

Staten Island Borough President James P. Molinaro 2007 State of the Borough Address

by Gotham Gazette Staff
Monday, February 19, 2007 12:00 AM

Good evening. I would like to thank you for coming this evening.

Let me thank the staff of the Center for the Arts and the College of Staten Island, and most especially College President Marlene Springer.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our sponsor for this evening: SI Bank & Trust.

They are represented tonight by Frank Besignano, Josephine Savastano and Alan Fishman, whose vision and leadership have made SI Bank & Trust and Sovereign Bank one of the Island's leading corporate citizens.

I would like the SI Bank & Trust team to stand and be recognized.

I am pleased to announce that the State of the Borough is moving forward on the right track.

My office is working on many issues.

Some are completed, some are in progress, and some are for the future.

I am determined to complete the projects I have started, and to "get the shovel in the ground" on several new exciting initiatives.

I would like to begin with one of our top priorities for 2007: ensuring that all Staten Islanders have quality health care.

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Last year, the parent company of Saint Vincent's filed for bankruptcy.

This raised questions and concerns about the future of Saint Vincent's on Staten Island.

But by working with the community and other elected officials, Bayonne Medical Center was able to acquire Saint Vincent's.

And just this month, a new hospital was born — Richmond University Medical Center.

I am confident that Staten Islanders will be in good hands under the care of the new management team.

At this point, I would like to underscore the importance of cooperation between our two hospitals.

I have spoken with both directors. They have agreed to study the health care needs of Staten Island and to avoid duplication of services.

I would like to welcome Richard Salhany, Chief Operating Officer for Richmond University Medical Center, and I would like to congratulate Anthony Ferreri, the President of Staten Island University Hospital, for his leadership and vision on this issue.

This kind of cooperation between our hospitals has already been successful.

As you may recall, in 2001 we were able to open the Heart Institute on Staten Island. It is operated by both Staten Island University Hospital and Richmond University Medical Center.

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From the very beginning, it has been consistently ranked at the top of its field in New York State.

That is something to be proud of.

The men and women who fought for this country and defended our freedom are entitled to the best health care available, and I was proud to play a role in bringing the Veterans Community Health Center to Staten Island.

For many veterans, this Center is their hospital, and I would like to take a moment to recognize our strongest VA supporters: James Farsetta, and John Donnellan Jr.,

Over a year ago, the Salvation Army came to me for help with finding a location for a Kroc Community Center. I immediately suggested the former Bayley Seton site.

After an intense competition with other cities, Staten Island was selected as the site for the \$70 million dollar world-class Kroc Community Center.

The new Kroc Center will be a “beacon on a hill” for thousands of Staten Islanders of all ages. There will be three swimming pools, a full-size gymnasium, an educational center, and a five-hundred-seat performing arts theatre.

And here’s more good news: At my request, the Salvation Army has agreed to include an indoor track!

I would like to thank the Salvation Army for working with me.

I am always seeking ways to help children with special challenges.

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Over the last three summers, hundreds of children with special needs have been helped by a horseback riding program.

It is a very successful program that is forced to close for the winter because it does not have an indoor arena.

So tonight, I am announcing that I have dedicated \$750,000 for an indoor riding facility at South Beach State Park.

My office is working closely with the State Department of Parks to move this project forward.

Tonight, I am also announcing that I have allotted \$400,000 toward the construction of the Mount Sinai Community Center on Jersey Street.

This project is the vision of Dr. Reverend Victor Brown, and I am proud to support it.

Since 2002, I have allotted over \$10 million to fund improvements in our schools. These include libraries, gymnasiums, auditoriums and security systems.

I am especially proud to have provided over \$5 million for new computers in over 30 public schools and in every public library on Staten Island.

I was also proud to fund our newest marvel -- a Mobile Science Lab.

Last year, my office was the first to fund innovative "smart boards" for our public schools on Staten Island.

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I recently visited P.S.5 to see one in operation.

As you may have noticed, we have placed a “smart board” in the lobby so you can get a close look at the blackboard of the 21st Century. Instead of students writing with chalk, they have the whole world of the internet at their fingertips.

Based on this huge success, I am now committing \$1 million to purchase 200 “smart boards” for our schools.

We have several school construction projects well under way, which will create nearly 3,000 new school seats for Staten Island.

As part of my plan for Charleston, the City has set aside 15 acres for the Department of Education.

In the spirit of Mayor Bloomberg’s challenge to plan ahead -- I have asked Chancellor Klein to work with me on a vision for this school property.

I would like to see a “Health and Environmental Studies” school at this site. As “The Borough of Parks,” Staten Island is the ideal place for a school with an environmental focus.

I also strongly believe children should learn more about health and fitness in this age of computers and video games.

Now that’s moving forward on the right track for education.

Seniors are a top priority of mine, and I continue to work with our City agencies on my Senior Retirement Village in Charleston.

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I would like to see it opened before I leave office in 2009.

Bringing new businesses and jobs to Staten Island has also been one of my top priorities. As we stand now, Staten Island has the lowest unemployment rate and the highest median income in New York City.

In Charleston, we have taken one of the Borough's largest vacant properties and turned it into a dynamic retail complex.

All these stores are thriving and helping to keep Staten Island shoppers here in our Borough.

Thanks to Mayor Bloomberg, the Home Port redevelopment project is making great progress.

There will be housing, retail shops, and a sports complex, all linked by a new waterfront esplanade.

I am working closely with Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff and City Planning Director Amanda Burden, and I would like to thank them for their cooperation.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the role of Staten Island Bank & Trust, a division of Sovereign Bank. They are making a tremendous investment of time, funding and leadership in the Stapleton community.

VISY Paper is a success story that really needs to be told and re-told.

Ten years ago, VISY was looking for locations in the tri-state area. The Borough President's Office convinced them to locate here, on Staten Island.

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VISY has recycled over one million tons of curbside paper and employs over two hundred workers.

And they are in the process of expanding, and will create many more jobs for Staten Island.

Yet another success story is the New York Container Terminal, which went from closure in the 1990's to being the largest container port in New York State.

They have added four new cranes and increased their total warehouse space to 500,000 square feet. They now handle over 420,000 containers per year.

Thanks to this operation, Staten Island is no longer shut out of our port economy. We are a major player, and we're here to stay. A major expansion, which will create more jobs and revenue, is right around the corner.

The container operation is linked directly to the next subject â€” the return of freight rail operations to Staten Island.

Last year, on October 4th, , I rode the first locomotive across the newly renovated Arthur Kill lift bridge from New Jersey to Staten Island.

This was an historic day for commerce. It is estimated that the restoration of freight rail service will create 330 permanent jobs and \$200 million per year in tax revenue by 2010.

And it will have a dramatic positive effect on traffic.

Let me explain.

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Presently, thousands of containers received by New York Container Terminal, or shipped from VISY Paper, which must be shipped by rail, are transported by truck over the Goethals Bridge to the New Jersey Express Rail Yard.

Soon, our new freight railroad yard will link us to the Nation's rail network, and the containers will be transferred directly from ship to rail, right here on Staten Island.

This will eliminate up to 90,000 trucks going over the Goethals Bridge per year.

Now that's moving forward on the right track.

We are bringing that same focus to restoring passenger service on the North Shore Railroad.

As you know, the Borough President's office saved the existing North Shore Railroad right-of-way from being sold to developers.

My office, along with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, is working closely with our good friend Senator Charles Schumer to obtain funding for a second study. This will allow the City to apply for Federal transportation funding.

I want to thank Senator Schumer for his hard work on this issue, and also for his continued support of the one-way toll.

One of my chief goals over the next three years is to keep the renaissance of St. George moving forward.

My vision for St. George is clear: It should be Staten Island's official "downtown," a hub of

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business, government, cultural and tourist attractions, and a great place to live.

While visiting down in Florida, I witnessed for myself how the cultural and arts community transformed downtown Sarasota into a bustling, vibrant area.

I am confident the same can happen in St. George.

I am proud to have played a role in bringing new life to the St. George Theater, which has run 90 events in the past year.

I provided over \$1.6 million to repair the St. George promenade for public use.

And I am working with the New York City EDC to redevelop the former Coast Guard base for housing, shops, restaurants and a home for the National Lighthouse Museum.

I also want to welcome the new management team of the Staten Island Yankees: Mandalay Sports. You have our support to make 2007 your best season ever!

The St. George Ferry Terminal renovation is also a great success, and I applaud the work of the DOT and EDC.

We've transformed a drab-looking institutional terminal into a bright, welcoming transportation hub.

Tonight, I am pleased to announce my next project to brighten the ferry terminal: The installation of two giant saltwater fish tanks in the waiting area.

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I was inspired by the use of fish tanks throughout the country in other large public places.

Here are some images of the tanks under construction.

Each tank will be 14 feet long by 5 feet wide, and will sit on a 40 inch tall base.

They will be home to 800 colorful fish.

This project is funded by my office. The tanks will be maintained by the Staten Island Zoo and sponsored by Richmond County Savings.

Like the dolphin fountain at South Beach and the sea turtle sculpture at Midland Beach, the St. George Aquarium will become a widely recognized icon of Staten Island.

Preserving our natural spaces and improving our parks have been priorities of my administration from day one.

Last year, I allotted \$3 million from my capital budget toward the purchase of several acres of the Goodhue Center.

This property could one day provide a major link in creating a ‘North Shore Greenbelt.’

The protection of Staten Island’s sensitive land is the best present we can give to our children and grandchildren.

To that end, last month, I announced the formation of a not-for-profit corporation to purchase

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sensitive property for preservation

It's called The Staten Island Community Preservation Conservancy.

The Conservancy will raise funds from individuals, corporations, foundations and other charitable organizations.

I would like to recognize the Board Members: Ken Saccaro, Jay Chazanoff, Ruth Lasser and Vincent Pitta. Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Board of the Conservancy.

And I would also like to thank our very first donor: Randy Lee, who contributed \$200,000.

None of these exciting projects throughout the Island would be viable without a safe City.

Thanks to our Police Department, Staten Island has the lowest crime rates in the City.

In helping our police do their job, I am pleased to announce that I have provided \$1 million to improve conditions in our police precincts in the coming year.

I am also assisting the Fire Department, purchasing new vehicles such as a Major Emergency Response Vehicle, and a Marine Rescue Craft.

And with safety in mind, I purchased a new salt spreader for the Department of Sanitation. So we can all be safer when it snows.

I want to thank our uniformed services for the quality of life that we all enjoy, and I'd like to

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recognize Police Borough Commander Al Girimonte, Fire Borough Chief Thomas Haring, New York City Sanitation Commissioner John Doherty, and Sanitation Borough Chief Daniel Ambrose.

Just as our uniformed services protect our quality of life, so do the actions of everyday citizens.

As you know, each year my office honors a Staten Islander with the prestigious Albert V. Maniscalco Community Service Award.

My 2006 Maniscalco Award honorees are two ordinary citizens who do extraordinary things purely out of love for their fellow man.

They created and maintain Angels' Circle in Grasmere, a heavenly sanctuary that honors our lost loved ones from 9/11.

They are Wendy Pellegrino and Fred Ariemma and we will honor them at an official ceremony at Borough Hall on March 29th .

Staten Island's waterfront should be its greatest asset. That is why we have been revitalizing the waterfront in many parts of Staten Island. The renaissance at South Beach is the one I am most proud of.

Let's go to the videotape.

Video presentation "Renaissance at the Boardwalk"

There is no doubt that the Boardwalk is a great success story. And this year we will be making

further improvements, such as new benches, railings and litter baskets.

Recently, I conducted a survey among users of the Boardwalk. Many agree that we need more activities for children.

So tonight, I would like to outline my next major project.

We are going to establish a “children’s play park” just off the Boardwalk between Freedom Circle and the new artificial turf soccer field.

Take a look at our conceptual illustration.

It will be a beautifully landscaped area, with an ocean-front atmosphere.

All the rides will be designed for children under the age of 12.

And working with our designers and the Parks Department, every ride will be imaginative and educational.

Instead of a carousel of horses, there will be one of seahorses.

Instead of spinning teacups, there will be spinning clam shells.

Instead of a Ferris wheel, we will have a Staten Island ferry wheel.

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Other small rides will be in shape of sea turtles, dolphins and flying fish.

And with the revival of railroads so much a part of my address tonight, I am happy to say that the property will have a kiddie train to take families from one end to the other.

There will be an old-fashioned ice cream parlourâ€¦An indoor facility for parties...A scenic lighthouseâ€¦and lots of fun spilling out from every corner.

Most importantly, the Play Park must have a reasonable admission price, and include programs that reflect the educational as well as entertainment value of the Park.

Therefore, I have requested that the Play Park be operated by a not-for-profit organization, just like the Carousel in Willowbrook Park.

And we will be looking for corporate sponsors to help make this a success.

So there you have it. The next step in our continuing renaissance at the Boardwalkâ€¦the "Children's Play Park".

Let me now turn to Land Use and Traffic.

Mayor Bloomberg, by creating the Growth Management Task Force, has produced a better quality of life for our residents.

As we move ahead with the Growth Management Task Force, I have several agenda items for them to consider.

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First, I want to have the Task Force look at what defines a BSA “hardship case”. I think this is a term that has been abused.

Hardships should be considered only when the hardship was caused by government action, not when they are self-created by the developer.

For example, if the government allows someone to build a catering hall across the street from my house “ then I can legitimately claim a “hardship.”

But if a developer buys a piece of property knowing that he cannot build on it, and asks the City for reconsideration, this is not a hardship.

That’s like a man who shoots and kills his parents, and then goes before the judge asking for mercy because now he’s an orphan.

We also need to adopt new rules for gas stations that have been retrofitted as convenience stores and coffee shops.

These establishments are springing up at many intersections, and they are having a negative impact on traffic.

Look at this picture of Clove Road and Victory Blvd.

DOT was forced to put “quick-curbs” in the roadway to prevent dangerous turns into and out of the gas station.

So my office will be working with the Task Force to create new guidelines.

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We must create more onsite parking and better traffic circulation -- so these locations are safer and less congested!

Staten Island has 5% of New York City's population, but 17% of the registered vehicles in the City.

And that doesn't count all the vehicles that are registered in Florida, North Carolina and Pennsylvania by Staten Islanders

Knowing that traffic will continue to increase at 2-3% each year, we need to think "outside the box."

With the cooperation of DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall, we were able to implement a number of common sense traffic improvements, including

- More turning lanes and left-turn signals.

- And "common sense" street signs that are so successful they were implemented all over the City.

I have also introduced blinking stop signs that run on solar power.

Tonight, I am pleased to announce that they will be installed in 5 new locations.

The new stop signs help improve safety, and I hope to add many more in the coming years.

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Another project that I announced during my first term was a new entrance to Miller Field at Father Capodanno Boulevard. Construction on the new entrance should begin in April.

By this time next year, motorists traveling on Father Capodanno will no longer have to travel through neighborhood streets, around Hylan Boulevard, and down New Dorp Lane, in order to enter Miller Field.

Rather, they will be able to enter directly into the park.

The hundreds of cars using this new location will no longer be crowding our neighborhood streets or the intersection of Hylan Boulevard and New Dorp Lane, which we all know is way too crowded already.

This is a realistic traffic improvement that will give us real results.

We have also continued to improve crucial intersections.

We placed new left turn lanes and left turn signals at Amboy Road and Seguin Avenue, which is working beautifully, and we will do the same with Victory Boulevard and Travis Avenue.

And this year, I am pleased to report that DOT will install new left turn bays and left turn signals at four key intersections on Hylan Boulevard — Cleveland, Fieldway and Chesterton Avenues and on Buffalo Street.

I would like to thank Mayor Bloomberg, DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall, and Borough Commissioner Tom Curitore, for making these great traffic improvements possible, and I know we will be seeing many more as a result of the Mayor's Traffic Task Force.

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At my request, DOT, the Buildings Department, City Planning, and other agencies meet more often on growth management and traffic issues.

We have more cooperation and communication among City agencies than ever before.

That is a positive step forward.

Let me show you an example of what happened when inter-agency communication was not as good.

This is an aerial view of Englewood Avenue in Charleston.

As you can see, this warehouse was built right up against the street line.

Normally, DOT would have asked for a setback.

But without checking with DOT or the Fire Department, the Board of Standards and Appeals permitted the development to go forward.

So the warehouse stands there, permanently affecting the width of the street.

Today, we have changed the process for the better.

I have requested that the Board of Standards and Appeals notify the Borough DOT Commissioner, the Fire Department, and the Borough President's Office whenever there is a request for a change in the status of a street.

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Here's an example.

Rivington Avenue is mapped from Park Drive North to Richmond Avenue.

But as you can see from this picture, the road ends before Richmond Avenue at Jennifer Court.

Under the new way of doing business, DOT was informed of a waiver application to build on this vacant piece of property, which lies in the bed of the mapped street.

After reviewing the request, DOT has opposed the waiver and asked that the developer complete the connection to Richmond Avenue as mapped.

So with better communication, we are seeing better results for Staten Island.

Now let me turn to another issue.

With all the vacant land that we had at our disposal, how did we wake up one morning with this traffic mess?

This should not have happened. And it's not very complicated why it happened. In fact, it's really very simple.

It happened because of waivers, waivers, waivers, being given over and over.

You might ask -- what is a waiver?

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Let me show you an example.

Here is Amboy Road at Clark Avenue, where the street is built out to its full mapped width.

This next photo shows garden apartments that were built with a front lawn that extends into the mapped street. The developer was given a waiver so he did not have to widen the street to its full width.

This is an aerial view of Amboy Road just north of Richmond Avenue. You can see the two shopping centers on either side. These properties have wide sidewalks and parking lots because of waivers.

If not for waivers, we could have Amboy Road built with two lanes in both directions, including turn lanes. Traffic would move so much better.

But today this is a traffic nightmare. And we all suffer today because Amboy Road was only built to half its mapped size.

At my urging, the Department of Transportation has implemented a new waiver policy, where waivers are the exception, not the rule.

All waiver requests are now reviewed in coordination between DOT, Department of Buildings, and the Fire Department.

As a recent example, a project on Manor Road was denied a waiver, so that Manor Road could one day have a widening. We did not “give away” the width of the street.

We are also seeing better cooperation between developers and the DOT to make intersection

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and roadway improvements.

As an example, the owner of a new Dunkin Donuts, at his own expense, will widen Victory Boulevard at the intersection of Richmond Avenue, and a new dedicated right turn lane will be created.

This is another crowded intersection getting long overdue attention – thanks to smart planning!

Now take a look at these photos of our Mid-Island roads. The traffic jams here are incredible.

In this shot, you can see one motorist is so frustrated that he is driving in the opposite lane of traffic to try to get to the turning lane.

The same thing is happening in this next photo of Forest Hill Road.

Look at this photo. The Parks Department has to actually close down the road just to prune the trees along the street.

Why are we making our motorists endure these conditions? The roads are way too narrow and unsafe.

The DOT is planning to widen Forest Hill Road to two lanes in each direction, and Rockland Avenue will be realigned and widened from its current width of 22 feet to 45 feet.

Tonight, I strongly urge the City to proceed with these road improvements, and for Staten Islanders to be supportive of these initiatives.

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It is obvious. Why are we studying this to death? It is ridiculous to inconvenience and endanger the safety of Staten Islanders with these inadequate roads.

For safety's sake, let's improve Forest Hill Road and Rockland Avenue now!

Going forward, one of my top priorities is the reuse of the roads in Fresh Kills.

Back in 2001, I hired a consultant to analyze the landfill roads.

We knew that this was the first time in 50 years that we actually had the room and the opportunity to design and build the roads properly.

City Planning has included the plan in its designs for Fresh Kills Park.

But we must go much further than just opening the roads to the public.

I have given testimony and written letters, clearly stating that these roads must be under the jurisdiction of the New York City Department of Transportation, and they must be two lanes in each direction.

To do less would fly in the face of the Mayor's Traffic Task Force.

A one-lane road for Fresh Kills does not even meet the present needs of Staten Islanders, let alone future needs. By the time such a road is open to the public, it would already be insufficient.

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My fear is that “the architects of yesterday’s failures claim to have the solutions to today’s problems.”

Will these roads be heavily traveled?

Last year, my office asked Bed, Bath & Beyond in Charleston to record the zip codes of recent shoppers. They did, and the results are telling.

Roughly 50% of shoppers came from the Mid-Island area.

If they were available, they would use the roads through the landfill.

And they would not be driving through New Springville and Travis or taking the Korean War Veterans Parkway to get to Charleston – a convoluted route.

The most direct route – would be the landfill roads. It’s just plain common sense!

Nowhere is the need for major road improvements greater than on the growing South Shore.

Recently, my staff did an extensive study on current and potential development in Charleston.

According to our estimates, over 4 million square feet of commercial and retail space either exists or will be developed in the next ten years.

These developments bring with them a requirement for 12,000 parking spaces.

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That's a lot of vehicles.

Based on these facts, it should be obvious to everyone that the private sector is moving forward, very quickly.

Now we need the public sector to also move forward, with smart planning.

Over a year ago, I proposed a \$100 million traffic plan that calls for improving a number of roads on the South Shore.

I am pleased to report that the City will widen an eight-mile section of Arthur Kill Road, from Bentley Street to Richmond Avenue. DOT has increased the budget for this project by \$15 million and is fast-tracking its construction by two years.

Now that's a good start.

I am now asking the City to build the already mapped Kent Street, an important North-South road that will connect Englewood Avenue to Sharrotts Road.

We should then extend Kent Street south through the future school site. This will provide a vital connection through Bricktown Center to the community

Now looking ahead, we need to map and complete Englewood Avenue, and widen and complete Sharrotts Road. These are important East-West roadways, that connect to existing overpasses.

Looking at this aerial, you can see that most of the residential population for the Charleston Center is east of the Expressway.

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What do we expect them to do “ jump across?

If we don't complete these streets, the existing streets are useless, and that's unacceptable.

This is about sensible planning for our residents. Let's move forward with completing these roads!

That's just part of the issue. We also need to improve highway access on the South Shore.

So tonight I am announcing several recommendations.

First, in the Woodrow section of Staten Island, we have service roads off Bloomingdale Road which just end. They don't connect with the rest of the service road network. That's just bad planning.

So I recommend completing the service roads between Bloomingdale Road and Woodrow Road on both sides of the West Shore Expressway.

In this picture, you can again see that the service road ends. It goes nowhere—it's useless.

This is also the site where Lowes plans to open a new store. They asked for a waiver, and it was denied.

I then gave them a choice: either build the service road in front of the property as mapped, or you can't build your store.

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So after Lowes completes their portion of the service road, I will work with the State DOT and State Parks to complete this vital connection.

We should have continuous service roads “ it’s just plain common sense!

Take a look at this photo.

Here is the West Shore Expressway, the Korean War Veterans Parkway, and here is the Bricktown Center.

Currently, our residents have a tough time, navigating around the roads and highways in this area.

And in the summer, they have to compete with all the traffic heading to New Jersey.

There is only one narrow exit ramp from the West Shore Expressway to Bricktown, and it is far too dangerous to cut across traffic from the Korean War Veterans Parkway.

So here are my recommendations.

I am proposing new elevated ramps that will connect the West Shore Expressway, and the Korean War Veterans Parkway, to Bricktown and to Page Avenue. This is the safest and most efficient way to handle the traffic in the area.

We can also provide better access to Arthur Kill Road by extending the ramp to North Bridge Street.

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In this way, we can separate the traffic heading to the Outerbridge Crossing from the motorists wanting to visit Charleston or Tottenville.

These proposals, along with sixteen others, have been presented to the New York State DOT, and we are working closely with them to finalize these plans.

The residents of the South Shore deserve to have efficient roads to help them travel in their own neighborhoods! We can't have a situation where traffic is backed-up for miles because we have failed to put the proper infrastructure in place.

This plan offers solutions, and we have already started a dialogue with the State of New York. We have put the matter on the table, and I am confident we will move forward.

Obviously, the commercial developments in Charleston will be here well before the road improvements are made.

But why? Why is it possible to build an entire shopping center in one year, but simple road improvements take eight years?

Let me give you an example.

There is a dangerous curve on Todt Hill Road. You may be familiar with it. It's near the intersection of Willow Pond Road, not far from St. Francis Seminary.

Often, traffic backs up from Circle Road all the way up to Willow Pond Road. This is a very unsafe condition.

Back in 1997, I saw the opportunity to straighten out this dangerous curve.

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The Borough President's Office negotiated with the State during the purchase of St. Francis Woods.

As a result, we set aside a portion of State land for the re-alignment of Todt Hill Road.

My office then produced a "Preliminary Design" for improving the road "â€" which you see here on-screen.

We then submitted it to the City.

Now let me outline what has happened since, and this underscores the problem with ULURP.

Take a look at this graphic. This is a standard timetable for the ULURP process, which we have broken down in three sections for you.

From the time of inception, in 1997, the project went through a preliminary agency review for over four years.

Then the agency conducted what is called a Preliminary Design Investigation. That took two more years.

Then, a consultant was hired to study my office's study.

After two more years, they recommended basically the same plan that my office gave them eight years before.

by Gotham Gazette Staff
Monday, February 19, 2007 12:00 AM

Finally in 2006, the project reached the final design phase.

This year, it will finally start the ULURP process at City Planning – ten years after we started!

Now, if you look at this next chart, you will see that between the “Initial City Planning Meeting” and “Certification”, there are the words: “no specified time limit.”

That means just getting to Certification can take another year or more – before the formal ULURP timetable even begins!

After Certification, the ULURP timetable calls for a 150-day public review.

This includes public hearings with the community boards, the Borough President’s Office, the City Planning Commission and the City Council.

By the time the project is given final approval by the City, it is under-funded.

So we have to renegotiate the budget, which often takes months.

Then the bidding process begins. By the time the bid is drawn up, sent out, received and awarded, another year has passed.

Now construction can FINALLY begin.

Has anyone ever analyzed what we are doing to ourselves? How do you accomplish anything?

Let me make the point more simply. The Empire State Building was built in just 13 months.

Yet a simple road improvement can take over 13 years!

Something is wrong.

So before I leave you tonight, I want to take a few moments to make a case for common sense.

As you leave, my staff will be giving you a book called "The Death of Common Sense". I would encourage you to sit down and read it. In fact, it should be required reading in the 7th grade of every school.

I think you will be amazed at how much more efficient and responsive government can be, if we work together to find common sense solutions to problems.

Maybe we can start the first chapter of a new book, "The Re-birth of Common Sense."

Take a look at this property on Rockland Avenue. It sticks out into the road. Would you believe we would have to go through the ULURP process to remove this. Why are we not taking this property, compensating the owner, and making the road safer and better?

Look at this hydrant on Forest Hill Road. It makes no sense that this hydrant should be jutting out into the street. This is an unacceptable condition.

by Gotham Gazette Staff
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This next photo is of Forest Hill Road and Travis Avenue.

Four years ago, I asked DOT to install a left-turn lane at this intersection.

DOT reviewed the intersection, measured the width, and the improvement was a “go”

That is, until DOT was forced to conduct an EIS for the entire Forest Hill Road Corridor.

Is this efficiency? Should one, simple left-turn lane be delayed year after year for endless studies?

I therefore propose that we change the ULURP process.

I propose that left turn lanes, and other simple traffic solutions be fast tracked and not held up by the much broader review process of an EIS.

And I propose that ULURPs have different levels of timetables.

If an entire road system is under consideration, a ULURP of 18 months may be necessary.

But should the same amount of time be spent on a single, small road improvement?

Why not have a 3-month ULURP or a 6-month ULURP based on the scope of the project?

by Gotham Gazette Staff
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It's just plain common sense!

Let's look at it this way. Any projects that Mayor Bloomberg or I undertake in the next year, if a ULURP is required, we have no chance to complete them by the time we leave office.

We must fast-track ULURP, so we can improve our Mid-Island roads and make so many other improvements that our residents desperately need.

We must open the roads through Fresh Kills with two lanes in each direction. We're talking 40 additional feet. Why are we quibbling over 40 feet, when the landfill is over 2,200 acres in size? Or put it another way – 94-million-square-feet.

We should connect the service roads on both sides of the West Shore Expressway.

In an age of traffic jams and security concerns, we need our service roads available to community residents and emergency vehicles.

As I often say, "Common Sense can prevent us from repeating the mistakes of the past!"

That's my key message tonight.

That's how we can move forward on the right track.

The good news is that we have Mayor Bloomberg and his Administration working with us to correct these problems.

Staten Island Borough President James P. Molinaro 2007 State of the Borough Address

by Gotham Gazette Staff

Monday, February 19, 2007 12:00 AM

The Mayor's Task Force on Growth Management allowed us to improve zoning regulations.

The Mayor's Task Force on Traffic has allowed us to make historic progress on road improvements.

And the Mayor's leadership has sparked a successful redevelopment plan for the Stapleton Home Port and so many other initiatives.

I am hopeful that working with Mayor Bloomberg, we can continue to employ "common sense" to achieve the goals I have outlined tonight.

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