

- HOME
- BREAKING NEWS
- BUSINESS
- COLUMNISTS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOSSIP
- LIFESTYLE
- NEWS
- Liberty Medals
- Regional News
- National News
- World News
- Weird But True
- NYPD Blotter
- POST OPINION
- REAL ESTATE
- SPORTS
- STYLE
- TRAVEL
- Archives
- Last 7 Days
- Story Index
- Classified
- Classroom Extra
- Comics
- Coupons
- Games
- Home Delivery
- Horoscope
- Lottery
- Newsletters
- Post Store
- Post Winners
- Special Sections
- Traffic
- TV Week
- Weather

WATCHDOG: TUNNEL PLAN AN \$860M WEST ST. WASTE

By CLEMENTE LISI

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June 2, 2004 -- The \$860 million plan to build a tunnel under a four-block stretch of West Street has been deemed one of the most wasteful highway projects in the country, a new report says.

Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog that tracks government spending, said the tunnel plan is one of 27 projects across the nation that "should be eliminated immediately" because they are too costly.

"At a time of ballooning deficits, it is shocking that lawmakers would attempt to shove more billion-dollar white elephants onto taxpayers," said Erich Zimmermann, research analyst for the watchdog group.

The Gov. Pataki-backed "Short Bypass Alternative" would restore the roadway back to eight lanes — four of which would run in a tunnel between Albany and Murray streets.

The other option, dubbed the "at-grade alternative," would also restore the roadway back to eight lanes, at a cost of just \$175 million.

A part of West Street, also known as Route 9A, was destroyed on 9/11 and blocked off because of the subsequent recovery and cleanup efforts at the World Trade Center.

Back to: [Regional News](#) | [National News](#) | [World News](#) | [Home](#)

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