY Program.

**New York Metropolitan Area (NYMTC) Programs**

**Transportation Alternatives Program:** The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) encompasses most of the activities previously funded under the Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP), Recreational Trails Program (RTP), and Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program. TAP funding is available to projects which improve the quality of life of the community, as a whole as well as providing economic and social benefits. TAP funds can be used for a variety of alternative transportation projects, including the construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities; conversion of abandoned railroad corridors for trail use; and infrastructure-related projects to provide access for and improve the safety of children, older adults and individuals with disabilities.

**CMAQ:** The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program funds surface transportation improvements or transportation programs that improve air quality and mitigate traffic congestion.

**Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities:** The Section 5310 Program is intended to enhance mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities. It provides funds for transportation projects and/or programs that serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transportation services and complementary paratransit services under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
Regional Plan Association is an independent, not-for-profit civic organization that develops and promotes ideas to improve the economic health, environmental resiliency and quality of life of the New York metropolitan area. We conduct research on transportation, land use, housing, good governance and the environment. We advise cities, communities and public agencies. And we advocate for change that will contribute to the prosperity of all residents of the region. Since the 1920s, RPA has produced three landmark plans for the region and is working on a fourth plan due out in 2017. For more information, please visit, www.rpa.org.

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Josh Mohrer

New York
One Whitehall St, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10004
212.253.2727

New Jersey
179 Nassau St, 3rd Floor
Princeton, NJ 08542
609.228.7080

Connecticut
Two Landmark Sq, Suite 108
Stamford, CT 06901
203.356.0390

*Member of Executive Committee