

Plans for ground zero tunnel scrapped

BY PRADNYA JOSHI
STAFF WRITER

April 14, 2005, 11:01 PM EDT

The state has abandoned plans to build a tunnel to route vehicle traffic next to the World Trade Center memorial and Freedom Tower sites in lower Manhattan, and Gov. George Pataki said the money saved could be used to help pay for a rail link from downtown to Kennedy Airport.

The state Department of Transportation will instead spend \$225 million to widen West Street from six lanes to eight lanes of traffic, restoring it to its pre-Sept. 11th volume. It will be at least 18 months before construction can begin, DOT spokeswoman Jennifer Post said.

The Port Authority is also planning to build an underground pedestrian concourse to allow people to walk from the World Trade Center complex to Battery Park City without having to negotiate traffic.

Community groups had complained that an \$860 million price tag to shield essentially two blocks of roadway didn't make sense. Utilities such as Verizon Communications would have had to significantly alter their underground network at a cost of many millions of dollars.

"A tunnel would've meant that we would've had to dig up and replace all the work that we've done for the last three years or more," said Verizon spokesman John Bonomo. "This is definitely good news for us."

At the end of this year, Verizon plans to move its headquarters from midtown to its historic 1926 building at 140 West St. That site, next door to the rebuilt 7 World Trade Center, will house 1,500 employees.

Goldman Sachs Group last week also had said it was putting on hold plans to build a \$1.8-billion, 40-story headquarters in Battery Park City partially because the entrance to the tunnel would have been right outside the building. Spokesman Peter Rose yesterday declined to comment on the tunnel news, but Pataki said he hoped Goldman would continue with its plans.

Pataki had previously supported plans to build a tunnel, which was intended to help preserve the sanctity of the memorial as well as shield the Freedom Tower from trucks or buses that could potentially be armed with explosives.

But yesterday, Pataki said he supported the new plan to keep West Street, also known as Route 9A, as a surface street.

He also said the memorial architect Michael Arad told him the traffic will not take away from the sanctity of the memorial.

"I'm confident that the DOT has come up with the decision that they think works best for all of lower Manhattan," Pataki said at a groundbreaking for a new condominium development next to the Ritz Carlton in Battery Park City. "It also reflected community input, which is an important part of the process as we go forward."

Pataki said some of the savings could go toward a \$6-billion project to provide train service from lower Manhattan to Kennedy Airport. Under that plan, a tunnel from lower Manhattan would connect to Long Island Rail Road tracks through Jamaica and the AirTrain.

"With the savings by not constructing the tunnel, I think we should take a good look at whether it's appropriate to use some of those funds [for the JFK link]," Pataki said in comments to the media. "It's certainly a priority of mine, once we deal with the infrastructure and reconstruction needs at Ground Zero."

Copyright © 2005, [Newsday, Inc.](#)