



The 27 Most Wasteful Road Projects in America

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West Street Bypass Tunnel Lower Manhattan, New York City Cost to Federal Taxpayers: \$860 million

West Street (also known as the West Side Highway and Route 9A) runs below West 59th Street to Battery Park. The portion of the route adjacent to the World Trade Center (WTC) site in lower Manhattan was destroyed in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Before the attack, West Street served approximately 80,000 vehicles and 110,000 pedestrians each day, in addition to significant numbers of bicycle and bus commuters.

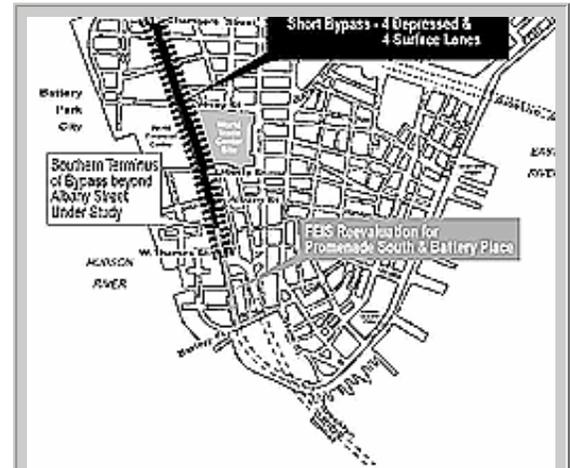
Prior to September 11, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) had completed a five-year, \$400 million renovation of West Street. As part of that renovation, NYSDOT prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 1994. NYSDOT is currently preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) in light of changes in the area from the September 11 attacks. The EIS process for this project has been fast-tracked under Presidential Executive Order 13274, which allows for expedited review of designated transportation projects.

A primary goal of the West Street restoration is to provide an "appropriate and respectful" setting for the WTC Memorial while restoring the roadway for the wide array of users that once traveled it. NYSDOT has proposed three alternatives for rebuilding West Street. The "no build" option would make permanent the six-lane temporary roadway that was installed adjacent to the WTC site after the attacks. The second option would build an eight-lane roadway where the temporary six-lane route now lies. The third option would rebuild the previous West Street alignment as an eight-lane roadway, with four lanes of through-traffic diverted underground into a four-block tunnel adjacent to the WTC site, and four lanes of local traffic at street level. This would be a radical departure from the road as it existed before September 11 and as it exists now. The federal government has already committed \$242 million for one of these three options as part of a disaster relief package for New York City.

Taxpayer Concerns

At-grade improvements to the existing road would save taxpayers at least \$685 million, and would be fully covered by funds already dedicated to the project. This would accomplish the primary project goals, and the money saved could be better used to help revive lower Manhattan.

Local Community Concerns



[click here for enlarged map](#)

Proposal and Savings

NYSDOT should reject the \$860 million plan to construct a four-block bypass tunnel on West Street, all of which would be paid for by federal taxpayers. Consider instead the at-grade options that are more in keeping with the character and needs of surrounding neighborhood, and would cost only \$175 million, which could be covered by funds already committed to the project.

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Although Gov. Pataki supports the tunnel option, it faces significant community and official opposition. Rep. Jerrold Nadler, Sen. Charles Schumer, New York City Council Member Alan J. Gerson, New York State Assemblymembers Sheldon Silver and Deborah Glick, New York State Senator Martin Connor, Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, Community Board Number 1, the American Automobile Association of New York, and a host of local transportation organizations oppose or seriously question the tunnel option and are calling for consideration of at-grade improvements instead.

The tunnel project as proposed would not significantly improve pedestrian safety or access. Crossing West Street immediately north and south of the tunnel would actually become far more dangerous. This is a vital consideration given the number of pedestrians who traverse this area every day and the local businesses that rely on pedestrian traffic. Before September 11, pedestrians could cross West Street safely and conveniently using a combination of at-grade crossings and pedestrian bridges. Restoring these paths and combining them with a planned east-west pedestrian tunnel with moving walkways to connect Battery Park City to a new transit station, would serve local pedestrians and businesses well.

The tunnel would increase traffic on local streets and reduce vehicle access, and raises concerns about accessibility for local areas in the vicinity of the tunnel. Surface lanes would likely become clogged with tourist-related traffic in the area, and one plan calls for tour buses to discharge passengers along West Street to access the WTC Memorial. While NYSDOT estimates that only 25 percent of traffic would travel on the surface, the agency also acknowledges it has not factored in the increased traffic generated by the memorial. West Street is the primary means of access for nearby Battery Park City (resident population: 7,500; working population: 25,000). Residents and commuters have no other north-south street connection and no subway stops. The at-grade options would minimize traffic growth in the area and would make pedestrian travel safer and more convenient than the tunnel proposal.

The local economy would be harmed by the lengthy construction required to build the tunnel. Tunnel construction would take at least three-and-a-half years, using NYSDOT's optimistic estimates. This would further damage local small businesses, which were dealt a terrible blow by the September 11 attacks. At-grade improvements could be completed in as little as 18 months, and would be more in keeping with the cost-effective and sensible "landscaped promenade" already planned for much of West Street below Liberty Street. NYSDOT will start construction in Summer 2004 of a four-block segment of West Street from Battery Place to West Thames Street at an estimated cost of \$50 million. The "Promenade South Project" will, according to NYSDOT, "increase and improve pedestrian circulation through the area and will help to make nearby parks and neighborhood destinations more accessible to pedestrians."⁽¹⁾

Environmental Concerns

Instead of decreasing West Street congestion as some proponents have suggested, the tunnel would draw more cars and trucks to lower Manhattan and dramatically increase noise and air pollution. In indicating preliminary support for the tunnel, Gov. Pataki said that he believed it would reduce noise pollution near the WTC Memorial site, but traffic increases would likely have the opposite effect, harming the memorial site and the surrounding residential and commercial areas.

New York City is already in violation of two separate federal Clean Air Act standards for ground-level ozone and fails to meet federal standards for airborne particulates. Repeated exposure to increased levels of these pollutants can cause lung damage and increase incidences of respiratory illness.

In addition to general concerns about car and truck emissions' impact on public health, local residents fear that increased concentrations of toxic and carcinogenic air pollutants will occur near the tunnel entrances and harm local communities and children playing on a nearby ball field.

(1) Route 9A Project: Lower Manhattan Redevelopment, [NYSDOT website](#).