

STATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW ACT
FINAL SCOPE
New York State Thruway Authority
Thruway Reconstruction and Mobility Improvements
Between Interchanges 23 to Interchange 24
Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Name of Action: Thruway Reconstruction and Mobility Improvements between Interchanges 23 to Interchange 24

SEQR Status: Type 1

Lead Agency: New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA)

I. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

The Thruway Authority's pavement condition ratings indicate that the underlying pavement conditions between Interchanges 23 and 24 require the mainline to be reconstructed. The proposed action involves the planning, design and reconstruction of the existing roadway. In addition, traffic analysis indicates that unacceptable levels of service will develop between Interchanges 23 and 24 before the end of 2005. Therefore, mobility improvements will also be investigated, including the addition of a travel lane in each direction on the NYS Thruway mainline from Interchange 23 (MP 141.92) to Interchange 24 (MP 148.15).

An additional temporary lane is required to maintain traffic during construction. The temporary lane may be converted to a permanent lane if the study concludes that this is the preferred alternative. The additional lane will primarily occur in the median of the Thruway mainline. Some widening will occur outside of the existing mainline pavement at the proposed emergency turn-around locations. The project is anticipated to use 100% Thruway Authority funding.

A positive declaration was made during the environmental assessment, therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared to consider the following possibilities: The project may have an impact on wetlands and noise levels and increase the stormwater discharge. The project area also included potential archeological sites.

The DEIS will include the following project description elements:

- A. Project Purpose and Need – A discussion of the needs and objectives for the project.
- B. Discussion of Project Benefits – Highlights the positive aspects of the project including enhanced Thruway services and life-cycle cost benefits.
- C. Project Schedule – The anticipated project schedule will be identified in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- D. Potentially Required Permits and Approvals
 - Section 404 Permit – US Army Corps of Engineers
 - Section 401 Water Quality Certification – NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC)

- State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (wastewater treatment and general construction) – NYSDEC
- Cultural Resources Review – NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)
- Threatened and Endangered Species Review - NYSDEC

The purpose of the EIS will be to convey information on the project conditions, needs, objectives, feasible alternatives, and construction costs for the selection of the preferred alternative. It will also serve to document the environmental process and the assessment of the environmental impacts, mitigation measures and environmental commitments.

This Draft Scope is prepared in accordance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (6NYCRR 617.8) and is available for public review. Copies of this scope have been submitted to all Involved Agencies and any Interested Agency requesting a copy. The purpose of preparing an EIS is to consider the cumulative impacts on land use, infrastructure, and the environment associated with the reconstruction and widening of the Thruway mainline between Interchanges 23 and 24. SEQRA evaluation will be based on preliminary plans.

The project area consists of approximately 6 miles of the New York State Thruway between Interchanges 23 and 24. Project area boundaries are illustrated on the attached location map.

II. POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

Part 1 of the Full Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) was prepared to determine the potential significance of the project impacts. Based on this initial analysis, the following scope is provided to guide preparation of the Draft EIS.

A. Traffic

Existing Conditions: Existing traffic volumes have been identified. The existing level of service (LOS) has been determined. The 2004 design hour volumes (30th highest hour of the year) are 3,600 and 2,900 in the northbound and southbound directions, respectively. This correlates to LOS D and C in the northbound and southbound directions, respectively.

Potential Impact: The project may provide additional mainline capacity and result in a better level of service in the northbound and southbound directions. No changes are anticipated on the adjacent roadway networks.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: Existing traffic and regional growth data is available. Projected traffic volumes for the design year have been developed and trip diversions have been calculated by Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) to account for traffic pattern changes due to regional growth and construction of the project.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: The DEIS will consider mitigation measures as necessary for traffic volume and pattern changes resulting from the proposed project to the adjacent roadway network; however output from the Capital District

Transportation Committee STEP Model indicates that there will be no significant change to the traffic patterns due to the project.

B. Topography, Geology and Soils

Existing Conditions: Topography, geology and soils will be identified based on available mapping including USGS quadrangles, surficial and bedrock geology maps, the Natural Resource Conservation Service soils survey for Albany County, and the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Potential Impact: The project site contains limited potential for impact. Erosion and sedimentation are potential impacts that can be mitigated by standard erosion control practices.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: Soil survey data for Albany County will be sufficient to identify the potential impacts of the project and is currently available. Grading limits and a survey of wetlands and streams will be used to determine the impact limits.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: The DEIS will identify typical temporary and permanent erosion control measures and will require that erosion and sedimentation control plans be developed for the State Pollution Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) General Construction Permit.

C. Affected Population and Local Planning

Existing Conditions: Existing land use adjacent to the Thruway will be identified by site investigation and available mapping.

Potential Impact: The proposed project area is primarily located within the existing Thruway right-of-way and, therefore, is consistent with the current land use. The project is not anticipated to directly impact adjacent land uses.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: Land use and zoning information will be collected from the City of Albany, Town of Bethlehem and Town of Guilderland zoning codes, zoning maps, aerial mapping, and land use plans. A site visit will also be conducted to confirm existing land use.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: The Draft EIS will consider mitigation measures as necessary for land use compatibility with adjacent uses. Since no direct impacts to adjacent land uses resulting from this project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated (potential noise concerns are addressed in Section II.Q.). Although the NYSTA must consider local land use and zoning in its decision making process and will do so through the SEQRA process, NYSTA is not required to obtain local permits and approvals.

D. Community Cohesion

Existing Conditions: Residential neighborhoods exist adjacent to the Thruway within the project area.

Potential Impact: The proposed project will not further bisect any existing neighborhood or residential street. No impacts to community cohesion are anticipated.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: A site visit will be conducted to identify existing neighborhoods.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts resulting from this project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

E. Changes in Travel Patterns or Accessibility

Existing Conditions: The project area is located along a fully controlled access highway between two interchanges.

Potential Impact: The CDTC STEP Model indicates that there will be no significant change to the travel patterns due to the project. The project does not include any changes to the interchanges or accessibility to the Thruway.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: No additional information will be required.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts resulting from this project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

F. Impacts on School Districts, Recreation Areas, Places of Religious Worship and Businesses

Existing Conditions: Two schools, which are part of the Albany City School District, are located adjacent to the project area. Albany School of Humanities (elementary) is located at 108 Whitehall Road and a new middle school is under construction on Kelton Court. Four places of religious worship and numerous businesses have also been identified adjacent to the project corridor.

Potential Impact: The project lies primarily within the existing Thruway right-of-way. No impacts resulting from this project to the identified facilities are anticipated.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: A site visit will be conducted to confirm existing land use.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts resulting from this project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

G. Impacts on Police, Fire Protection and Ambulance Access

Existing Conditions: New York State Police Troop T, headquartered in the Thruway Authority offices at Interchange 23, primarily patrols the Thruway within the project area. Local emergency response services which provide fire and ambulance services within the project area will be identified.

Potential Impact: The project does not propose to make any changes to the existing emergency access within the project area. Potential impacts to emergency services during construction will be evaluated. No impacts are anticipated as a result of this project.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: New York State Police Troop T will be contacted to identify proposed locations for emergency turn-around areas. Fire protection and ambulance services in the project area will be identified.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts resulting from this project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

H. Impacts on Highway Safety, Traffic Safety and Overall Public Safety and Health

Existing Conditions: Increased mobility and a proposed design meeting current standards are anticipated to result in less congestion and delay, and increased safety.

Potential Impact: The proposed project conforms to all design standards and is not anticipated to negatively impact safety.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: Existing safety conditions of the roadways in the project area will be identified including non-standard and non-conforming features and accident history.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

I. General Social Groups Benefitted or Harmed

Existing Conditions: The project area is located primarily within the existing Thruway right-of-way. No impacts to general social groups are anticipated as a result of this project.

Potential Impact: No negative impacts associated with right-of-way acquisitions or changes in travel patterns resulting from the proposed project that would affect any social group are anticipated.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: Elderly, ethnic, low income and minority groups adjacent to the Thruway corridor will be identified.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts associated with right-of-way acquisitions or changes in travel patterns resulting from the proposed project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

J. Impacts on Regional and Local Economies

Existing Conditions: Regional and local businesses utilize the Thruway to transport goods through the Capital District.

Potential Impact: The project is anticipated to reduce delay and alleviate congestion on the Thruway. These factors may have a positive impact on regional and local economies. Minimal right-of-way acquisitions may be required, but they are not anticipated to significantly reduce the tax base of the area surrounding the Thruway.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: No additional information is needed.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts resulting from this project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

K. Impacts on Existing Highway-related Businesses

Existing Conditions: Highway-related businesses exist near Interchange 23 on Route 9W. Interchange 24 connects two major interstates and does not provide any access to businesses. There are no service areas within the project area.

Potential Impact: Since the project will not change travel patterns on the Thruway or connecting roadways adjacent to Interchanges 23 or 24, no impacts on existing highway-related businesses have been identified.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: Traffic volumes will be confirmed. No additional information is anticipated to be needed.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Since no impacts resulting from this project have been identified, no mitigation measures are anticipated.

L. Water Resources

Existing Conditions: Surface water features will be identified using topographic mapping and by field investigation and delineation. New York State water quality classifications for surface waters will be identified. Aquifers will be identified using U.S. Geological Survey groundwater mapping for New York State.

Potential Impact: The possible addition of a third lane to each direction of the Thruway mainline will increase impervious area that may lead to increased runoff, erosion and sedimentation, and water quality impacts. Current stormwater management practices have increased the emphasis on water quality and may adequately mitigate the project impacts.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: Guidelines for the current State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) General Construction Permit are available and will be utilized to establish requirements for water quality and water quantity controls. Stream classifications for the Normanskill, Krumkill, and their associated tributaries will be identified. Preliminary estimates of runoff will be required to identify potential land area requirements for water quality treatment. Mapped streams, lakes, and ponds and their associated floodplains will be identified. Stormwater management plans will be developed.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Stormwater management practices based on current SPDES regulations and engineering practices will be developed to mitigate impacts associated with runoff.

M. Ecology

Existing Conditions: Previous site walkovers within the project area revealed the presence of federally regulated wetlands within the project area. The project area is not within a Critical Environmental Area. No critical habitats in accordance with provisions of the Endangered Species Act (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) have been identified in the project area. However, several rare, threatened, or endangered species were identified in the Albany Pine Bush, immediately northwest of the project area, and in other locations adjacent to the northern end of the project area by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Natural Heritage Program. No rare, threatened, or endangered species were identified by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Potential Impact: Development may impact wetlands. The significance of the impact must be determined through further analysis as described below. It is not anticipated that rare, threatened, or endangered species will be impacted by this project; however, further analysis is required.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The potential presence of threatened and endangered species and species of special concern will be identified through consultation with the NYSDEC Natural Heritage Program and field review. The presence of ecosystems associated with the Albany Pine Bush will be identified through consultation and field review with the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission. Other common species and their habitat (vegetative communities) will be generally described. The presence of State and Federal wetlands within the project area will be identified through field investigation (wetland delineation) and Agency jurisdictional determination.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Wetland mitigation will be identified based on the extent of impact, wetland functions, and wetland values.

N. Cultural Resources

Existing Conditions: A Cultural Resources Survey will be conducted to identify the potential of the project area for producing historic and prehistoric resources.

Potential Impact: The project area may be sensitive to the presence of historic and prehistoric cultural resources. Development may impact these cultural resources such that they are lost for future study.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: Existing information is limited. Initial documentation collected under the Build Now New York program suggested that lands, particularly south of the Thruway mainline, may contain historic and prehistoric resources. Appropriate cultural resource surveys will be completed in consultation with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP).

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: If cultural resources are identified on site, avoidance will be the first mitigative consideration. If avoidance is not practical, a mitigation plan will be developed first to define the extent of the resource and then to extract the data. Such a plan requires the approval of OPRHP.

O. Visual Resources

Existing Conditions: The Thruway currently uses the land within the project area. The existing land use is, and will remain, highway related. The Thruway is visible from residential properties adjacent to the project area and headlight glare may be a concern for some residents.

Potential Impact: The proposed land use will be consistent with current Thruway uses.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: Areas where vegetation will be removed as part of the proposed project and could result in increased headlight glare will be identified.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Landscaping to replace the loss of existing vegetation and improve the visual character of the Thruway mainline will be evaluated.

P. Air Quality

Existing Conditions: The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) classifies the Albany-Schenectady-Troy area as a marginal non-attainment area for ozone.

Potential Impact: The project may provide additional capacity on the Thruway mainline. A reduction in congestion and idling should occur due to the additional capacity. Air quality impacts due to vehicle fumes will be determined for the project area.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The need for either a microscale or mesoscale analysis will be determined using guidance in the New York State Environmental Procedures Manual (EPM). This guidance is based on the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) set forth by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). An air quality screening will be completed to determine whether a microscale air quality analysis is required. A mesoscale analysis is anticipated and will be completed for the project. Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) will

conduct the air quality conformity analysis. Anticipated air quality emissions related to dust are determined by the analysis of PM₁₀ (particulate matter) in accordance with the EPM; however, a PM₁₀ analysis is not required according to NYSDOT Environmental Procedures Manual (EPM) because the project is located in an attainment area for PM₁₀. The effects of dust created by traffic on the Thruway will be qualitatively discussed.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: No mitigation measures to correct for degradation in air quality due to the project are anticipated.

Q. Noise

Existing Conditions: Noise sensitive land uses will be identified and existing noise levels will be measured. A general discussion of how noise is measured and what changes in noise levels are noticeable and detrimental will be included in the DEIS.

Potential Impact: An additional lane in each direction of the Thruway mainline in the project area may increase noise levels.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: A noise analysis will be conducted for the project in accordance with the New York State Noise Analysis Policy. The analysis will include:

- Identification of noise sensitive land uses within the area.
- Measurement of noise levels at receptor points within the project vicinity using one-hour equivalent noise levels to represent the worst case noise period.
- Determination of projected noise levels for future no-build conditions and future build conditions using the Federal Highway Administration Traffic Noise Model.
- Comparison of noise level to the Federal Highway Administration Noise Criteria found in 23 CFR Part 772 to determine the extent of noise impacts.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: The DEIS will consider mitigation measures as necessary for noise impacts to adjacent land uses. This could include mitigation measures such as traffic management measures, alteration of horizontal or vertical alignments, acquisition of real property to create a buffer zone, noise insulation of a publicly owned school building, or noise barriers. Construction scheduling will also be investigated as a means of mitigating construction noise during early morning and evening hours.

R. Vibration

Existing Conditions: Residential and other structures that are susceptible to vibrations are located adjacent to the Thruway.

Potential Impact: The project may provide additional mainline capacity which may result in an increase in vibrations felt in nearby structures; however, the project will improve the quality of the pavement which would reduce vibrations.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The effect of the project on vibration will be evaluated qualitatively by comparing the change in traffic volume and the change in distance between the travel lanes and adjacent building structures.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: No mitigation measures to correct for increased vibrations due to the project are anticipated

S. Hazardous Materials

Existing Conditions: The potential for toxic spills exists along the Thruway as a result of traffic accidents. Any known health and public safety issues existing within the project area will be identified.

Potential Impact: Construction activities could result in accidental toxic spills or excavation could be required at the site of an existing spill.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: A regulatory review will be conducted of state and federal databases to identify known hazardous waste sites and/or other sites or areas which may be of potential environmental concern to the project area. Hazardous waste sites will also be identified through consultation with NYSDEC staff and through field reconnaissance. The effect of construction activities and accidental toxic spills will also be evaluated.

Should excavation in any identified areas be anticipated, the potential for petroleum contaminated soil and/or groundwater will be evaluated.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Mitigation measures for avoiding and responding to spills and handling excavation of hazardous materials will be established in the DEIS.

T. Construction Impacts

Existing Conditions: Any construction issues will be identified.

Potential Impact: Construction activities could result in the following issues in and adjacent to the project area:

- accidental spills including fuel spills,
- temporarily increased noise levels,
- temporarily degraded air quality,
- temporarily increased levels of dust in the air,
- erosion and sediment control, and
- traffic congestion.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address Impact: The effect of construction activities will be evaluated.

Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures: Mitigation measures for avoiding and responding to spills will be utilized to protect the public. Appropriate measures will be

investigated to mitigate construction noise, air quality, erosion and sediment control, and to minimize traffic delays.

III. REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO BE CONSIDERED

The following project alternatives will be discussed:

- A. Alternatives – Alternative transportation modes investigated as part of the NYS Thruway Albany Corridor Study will be summarized. Also, the use of Transportation Systems Management (TSM) and Travel Demand Management (TDM) as methods to meet mobility needs will be explored.
- B. Alternative Layout – Consideration will also be given to alternative roadway layouts, including alternative lane uses such as managed lanes and managed service. Alternatives which separate the HOV lane from the general use lanes will also be considered.
- C. No-Action Alternative – The No-Action Alternative will identify the "no build" scenario whereby no improvements are made to the existing roadway.

IV. OTHER EIS COMPONENTS

- A. **Executive Summary** – Includes a brief description of the project and a summary of impacts, mitigation and alternatives.
- B. **Unavoidable Adverse Impacts that Cannot be Mitigated** – This section will summarize all the impacts from the proposed project for which mitigation is either not available/feasible or not sufficient to completely mitigate the impact. The potential significance of these impacts will also be discussed.
- C. **Growth-Inducing Impacts** - The potential for growth stimulated by the project will be qualitatively discussed.
- D. **Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources** – Construction of additional lanes on the Thruway will consume resources that may be permanently committed to the development. Land is an example of a commitment of a resource but is not necessarily irreversible and irretrievable. Energy consumption and the use of construction materials made from natural resources are typically irreversible and irretrievable resources.
- E. **Future SEQRA Actions** – The purpose of an EIS is to describe the environmental setting and examine alternatives, significant adverse environmental impacts and mitigation for a project. This document will be revised as necessary as a result of public comment and will be finalized within the SEQRA Findings Statement. No further SEQRA action is required.
- F. **References**
- G. **Preliminary List of Appendices**
 - Draft and Final Scope
 - Correspondence
 - Traffic Data
 - Air Quality Analysis Data
 - Noise Analysis Data
 - Cultural Resources Survey
 - Wetland Delineation Report