

II STUDY OVERVIEW

A. Why Transit Road is Being Examined

Transit Road (NYS Route 78) is an arterial highway that forms the border between the Towns of Amherst and Clarence, New York. Increasing traffic congestion on Transit Road prompted the towns to partner with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to address concerns regarding this important regional corridor. Growing traffic congestion and continued development of land located on and adjacent to the highway are viewed by many as negative impacts on the area's quality of life.

NYSDOT has completed several highway improvement projects within the corridor that were intended to address congestion and improve the mobility and safety of all users. However these issues are still a concern for both towns and the NYSDOT and required additional examination.

The first phase of the planning effort included a collection of traffic data and land use information. The data collection and analysis performed in the early stages of this study confirmed traffic and development conditions that town and NYSDOT officials have observed in recent years. A summary of the inventory and analysis is contained in Appendix C of this report.

Noticeable differences in the levels of service, volume to ratio capacity levels and accidents were found in segments of the corridor with more travel lanes and more densely developed adjacent land uses. Average travel times and speeds decreased significantly in these areas as well. While the higher traffic volumes in these segments attributed to some of these conditions, the analysis indicated that the number and spacing of driveways were significant contributors to the observed conditions. Clearly, conditions along Transit Road could be improved in the future through the application of access management.

The Towns of Amherst and Clarence and the NYSDOT recognized that planned, orderly land development in conjunction with coordinated road improvements would help minimize traffic congestion, improve safety and maximize the use of limited infrastructure resources. This cooperative planning effort is an objective of a comprehensively designed corridor that preserves and enhances safe and efficient transit for motorists and pedestrians, which will ultimately encourage continued economic development in the future.

The Towns of Amherst and Clarence worked with the NYSDOT to identify goals and strategies that will facilitate economic development in the vicinity of the corridor without compromising the need for safe and efficient movement of people and goods. Because much of the land in certain portions of the study area is already developed, retrofitting existing development to improve access configurations will be a component of

the report. Existing businesses, landowners and the traveling public have been involved in the planning process to assure a realistic and achievable set of recommended actions. Directing new development into efficient access configurations will be the focus in undeveloped parcels. Pedestrian and bicycle accommodations and aesthetic enhancements have also been considered.

This report contains recommendations for appropriate modifications to existing land use plans along the corridor. These recommendations include: land use density and type adjustments; frontage requirements; set back requirements; shared and joint access requirements; driveway spacing standards; corner clearance standards; improved site circulation; and subdivision regulations that support the development of local roads.

The report also contains recommendations for highway improvements such as medians, auxiliary turn lanes, median openings, future intersections, frontage/access roads, pedestrian accommodations, and local road improvements. Sketch plans that illustrate recommendations for improved access to existing businesses have also been produced for the developed portions of the corridor.



Figure II-1: Transit Road Public Meeting held in March 2002.

B. The Planning Process

The process included five key phases:

- Existing conditions analysis;
- Corridor vision creation;
- Alternative design concept development;
- Final recommendations;
- Model Access Management Code Language

The planning process was designed to encourage a wide variety of input and feedback. Given the size of the study area and its regional impact, a Technical Advisory Committee was assembled to guide the process. The committee consisted of representatives from the NYSDOT, the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, local planning and transportation organizations and the Towns of Amherst and Clarence. In addition to providing necessary information and data, the committee played an integral role in developing and evaluating potential design concepts. Although the Technical Advisory Committee included a wide variety of view points, broader public outreach was sought to ensure a comprehensive approach.

Stakeholder Meetings

During the process, a series of stakeholder meetings were conducted to ensure that the concerns and issues of specific groups, such as residents, businesses, elected officials, and emergency services, were heard. These meetings were held in order to identify a



Figure II-2: Examples of the types of images used for the Preferred Development Survey, which allowed participants to identify favorable development for the Transit Road corridor. The top image was given a favorable rating and the bottom image was rated

common vision for the corridor. Each stakeholder meeting provided participants with an opportunity to discuss existing conditions and their ideas for future development.

Issues raised through these meetings included:

- Concern about volume of traffic in the southern portion of the study area;
- The desire to preserve Swormville's character and scale;
- Pedestrian access and connectivity; and
- Overall safety along the corridor.

A preferred development survey was conducted during these meetings to help participants envision and articulate their preferences for development along the corridor. In this exercise, participants were shown a series of images and were asked to rate each one on a scale from zero to 10, zero being the lowest score and 10 being the highest. The average score for each image was calculated to determine which types and styles of development are preferred in the community. A more detailed summary of the preferred development survey results are included in Appendix B.

Public Meeting

In May 2002, a public meeting was conducted to solicit community-wide participation in the process. Designed

as a community workshop, the meeting included hands-on brainstorming exercises to identify potential transportation improvements, corridor designs and appropriate land uses. The corridor was divided into four sub-areas to allow participants to focus their comments, ideas and suggestions. These focus areas were also used in the analysis and recommendations for the Transit Road corridor.

C. Purpose and Use of the Final Report

The Transit Road Corridor Management Study Final Report is intended to be a guiding document for the Towns of Clarence and Amherst to use as they develop and refine their respective policies and decisions related to transportation improvements and land use development. The Plan is designed to serve as a guide for decision making by the Towns' Boards, Planning Boards and the numerous committees and boards that deal with transportation, growth, development issues. As transportation and land use policies and decisions are developed and refined over time, the Report should be used as a resource.

The Plan includes both long- and short-term recommendations that can be implemented by the towns. Action on the recommendations will occur as development occurs and improvements to the corridor and adjacent properties are made. Therefore, the implementation items contained in the plan have not been prioritized to any real extent.

As is discussed in Section II.D that follows, the final report provides both corridor wide and section specific recommendations. During the course of the Study, Transit Road was divided into four focus areas to allow for more detailed analysis and consideration of specific options. The focus area breakdown also allows this plan to serve as a model or guide to decisions regarding other major corridors in the Towns of Amherst and Clarence as well as adjacent communities.

The Final Report's specific recommendations regarding transportation guidelines, land use changes and zoning updates must be made in the context of each municipality. Although the plan examined each town's existing and future plans relative to Transit Road, the recommendations included in the report were made to address both towns' needs and desires. However, each town may need to modify the concepts and suggested improvements to meet the town's specific objectives. This report provides strategies of how this can be done in a way that respects the decisions of the adjoining municipality.

Although the Report addresses issues related to the towns' zoning codes, subdivision regulations, building codes, and capital improvements, it is not intended to supercede the town's existing or future policies and regulations governing these areas of town administration. The Report offers suggestions for how future decisions and modifications can be made to support improved access management on Transit Road.

D. Approach

Issue Identification and Recommendations

From this point, the document will focus on the issues and recommended actions needed to improve safety, access and land use within the study area. While this report will include a general overview of study-wide recommendations, detailed recommendations will be provided for specific locations throughout the study area.

Focus Area Description

The Transit Road study area is approximately nine miles long and transitions from a rural setting in the north to an intensely developed commercial center in the south. The study area has been divided into four focus areas in order to provide contextually sensitive recommendations, ones that support the surrounding environment, uses, character and scale. This approach encourages transportation improvements that relate to existing and future development and land use in each distinct area. The focus areas are defined below and are illustrated in Figure II-2.

- Focus Area 1—North of Swormville / Tonawanda Creek to Lapp Rd.)
- Focus Area 2—Swormville / Lapp Rd. to N. French Rd.
- Focus Area 3—N. French Rd. to Sheridan Drive
- Focus Area 4—Sheridan Drive to the NYS Thruway (I-90)

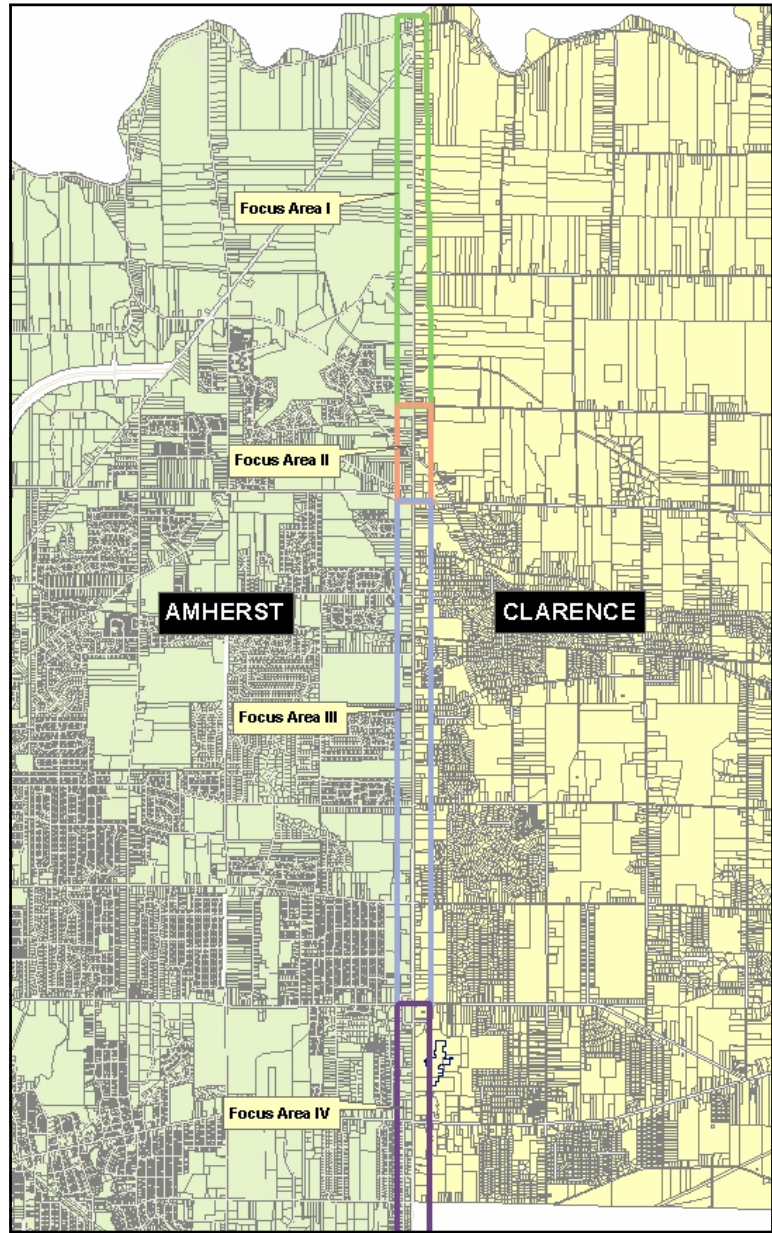


Figure II-2: Focus Area map.