Irondequoit Bay Outlet Bridge Assessment Complete

Week of January 15, 2018

We have now reached a major milestone in our efforts to tackle one of the area’s most longstanding and complicated issues: providing year-round access across the Irondequoit Bay Outlet in Seabreeze. The reasons to explore potential year-round solutions this are compelling: safety for our first responders; emergency evacuation routes; economic development; and common sense.

This process began almost three years ago with a letter signed by both my predecessor, Adam Bello, Webster Supervisor Nesbitt; former County Executive Brooks; Assembly Majority Leader Morelle; NYS Senator Funke and US Senator Schumer. That letter expressed unanimous support for establishing year-round access and engaging in an objective study of alternatives to achieve that end.

On Thursday, January 11th, we received a presentation of the draft findings of the Bay Outlet Alternatives Feasibility study, which weighed the strengths and weaknesses of the various alternatives for expanding access between northern Webster and Irondequoit. These include: retrofitting the existing bridge; building a new lift bridge; building new ramps off of NYS Route 104 near the Bay Bridge to connect to either Sea Breeze Drive (near Titus Ave) or Ridge Roads; and doing nothing.

I am very proud of the transparent and objective process by which the study assessed the five potential alternatives. This process was shaped through public input from both Webster and Irondequoit residents and provided a rational scoring method.

Ultimately, the highest scoring alternatives, by a wide margin, involved either a new lift bridge at the Bay Outlet, or retrofitting the existing bridge. For many, this is common sense. It would provide flexibility for motorists, maintain a safe harbor for boaters, and ultimately connect the two towns on a twelve-month basis.

There has been some conflicting information about the impacts of a year-round bridge, which is understandable since this is a very nuanced issue. Both moveable bridge alternatives proposed a 10-feet clearance above water level at its fixed stage. That height would allow for 75 percent of existing boat traffic to pass under the bridge without the bridge moving, thus reducing the impacts to daily vehicular travel. Furthermore, no properties would be taken with either of the outlet bridge alternatives. On the Webster side, the right-of-way would need to be widened approximately four feet. However, the impact to public and private property would be minimal.

The other alternatives, which involved new ramps near the Bay Bridge or bridge connections between 104 and E. Ridge Road, did not score as highly. While they would provide some additional access in that interchange, they wouldn’t achieve the initial objective of the study: expanding year-round access at the Bay Outlet. Furthermore, the Bay Bridge ramp extension option would involve the complete acquisition and removal of 10 homes in Irondequoit.

Any of the construction options explored through the study will involve a considerable investment of infrastructure dollars. Indeed, next to the null alternative, retrofitting the existing bridge would still cost an estimated $16 million. We have been in constant contact with our state and federal partners throughout this process. I am confident that if infrastructure dollars become available at either level, this thorough assessment will be very valuable in justifying any future allotment of state or federal dollars to advance enhanced connectivity.

I am proud we have moved on from simply lamenting about the fact that our two communities are divided for several months of the year. This study is the first concrete step towards a final solution to unite these two communities and the northern portions of Monroe County.