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West Harrison neighborhood concerned about I-287 plan

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WHITE PLAINS - Residents of West Harrison see the benefit to creating extensions of Westchester Avenue that would allow motorists to drive into and out of White Plains while avoiding two troublesome intersections.

But some are worried that the \$40 million plan for Interstate 287 near exits 8 and 8E will disrupt a neighborhood already addled by construction along the interstate.

Tony Sanchez, who lives on Locust Avenue on the north side of the project, said last night that the plan would help by separating Westchester Avenue traffic from Anderson Hill Road at the intersection with White Plains Avenue on the north side of I-287.

"It makes a lot of sense; that's almost like taking a road out of the way," Sanchez, 60, said in the White Plains Public Library auditorium, where state Department of Transportation officials presented maps and explained the plan.

During the construction, projected to last from 2010 to 2012, residents expect disturbances to their neighborhood, also called Silver Lake.

"I think it's going to be pretty difficult for the residents of Silver Lake," said Kathy Sanchez, Tony Sanchez's wife.

The plan would create two new roughly parallel Westchester Avenue sections, called frontage roads, one on either side of the interstate. They would take motorists under the White Plains Avenue Bridge rather than intersecting with the road on either side of the interstate. At the north intersection, Anderson Hill Road also meets with White Plains Avenue; on the south side, the Exit 8E ramp also hits the intersection.

Residents said they can wait 10 minutes or longer to cross over I-287 on the White Plains Avenue Bridge, inching forward at an excruciating pace while the light changes again and again.

During construction, only southbound traffic would be allowed on the White Plains Avenue Bridge while the DOT spends two years rebuilding it to allow the frontage roads to pass underneath. Residents returning home north on White Plains Avenue during that time would have to loop around to the Anderson Hill Road Bridge, then come back west. That, Kathy Sanchez said, would force them to join large volumes of traffic from places like Purchase and Manhattanville colleges and the PepsiCo offices in Purchase.

Even subtle changes in the spaghetti-like interchange could result in traffic tie-ups or a residential street suffering heavy truck traffic into the future. Some residents wanted to know when the state could reopen a curve that allowed cars from Underhill and Columbus avenues to loop onto Westchester Avenue westbound.

"They can't commit to a time," West Harrison resident Lisa Faillace said. "That's a little scary to us."

Greg Kisloff, the DOT community liaison on the project, said he would get back to her on an estimated time that it could reopen.

Even when it does, Westchester Avenue westbound in that area would then be four lanes wide. That would likely make it difficult for cars and trucks to travel to the other side of the road in order to take another loop back onto the eastbound lanes of Westchester Avenue. That means heavy trucks, even oil tankers, will continue to travel down a block of Locust Avenue, a street of one-family homes, to turn right on White Plains Avenue. Trucks take that route to cross the bridge and turn left onto Westchester Avenue heading east.

The work is planned even as discussions continue on whether to replace or renovate the Tappan Zee Bridge and what mass transit systems could run through the I-287 corridor. DOT regional design engineer Bill Gorton said bridges planned as part of the project would be built with piers that could be moved to the side of the median with relative ease to make space for a light rail line or a lane dedicated to high occupancy vehicles or a bus line.
