

Southern Westchester East West Corridor

Issues Scan

**Prepared by the Westchester County
Department of Public Works and Transportation**

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Introduction

In 2010, through a collaboration between the US Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development, a \$3.5 million Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant was awarded to the New York – Connecticut Sustainable Consortium to undertake sustainability planning efforts to integrate housing, economic development, transportation and environmental planning.

The Consortium covers the geography of four metropolitan planning organizations— the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, the South Western Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Greater Bridgeport/Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization and South Central Regional Council of Governments. It includes nine cities - New York City, Yonkers, Mount Vernon, New Rochelle and White Plains in Westchester, and Stamford, Norwalk, Bridgeport and New Haven in Connecticut. Nassau and Suffolk Counties and the LI Regional Planning Council represent Long Island.

As members of the consortium, the cities of Yonkers, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle represent the largest municipalities in Westchester County with a combined population of 340,330, or approximately 36% of the total Westchester County population, per the 2010 US Census. Each of these cities faces a unique set of challenges related to sustainability planning in areas of transportation, housing, infrastructure, economic development and climate change adaptation.

The three cities of Yonkers, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle were originally planned as some of the region’s first suburbs and continue to serve multiple purposes as bedroom communities for people working in New York City, as well as vital centers of economic, commercial, cultural and recreational activity. They each have an urban core built around a Metro-North Railroad station, which provides vast opportunities for strengthening transit oriented development, and are each served by several routes of Westchester County’s Bee-Line bus system. They have also undergone much change, particularly since manufacturing declined in the mid to end of the twentieth century.

As part of the work of the Consortium, a working group was formed to develop an issues scan that would discuss existing conditions in the corridor, and serve as a framework for developing solutions to addressing some of the challenges related to sustainability planning. Working group members consist of representatives of the Westchester County Department of Public Works and Transportation, Westchester County Department of Planning, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, New York State Department of Transportation, Regional Plan Association and municipalities of Yonkers, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle.

Public Outreach

As part of the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, a public meeting was held on February 15, 2012, at the Mount Vernon City Hall. The meeting consisted of an overview of the

Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program, presentations by each municipality on individual initiatives, and breakout sessions for participants to share their concerns and provide input to the planning process. The public expressed concerns about a range of issues including the need for economic development, improvements to the downtown streetscapes, development that is appropriate to the existing scale of each municipality, the potential for community branding, rehabilitating historic buildings and better access to fresh food.

Transportation

Cross County Parkway

The Southern Westchester East West Corridor contains the Cross County Parkway which is a limited access roadway extending from the Saw Mill River Parkway on the west to the Hutchinson River Parkway on the east. According to the New York State DOT, the Cross County Parkway carries approximately 80,000 vehicles per day (AADT) from the Saw Mill River Parkway east to the Bronx River Parkway, and approximately 120,000 vehicles per day from the Bronx River Parkway east to the Hutchinson River Parkway.

The Cross County begins in Yonkers at exit 4 of the Saw Mill River Parkway. A short distance after, the roadway divides into local and express lanes before forming an intricate interchange with the New York State Thruway (I-87) and NY 100 near the Cross County Shopping Center. At exit 6, the Cross County interchanges with the Bronx River Parkway near Bronxville, after which the local and express lanes end and merge together. At exit 8, the parkway meets NY 22 as North Columbus Avenue before coming to exit 9, a connector to the southbound Hutchinson River Parkway. The Cross County curves sharply northward to parallel the Hutchinson before merging with its northbound lanes.

The Cross County is the only parkway in New York State that has express and local lanes. It is also the only east-west limited access roadway between the Cross-Bronx Expressway to the south and the Cross-Westchester Expressway to the north.

MTA Metro-North Railroad

The Southern Westchester East West Corridor traverses the Hudson, Harlem and New Haven Lines of MTA Metro-North Railroad which provide rail service south to New York City and north to Putnam and Dutchess Counties. Inbound boardings and estimates of reverse commuters at the stations in Yonkers, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle are as follows:

MNR Station	Inbound Weekday Boardings	Estimated Reverse Commuters
Yonkers	1,255	200 (15%)
Greystone	489	2 (.4%)
Glenwood	316	1 (.3%)
Ludlow	263	20 (7%)
Mount Vernon East	1,527	500 (34%)
Mount Vernon West	1,023	400 (40%)
New Rochelle	3,970	400 (9%)

The Yonkers and New Rochelle stations also serve Amtrak. Ridership on Amtrak is shown below:

Amtrak Average Daily Ridership

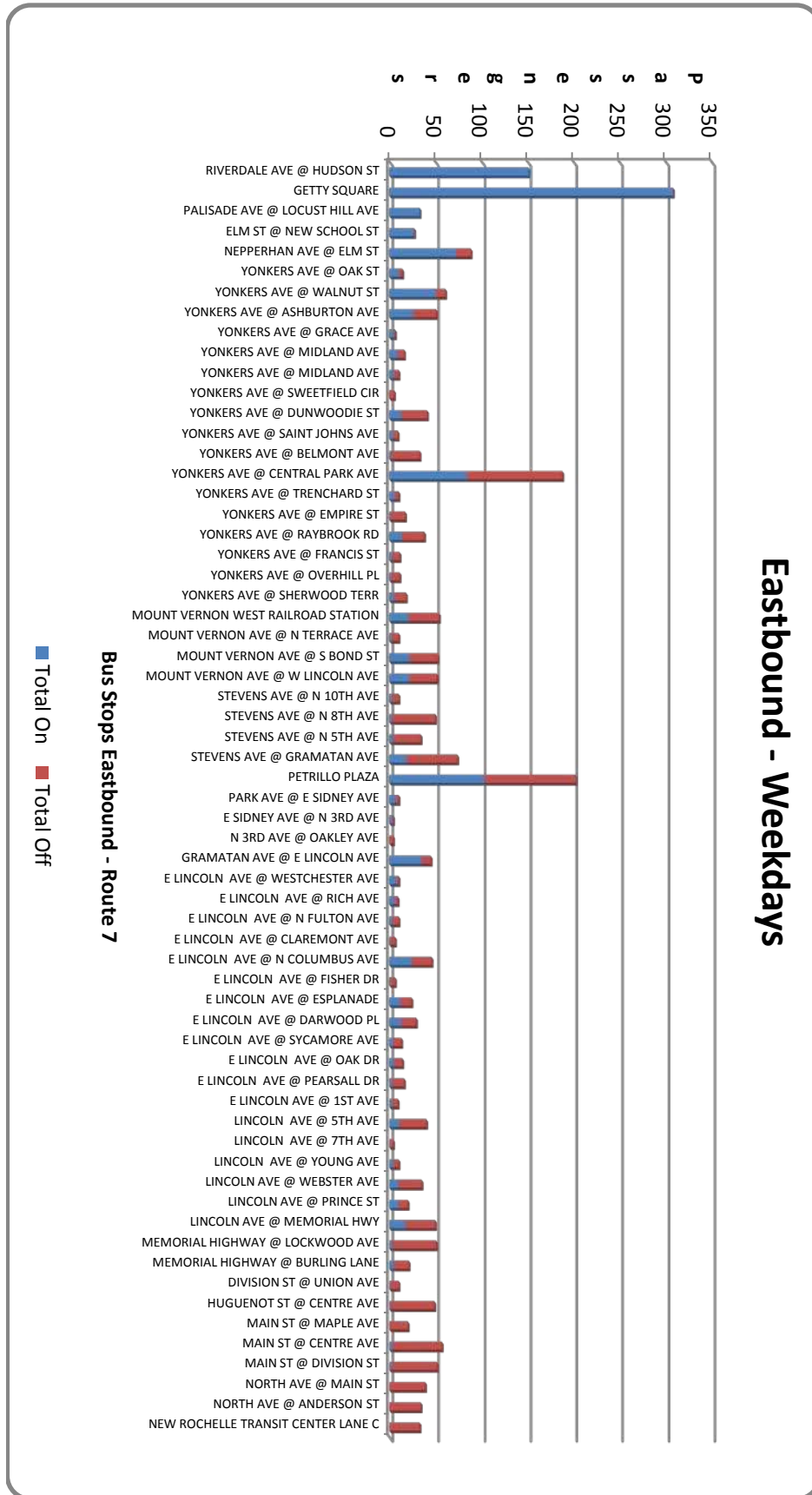
<u>Yonkers</u>	<u>New Rochelle</u>
61	232

Westchester County Bee-Line System

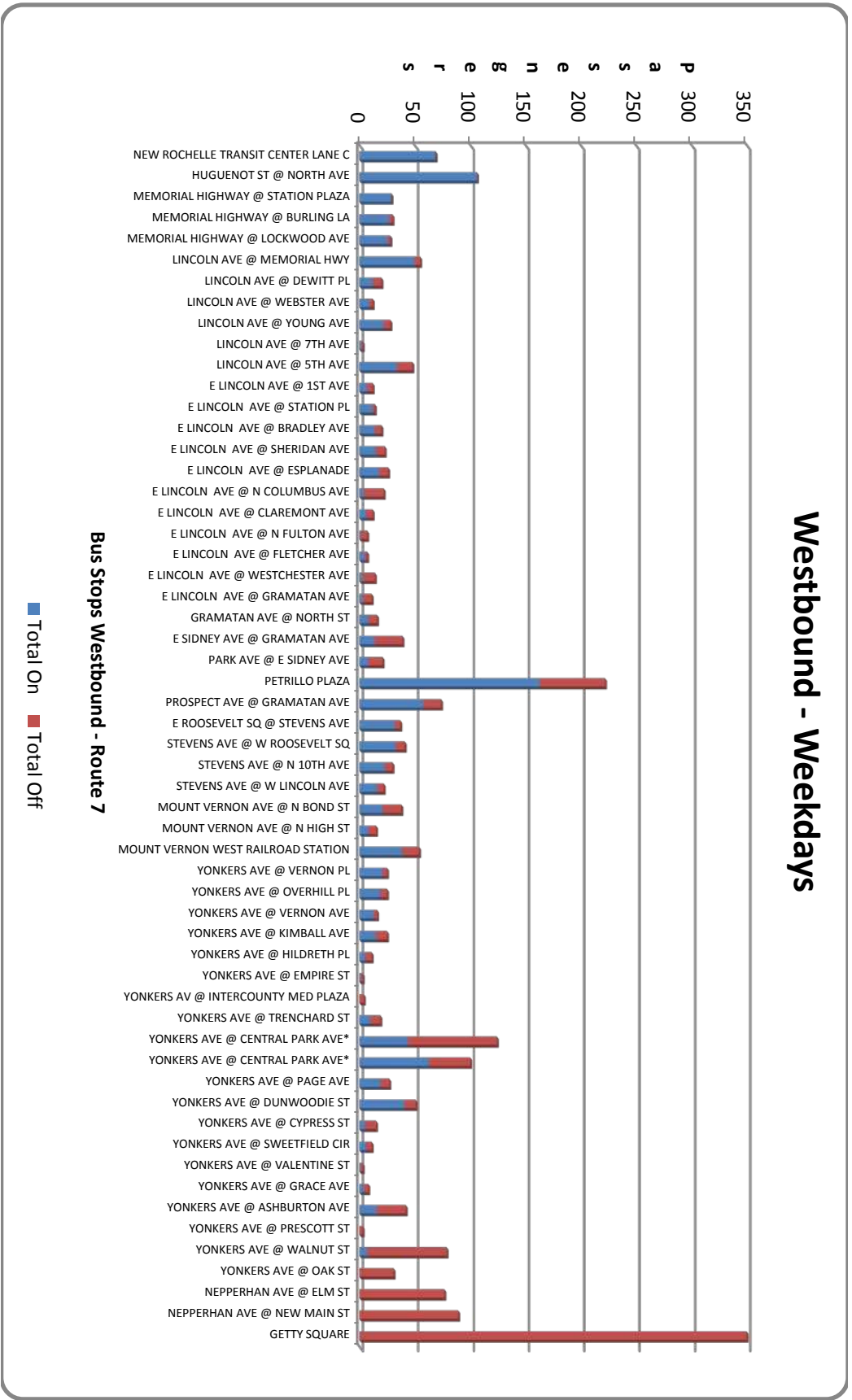
Several Bee-Line Bus routes operate within the Southern Westchester East West Corridor. The primary east west route is the Route 7 which begins at Riverdale Avenue in Yonkers and stops at Getty Square, before traveling east on Yonkers Avenue and then to the Mount Vernon West station on the Harlem Line. After serving Petrillo Plaza, which is adjacent to the Mount Vernon East Metro-North Railroad station in downtown Mount Vernon, the route continues on Gramatan Avenue, then east on Lincoln Avenue, and south on Memorial Highway to downtown New Rochelle and the Metro-North Railroad station. The Route 7 operates seven days a week with a relatively high volume of service – 54 eastbound and 49 westbound trips each weekday. Both 40 foot and 60 foot articulated buses are used on the route. As of 2012, the Route 7 carried the second highest number of riders in the Bee-Line System, with only the Route 20 operating on Central Avenue carrying more passengers. The annual ridership for the Route 7 in 2012 was 2,308,095 unlinked trips.

Passenger counts were performed on the Route 7 in 2012, from 7:15 am to 7:15 pm in the eastbound direction, and from 7:10 am to 6:42 pm in the westbound direction. The counts showed that the greatest ridership volume consistently occurs between Yonkers and Mount Vernon. Getty Square in Yonkers is the busiest stop, followed by Petrillo Plaza in Mount Vernon. The two stops on Yonkers Avenue at Central Avenue (on either side of the Thruway overpass) are the third and fourth busiest locations. The on/off counts within the City of New Rochelle are spread out within the downtown area, unlike Yonkers and Mount Vernon. Total eastbound and westbound ridership for weekdays and Saturdays is shown in the following tables. Also included is sample ridership for specific east and westbound trips.

All trips were surveyed between 7:15 AM and 7:15 PM

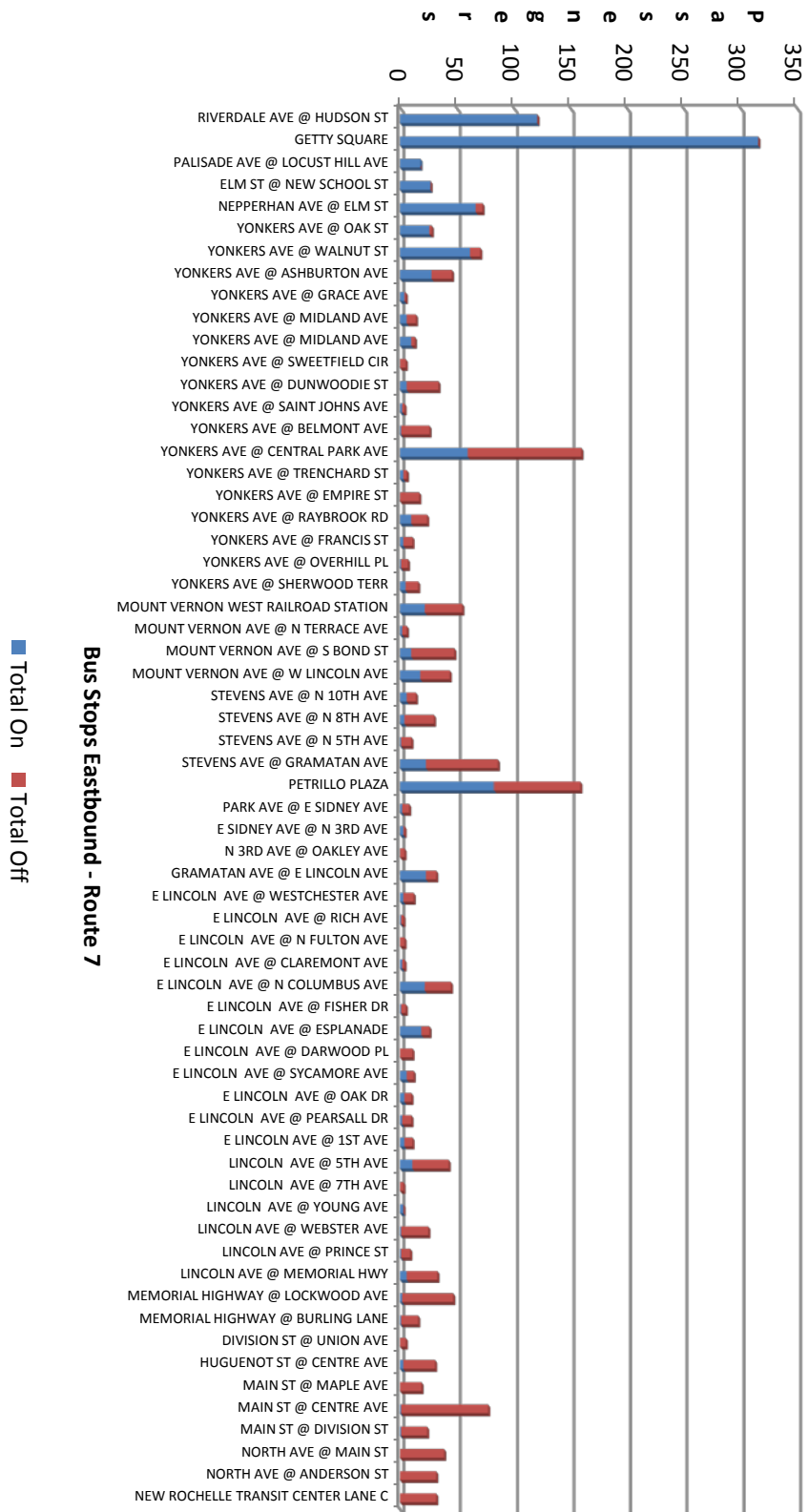


Westbound - Weekdays



All trips were surveyed between 7:10 AM and 6:42 PM
 *Two stops at Central Avenue on east and west sides of NYS Thruway

Eastbound - Saturday

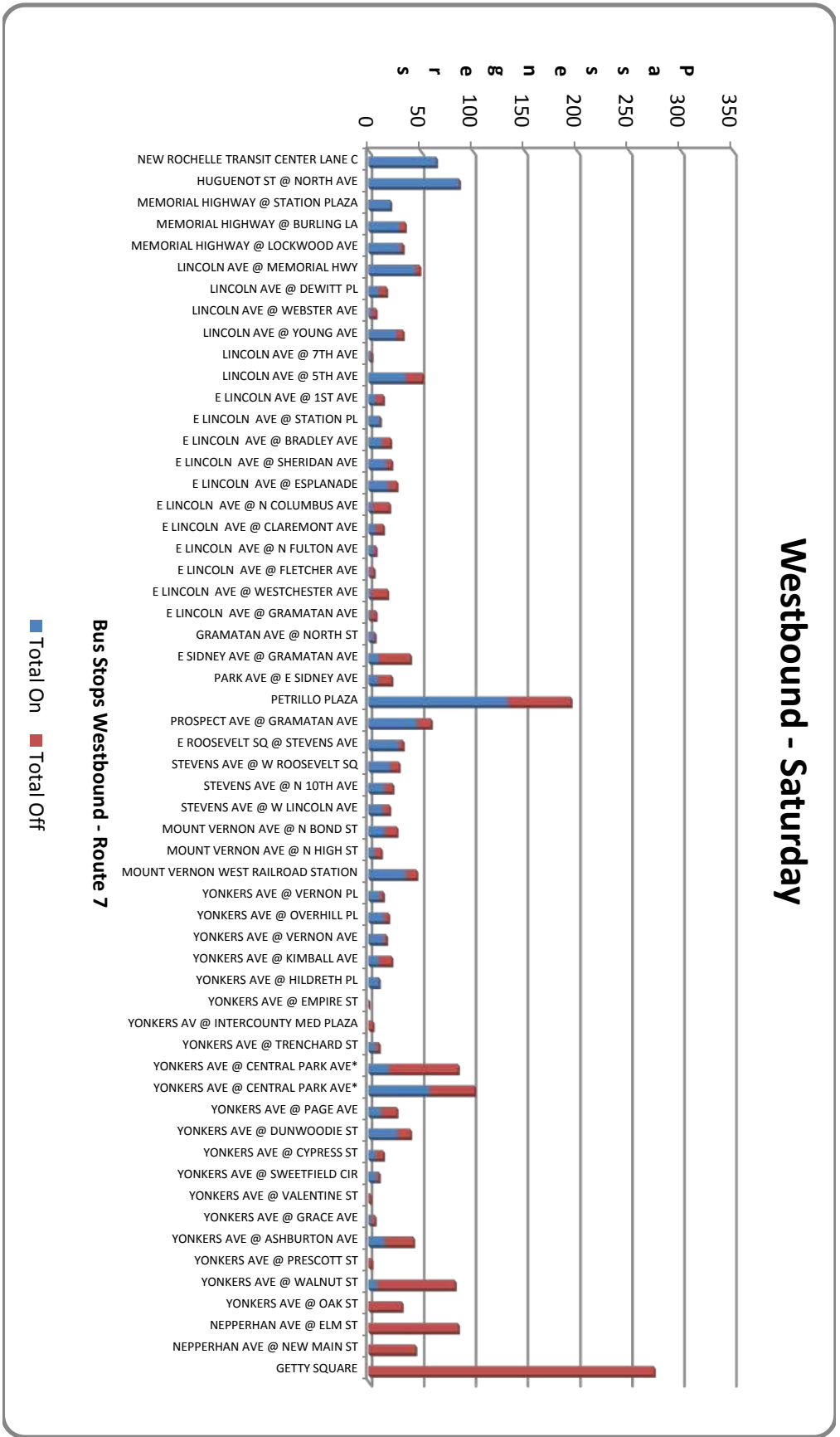


All trips were surveyed between 7:15 AM and 10:20 PM

Bus Stops Eastbound - Route 7

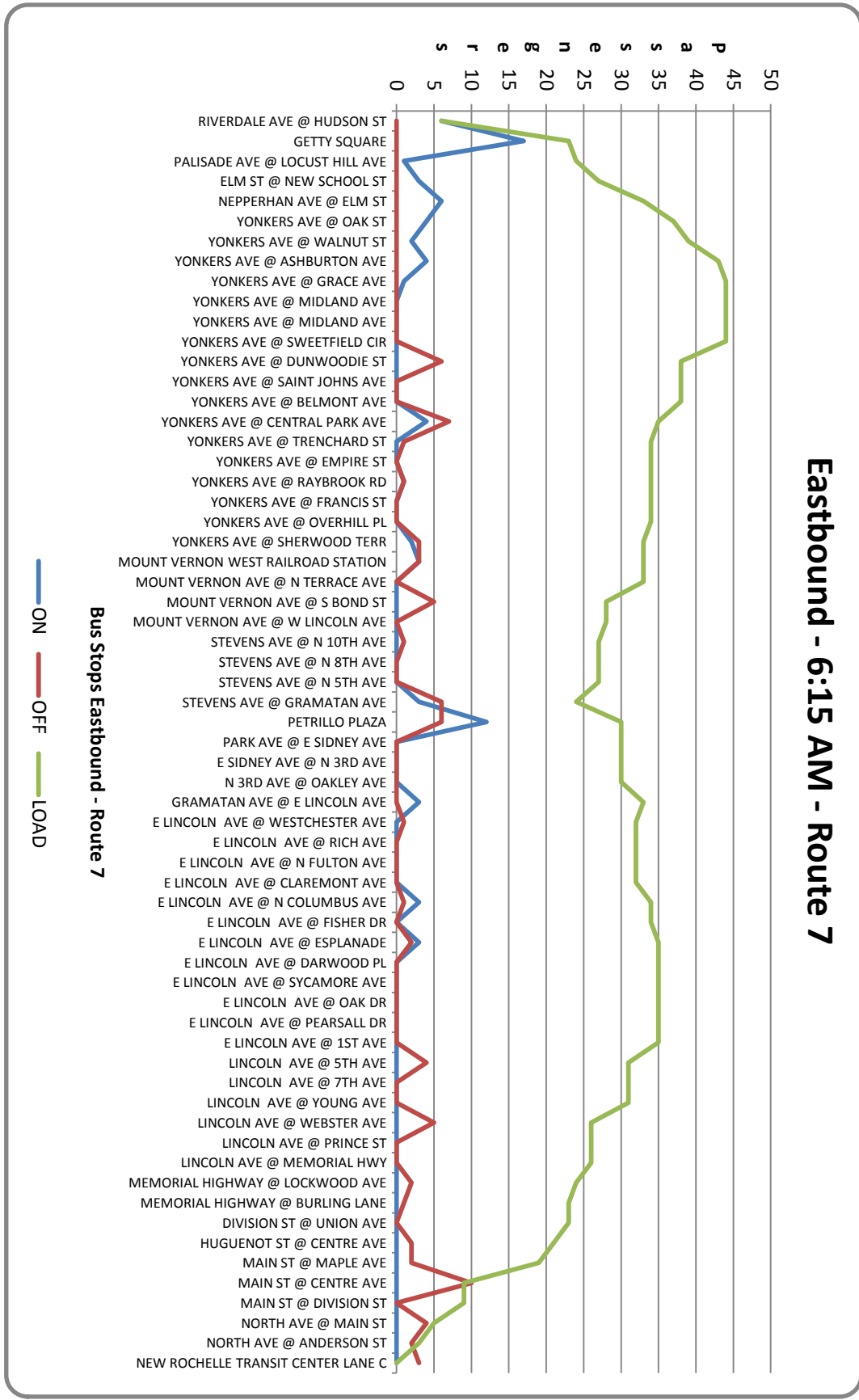
■ Total On ■ Total Off

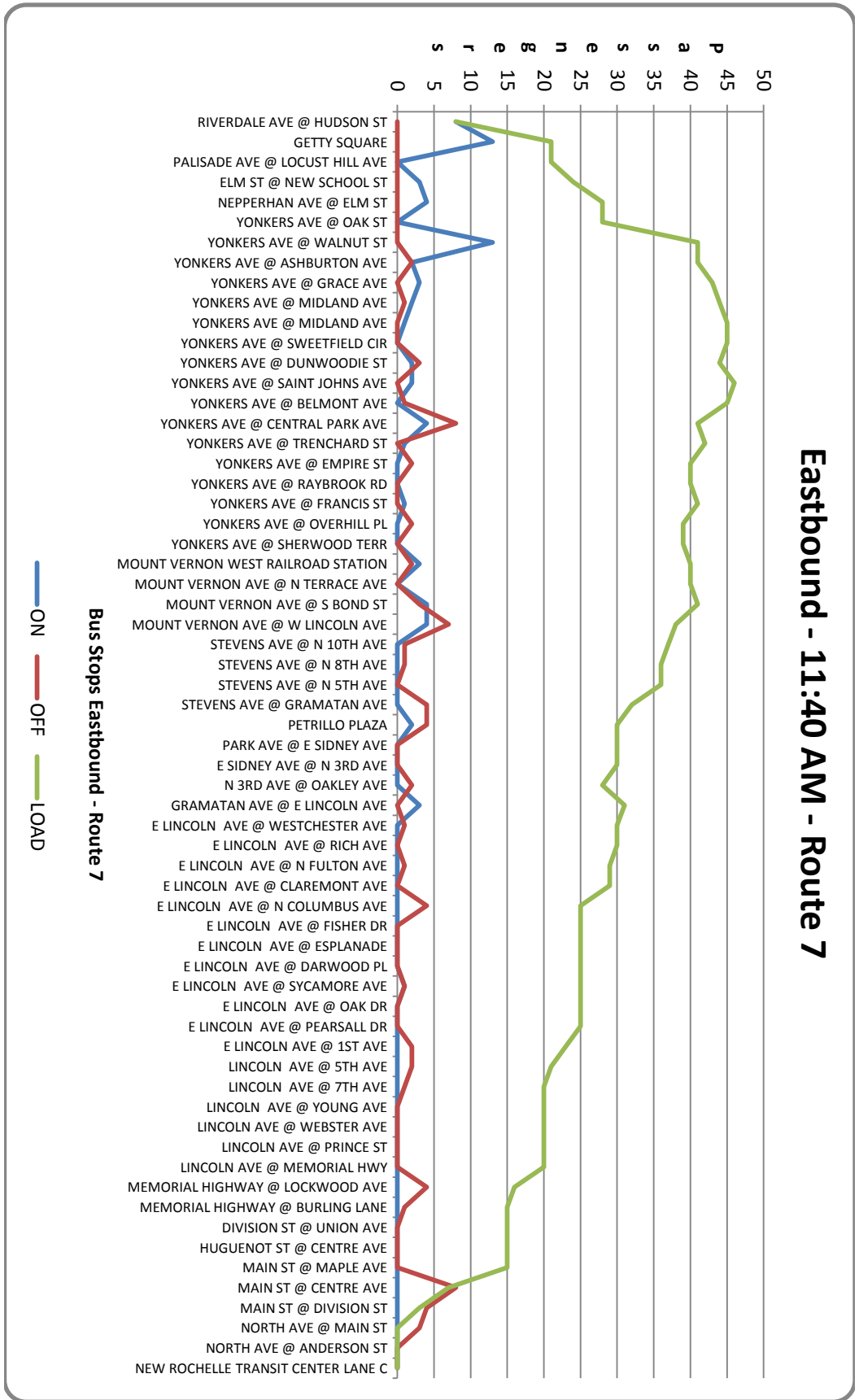
Westbound - Saturday



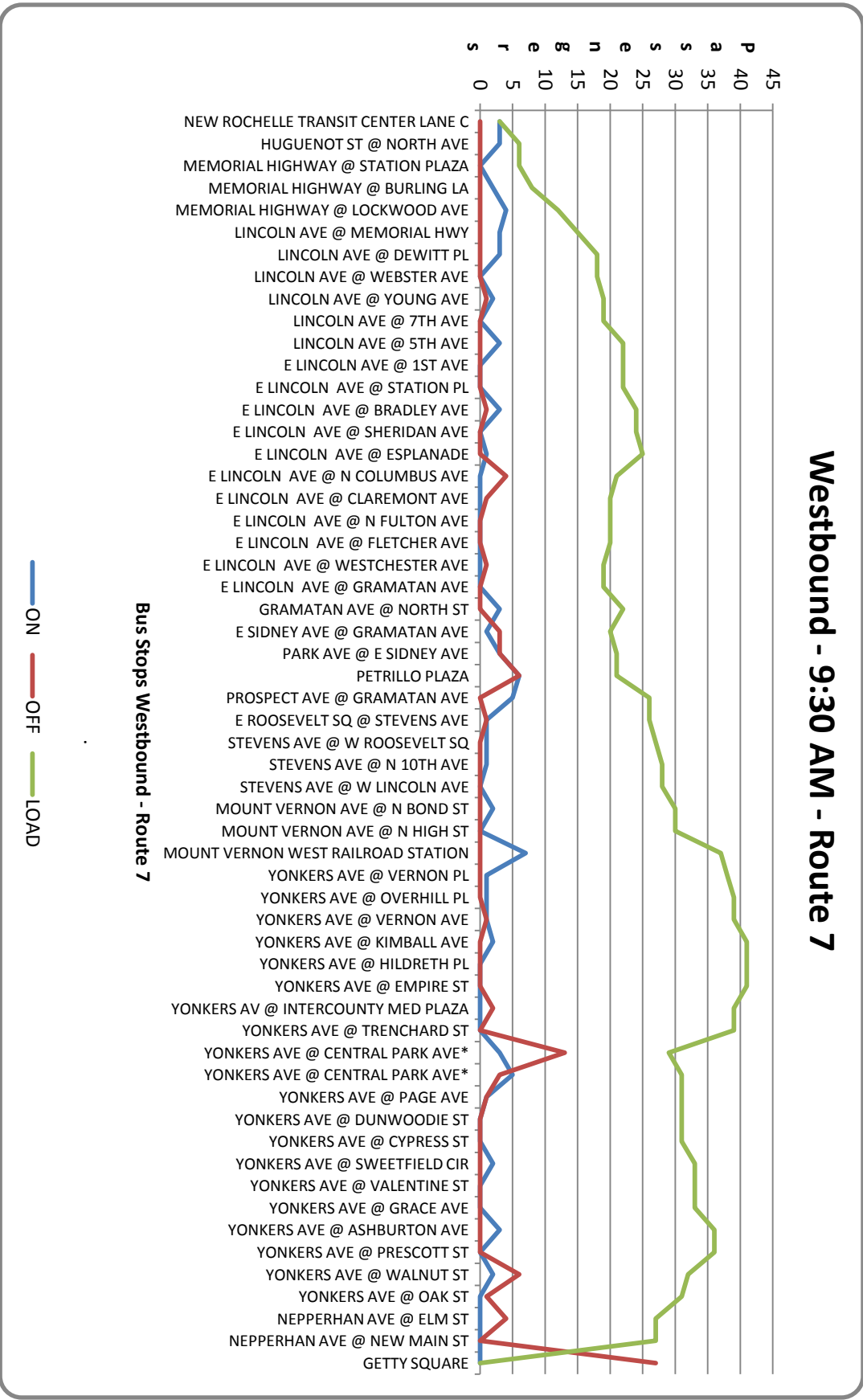
All trips were surveyed between 7:30 AM and 9:23 PM
 *Two stops at Central Avenue on east and west sides of NYS Thruway

Eastbound - 6:15 AM - Route 7



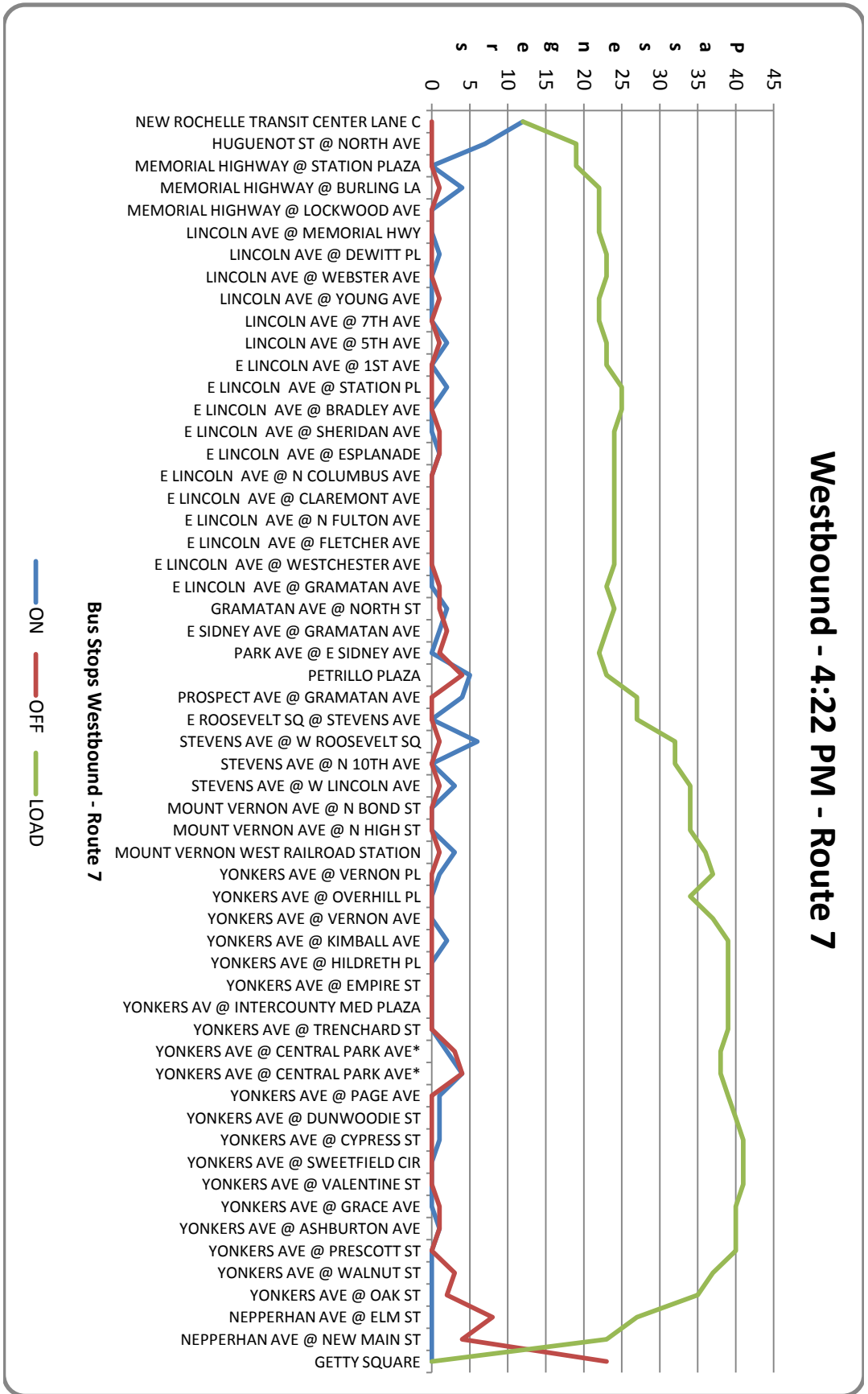


Westbound - 9:30 AM - Route 7



*Two stops at Central Avenue on east and west sides of NYS Thruway

Westbound - 4:22 PM - Route 7



*Two stops at Central Avenue on east and west sides of NYS Thruway

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

One of the more interesting aspects of the three cities that are part of the Southern Westchester East West Corridor is that, as older cities, they have nearly complete sidewalk networks, particularly in their downtown areas. This is also true of the older suburbs of Pelham and Pelham Manor that lie between Mount Vernon and New Rochelle. The extensive sidewalk network creates a safe environment for pedestrians. When combined with slower traffic speeds and narrow, two lane roads, the walking environment becomes even more pleasurable for the pedestrian.

An extensive sidewalk network can be the foundation of a “Complete Streets” approach to bicycle and pedestrian planning. Complete streets enable safe and convenient access for all users including pedestrians, bicycles, transit riders, drivers of various types of vehicles and people of all ages and abilities, including children, seniors and the disabled. In 2012, the City of New Rochelle adopted Complete Streets and Sustainable Complete Streets policies. The later includes Complete Streets with elements of design, construction and operation that also address environmental sustainability.

The Cities of Yonkers, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle have hosted Walkable Communities workshops to gather public input on impediments to safe walking, and in some cases biking, and to develop solutions to facilitating more walking and biking. These were held in 2004 in Mount Vernon, and in 2007, in Yonkers. In the City of Mount Vernon, recommendations from the workshop were implemented with several improvements to the Petrillo Plaza area in the downtown. There included construction of a center island median, improved streetscapes, landscaping, safer crosswalks, wider sidewalks, new bus shelters, seating, lighting and pedestrian signals.

The Cities of Mount Vernon and New Rochelle have also hosted Safe Routes to School (SRTS) workshops, aimed at increasing walking and biking to school, in order to decrease traffic congestion and improve air quality around schools, and encourage a healthy lifestyle among school children. SRTS workshops were held at the Trinity and Ward Elementary Schools in New Rochelle (2007), and at the A.B. David Middle School in Mount Vernon (2009). A workshop was also held at the Siwanoy Elementary School (2006) in Pelham Manor.

Westchester County’s network of bicycle and pedestrian trailways and bikeways complements the sidewalk infrastructure to create a seamless network of walking and biking facilities. The trailways are oriented north/south and provide non-motorized links from the Southern Westchester East West Corridor to the central and northern parts of the county, Putnam County and the Bronx.

Existing trailways and bikeways that serve the three cities of the Southern Westchester East West Corridor and link it to points north include:

- South County Trailway (Yonkers)

- Old Croton Aqueduct Trailway (Yonkers)
- Bronx River Pathway (Mount Vernon and Yonkers)
- Hutchinson River Pathway (New Rochelle)
- Westchester RiverWalk (Yonkers)
- Leatherstocking Trail (New Rochelle)
- Colonial Greenway (New Rochelle)

In addition to these existing facilities, the following potential facilities have been proposed:

- South County Trailway – construction of the one remaining segment of this trailway between Route 119 and Warehouse Lane in Elmsford/Greenburgh.
- Bronx River Pathway – Construction of the remaining segments of this trailway: 1) between Crane Road and Greenacres Drive in Scarsdale/Greenburgh and 2) between Scout Field and the Bronx line in Bronxville/Yonkers.
- New York State Bicycle Route 1 – On-street bike route paralleling US Route 1 corridor from the Bronx border to the Connecticut border, which will serve as an interim route for the East Coast Greenway until an off-road route is developed.

A major impediment to bicycling is the availability of secure and convenient bicycle parking for both multifamily, residential structures and commercial buildings. In 2009, the City of New Rochelle adopted a bicycle parking ordinance which requires, for any structure requiring site plan approval, one bicycle parking space for every 10 vehicle parking spaces that are required by zoning with new commercial buildings, and for residential buildings with 10 or more units. The ordinance specifies design criteria including dimensions, lighting, compatibility with natural elements, compatibility with street furniture and the need for easy access and use. Other impediments to increasing cycling are high volumes of traffic on several roadways and steep grades in some areas.

In 2010, graduate students from the New York University Wagner School for Public Service conducted a study on the feasibility of bike sharing in Westchester County. This effort was part of NYU's "capstone" requirement to work with a client organization, to develop solutions that address an issue that the organization is facing. The study gathered information on how bike share programs work in other regions in the United States and abroad, then selected four locations in Westchester to be analyzed in more detail for their potential to host bike sharing programs.

The four locations included the City of Mount Vernon, the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail (originating in Yonkers at the southern end), and the Long Island Sound Corridor from Rye to New Rochelle. The fourth location was the City of White Plains. The study concluded that each of the four locations could host a successful bike share program. In order for the programs to realize their full potential, however, additional bicycle infrastructure in the form of off and on-road lanes and paths would be needed to improve safety and encourage additional cycling.

The final bicycle issue in the corridor concerns low income workers who use bicycles on a daily basis to commute to and from work. Many of these riders cannot afford cars or the bus fare, and need a safe way to travel by bicycle.

Land Use

The corridor includes a wide variety of land uses typical of urban and suburban areas. Three major urban centers anchor the corridor, containing higher density commercial and residential land uses – Yonkers, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle. Several other mixed use downtowns and centers are also located in the corridor – Pelham and Pelham Manor, Bronxville, Fleetwood in Mount Vernon and commercial areas such as the Cross County Shopping Center. As is in all of Westchester County, the most common land use within the corridor is residential, ranging from medium density single family homes to high-rise residential towers in the downtowns.

There has been a progressive decline in the amount of land zoned for industrial use in the corridor and surrounding municipalities since the end of World War II, with few large industrial districts remaining. The earliest industries were traditionally located near the waterfront and their potential for future growth has been constrained by a lack of direct access to the interstate highway system. Many older industrial sites along the waterfront have also been redeveloped for residential and recreational development.

While the decline in the amount of space occupied by industrial uses, and a reduction in the number of jobs generated by the manufacturing sector reflect a broader shift of the county's manufacturing based economy to one dominated by finance, service and retail sectors, the industrial sector remains more active in the corridor than elsewhere in the county. Much of the new construction has been designed so that it can be adapted to a variety of applications ranging from office and laboratory uses to assembly and distribution.

A number of smaller industrial enclaves remain viable in areas such as Fifth Avenue in New Rochelle, Fullerton Avenue in Yonkers, and Marbledale Road in Tuckahoe. Examples of the types of businesses at these locations include fuel oil and natural gas distribution, automotive and other mechanical repair, and distribution of construction and landscaping supplies.

A substantial amount of existing industrial space has been adapted for use as self storage facilities, and combined with the number of new facilities constructed in recent years, passive storage has been one of the most active categories of commercial development in the region, with more than one million square feet of self storage space coming on line in the corridor in the twenty-first century to date. However, despite the absorption of a large amount of floor space, the number of jobs added is insignificant, and represents a huge decline from the sites' former employment capacity.

There have also been several sites previously zoned for industrial use that have been redeveloped as planned, large scale retail complexes designed to draw a regional market. These include projects on Weyman Avenue in New Rochelle, Sandford Boulevard in Mount Vernon

and on Boston Post Road in Pelham Manor, as well as at two neighboring sites in northern Yonkers, on Austin Avenue and Ridge Hill Boulevard, the later which also includes a significant residential component.

Major open spaces are limited to several county parks and golf courses, including Tibbetts Brook County Park and Dunwoodie County Golf Course in Yonkers, the Bronx River Parkway Reservation and the Nature Study Woods County Park at the Eastchester and New Rochelle boundary. Other open spaces include several private golf courses, school properties and local parks. Among the most prominent geographic features influencing development patterns are interior water bodies and the watershed and wetlands areas surrounding them. The largest of these are the Grassy Sprain and Hillview reservoirs.

Westchester 2025

Westchester 2025 is the county's long range land use planning document. The web-based set of policies and tools can be found at www.westchester2025.westchestergov.com. An important goal of **Westchester 2025** is to develop a new "Vision Plan" for the county which incorporates local comprehensive plans and visions into an overall, county-wide understanding of the future of the county and its infrastructure needs. The Vision Plan will also help preserve the valuable character of its communities while helping to deal with important county-wide and intermunicipal issues. The Vision Plan process is utilizing detailed analyses of all 43 of the county's zoning ordinances. These analyses approximate the amount of development that could occur, and some of the resulting impacts in each community, if all vacant and underdeveloped land were to be built-out according to current zoning.

The analysis approximates both the amount of potential development under existing zoning and the impacts of the potential additional development. The analysis not only estimates the number of potential single and multi-family dwelling units and potential non-residential development, it also approximates the additional population and additional number of school children, as well as the increase in energy use and increase in residential water consumption resulting from the potential development. Within the corridor, this analysis has already been drafted for two communities, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle, and has been provided to these cities' officials.

The draft analysis for the City of Mount Vernon, completed in 2011, calculated the amount of development potential on vacant and "underdeveloped" parcels throughout the city under existing zoning requirements. There were 188 buildable vacant parcels of land and 655 underdeveloped parcels identified and utilized in the analysis.

The draft analysis for the City of New Rochelle, completed in 2010, calculated the amount of development potential on vacant and "underdeveloped" parcels throughout the city under existing zoning requirements. There were 256 buildable vacant parcels of land and 890 underdeveloped parcels identified and utilized in the analysis.

Parking

Parking regulations are included in zoning ordinances. The three municipalities largely have minimum parking requirements. On-street parking is also regulated by time of day and day of week, and fees are charged in downtown areas.

The City of New Rochelle allows waivers to minimum parking requirements under certain circumstances. These have included shared parking arrangements in mixed use developments and reduced parking requirements for senior housing. The City of Yonkers has also reduced parking ratios in some circumstances.

In 2009, a Parking Management Workshop was held in the City of Mount Vernon to examine demand, location, time, cost and supply of parking, and to develop strategies to make better use of parking and transportation resources. The study focused on the Petrillo Plaza area, looking at on-street parking, the Metro-North lot adjacent to Petrillo Plaza, the Gramatan Avenue parking structure, and the Rite-Aid/Foodtown lot. The study found that there was excess parking capacity and recommended making better use of existing parking facilities, through shared parking arrangements and unbundled parking.

Municipal Initiatives

City of New Rochelle

Echo Bay Waterfront Development

Echo Bay is a sheltered inlet located on the Long Island Sound. The entire Echo Bay project area consists of over 10 acres of City-owned land primarily consisting of the City Yard and City Armory properties. The City's vision for the redevelopment of Echo Bay is to enhance views and vistas of the Long Island Sound from Main Street, create public access to the water for local residents and visitors, and to provide residential living on the waterfront at a density that is in scale with development elsewhere in the community.

The City selected Forest City Residential Group as its private partner to redevelop Echo Bay. The Echo Bay Redevelopment project consists of approximately 250-300 units of new rental housing, 30-50,000 square feet of neighborhood retail, and nearly five acres of publicly accessible open space along the water's edge.

City Yard Relocation

This project will relocate the Department of Public Works from its present locations along the waterfront (Pelham Road and Main Street) to an industrial area of New Rochelle (Beechwood Avenue). The relocation of this century old and outdated facility from a valuable waterfront location will make way for future development along the sound shore, while providing for a much needed improvement in the ability of the Department of Public Works to provide basic community services. The City has

prepared the Echo Bay Redevelopment Plan as a means to guide the redevelopment of the current “City Yard” property after relocation. The relocation of the existing Department of Public Works facility to the proposed DPW Maintenance and Operations Center is necessary for the redevelopment of the Echo Bay area to occur.

City Armory Revitalization

The City Armory is adjacent to the proposed Echo Bay site. It is currently inactive and in a major state of disrepair. The City sought to determine if a reuse of the former military outpost can be found that is sensitive to the community, self-sustaining and consistent with the City’s vision for Echo Bay as a vibrant, mixed-use community with public access to the Long Island Sound. The City has signed an agreement with a non-profit organization to move ahead with revitalization plans of the armory through rehabilitation and reuse to support mixed use occupancy, including as its primary use an indoor open, local, market. This revitalization will hopefully enhance the City’s shoreline, promote economic growth and foster job creation.

New Rochelle TOD Smart Growth Initiative

The City has utilized grant funding to retain consultants to complete a station area plan focused on creating a TOD zone within a half mile of the New Rochelle Transit Center to foster the integration of existing uses with future mixed-use, mixed-income, and energy-efficient developments. This will be accomplished through a comprehensive review and assessment of local and regional near-term, intermediate, and long-term mega-trends affecting the city’s assets, neighborhoods and downtown area. Overall, it is the intent that this work will lay a foundation and establish a road map toward a vision of future progress when economic and market conditions are favorable. It will describe the market trajectory and where it is heading, in order for New Rochelle to position itself and begin to establish an action plan to reach a future vision.

Gateway TOD @ Garden Street

The City solicited proposals in June of 2012 for the redevelopment of an approximately three acre site across the street from the City’s Transit Center hub, as a mixed-use development with an emphasis on commercial, rather than exclusive or predominantly residential development. The City will recognize and support increased zoning allowances and bonuses and reward efforts to promote its policies as outlined in its sustainability plan, “GreeNR.”

Update of Comprehensive Plan

Entitled “EnvisioNR” (“Envision New Rochelle”), the City’s update of the 1995 Comprehensive Plan was publicly launched in June, 2012. This process affords the public an opportunity to weigh in on important issues affecting land use in the community. The plan is slated for completion in 2013. The resulting plan will provide a framework to guide future development and preservation that reflects current and anticipated

environmental, economic and social conditions. EnvisionNR focuses on six (6) major topics of interest that have been identified as priorities for New Rochelle's future.

- economic development
- land use + zoning
- mobility + infrastructure
- neighborhoods + housing
- open space + community resources
- urban design + preservation

City of Mount Vernon

Marketing Campaign

The City's main goal is to attract jobs and more commercial entities within the City. The purpose of the campaign is to provide residents with greater ability to shop in the same community in which they live and to capture more of the market share that is "leaking" out of Mount Vernon. The City of Mount Vernon is employing strategies geared to attract companies and businesses that may relocate or expand within the City of Mount Vernon. This marketing campaign is being implemented through the City's Industrial Development Agency, Empire Zone Program and the Urban Renewal Agency.

Comprehensive Plan

The City of Mount Vernon is updating its comprehensive plan to guide preservation and development of the City's physical environment. The purpose of the plan is to provide guidance for future planning and land development. It provides goals, policies and guidelines for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement and growth of Mount Vernon. The Plan includes topics such as preserving and revitalizing community character, identifying areas where development should occur and outlining strategies for improving transportation facilities, while encompassing planning strategies such as smart growth, complete streets and sustainable development principles.

Canal Village

As identified in the proposed, updated Comprehensive Plan, the City of Mount Vernon is focused on the redevelopment of an area located in the southeastern section of the City, locally known as "Canal Village." The City seeks to revitalize the Canal Village Area by identifying potential brownfield sites and vacant space while maximizing the use of existing resources. The City also seeks to increase the use of the City's waterway resources and provide a greater number of commercial offerings within the City of Mount Vernon for employment purposes to increase the City's tax base.

In addition, the City of Mount Vernon is working with the Village of Pelham Manor to develop an inter-municipal overlay district. This district will provide regional economic gains for both municipalities, while protecting and enhancing resources such as, but not limited to, infrastructure and natural resources in both Pelham and Mount Vernon.

Rezoning Investigation

In accordance with the proposed Comprehensive Plan, the City is evaluating the appropriate rezoning of the City. Currently, many of the City's zoning districts do not accurately reflect the built land uses within the City's neighborhoods. Accordingly, Mount Vernon seeks to rezone all of its areas appropriately and promote mixed use development along commercial corridors and near its transit hubs, with emphasis on the Mount Vernon East Train Station/Downtown and the Mount Vernon West Train Station. The appropriate zoning will also bring greater commercial amenities to the Fleetwood area. This rezoning will increase and maximize the City's tax base.

Sustainability Initiative

The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program is a direct allocation that the City of Mount Vernon received from the United States Department of Energy. The funds are being used to generate a Citywide "green" ordinance and to assist the City with incorporating "green" strategies into the City's zoning code. This includes zoning code changes that promote or incentivize energy efficient development, design standards to maximize natural day lighting of spaces and green roof technology. Also, this includes devising parking standards that permit shared parking among commercial and residential developments. The funds allow the City to engage a local academic institution with expertise in sustainable practices to evaluate best practices from around the country for incorporation in the City of Mount Vernon.

Mount Vernon East Train Station/Downtown

The Mount Vernon East Train Station Area/Downtown is an existing transit oriented development location. However, with the relocation of the train station from Petrillo Plaza (Downtown) to one block north, the City lost much of its downtown connectivity. This situation, coupled with rail tracks that divide the City north and south, has spread out the City's downtown, as opposed to creating a clustered downtown nucleus which is typically found in most downtown areas. The City has applied for a grant from New York State to assist with the planning of this area. While the City has not determined the appropriate strategy for establishing greater connectivity, the City has conducted preliminary planning studies to understand the economics and other socio-economic dynamics that drive the City's economy. These preliminary planning studies consist of a Walkable Communities Workshop and a Downtown Mount Vernon Parking Workshop to name a few. However, the strategy for redeveloping this area, when it is ultimately determined, will consist of creating more commercial amenities for residents through larger floor space for commercial tenants. This will also increase employment opportunities and sales taxes for the City.

Mount Vernon West Train Station

The City of Mount Vernon is exploring and implementing long range transit oriented development strategies for the Mount Vernon West Train Station Area. Because of Mount Vernon West's built out nature, transit oriented development for this area had once meant residents living near their industrial jobs along MacQuesten Parkway, where

the industrial employers used the train to ship products. As industry changed in order to stay competitive, transit oriented development for this area has meant mixed use, higher density development, which is the main strategy for redeveloping this area. By creating more commercial amenities for residents, through larger floor space for commercial tenants, employment opportunities and sales taxes will increase for the City.

Hutchinson River Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

This planning initiative seeks to maximize the use of a natural resource (the Hutchinson River) for its economic, ecological, recreational and health benefits. To do so, the City obtained a grant from New York State to study and develop implementable economic, ecological and recreational strategies to increase the use of the Hutchinson River. Currently, this study is underway.

South Fourth Avenue Urban Renewal Plan

In an effort to spark redevelopment along South Fourth Avenue and East Third Streets, the City is developing an urban renewal plan for this particular area. The urban renewal plan will focus on preservation and redevelopment strategies for the properties within the area. The City is currently constructing this urban renewal plan.

Senior Citizen Housing Floating Zone

After studying the City's total population, it was found that the City's senior population (62 years and over) consisted of a significant portion of the City's total population. Therefore, the City is proposing a senior citizen housing floating zone that will increase the property values of the City, while providing housing opportunities for senior citizens in locations convenient to shopping, transportation and community facilities. The City seeks to ensure that these types of developments are constructed with superior functional design, a high quality of construction, appearance and operational standards. This strategy allows the City to implement a recommendation emphasized within the City's proposed Comprehensive Plan Update.

City of Yonkers

Downtown Revitalization

Yonkers has effected a significant change in its downtown area, particularly in the blocks surrounding the Yonkers Main Railroad Station. Almost a thousand market rate housing units have been built in the last 10 years changing the feel of the community. Five hundred additional units, including the first micro-units in Westchester County, were approved in 2013. Because of this influx of new residents, services and restaurants have come back to the area.

The Board of Education and the Yonkers Public Library share a rehabilitated former Otis Elevator Company building across the street from the Yonkers Main Station which, along with the train station and Bee-Line bus traffic, contributes to day long pedestrian and business activity in the area.

Daylighting of the Saw Mill River

In the early 1920's, the Saw Mill River, from Warburton Avenue to the Hudson River, was buried in a flume by the Army Corp of Engineers as a flood control project. Almost a hundred years later, a consortium of state politicians, local and regional environmental groups and the City of Yonkers began to lobby for assistance to reopen the river. In 2012, with assistance from all levels of government, the Saw Mill River was opened to daylight creating a new water featured park in Larkin Plaza. This \$22 million project includes public spaces, outdoor classrooms, quiet areas for nature contemplation, areas for public performances and a fish ladder to assure the survival of the American Eel that breeds in the Saw Mill River. These improvements have spurred hundreds of millions of dollars of proposed development in the area surrounding the new park.

Downtown Rezoning

Recognizing that the current zoning was not resulting in the types of development that the City was seeking, Yonkers undertook a two year focused study resulting in a new zoning scheme for the downtown area, adopted in December, 2011. Form based and transit oriented, the new zoning moved away from the traditional Euclidean zoning ideas of separation of uses, towards a mixed use scheme that allows more uses in the downtown with fewer restrictions on their placement. Parking ratios were reduced to urban levels for new buildings and existing buildings saw their parking grandfathered for any potential use of the property. Three new primary zones span large swaths of the downtown instead of the dozen zoning districts which started and stopped in an artificial and confusing manner. The new zoning has begun to show its worth as several hundred dwelling units and several hundred thousand square feet of commercial spaces have been approved since its adoption.

Retailing

Yonkers has retained and expanded its strength in retailing with the revitalization of the Cross County Shopping Center on Central Park Avenue and the opening of the Ridge Hill Village on the NYS Thruway. Both of these centers are significantly assisted by the service of the Bee-Line System bringing large numbers of shoppers and employees to these regional job and shopping locations.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This issues scan represents the first step in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the Southern Westchester East-West Corridor stretching from New Rochelle to Yonkers. The three cities of New Rochelle, Mount Vernon and Yonkers all have urban downtowns that benefit from a robust local bus system provided by the Westchester County Bee-Line System, and a regional rail system provided by MTA Metro-North Railroad. However, all three municipalities struggle to secure development that is more successful and transit oriented. They continue to grapple with finding the right approach to assessing, planning and implementing TOD principles.

The existing bus routes serving the cities should be evaluated for ways to improve transit and increase its use. To begin this effort, the comprehensive passenger counts performed on the Bee-Line Route 7 have rich data that should be studied for meaningful implications on commuting and other travel behavior patterns. The results should then be used to develop appropriate bus service enhancements.

There is a nearly complete network of sidewalks in each downtown designed to ensure pedestrian safety. An extensive sidewalk network can be the foundation of a “Complete Streets” approach to bicycle and pedestrian planning.

The municipalities should build upon their street infrastructure to provide safe cycling routes through buffered bike lanes and traffic calming. Technology can also be useful for promoting bike safety. New York City, San Francisco and Toronto, Canada have web based applications, similar to Google maps, to help cyclists find routes of least resistance, www.RideTheCity.com.

Another interesting finding from the issues scan is that the corridor still has a vibrant industrial and manufacturing sector that continually redefines itself to adapt to applications ranging from office and laboratory uses, to assembly and distribution. The industrially zoned areas as well as the other keys findings from the report deserve to be integrated with other universally accepted TOD principles and implemented in the corridor.

The three municipalities should take next steps to develop a framework that can assess the desire and readiness to take current and new TOD related practices to the next level. Stakeholders should be identified as individuals or entities that transcend political term limits. Each municipality needs to identify and neutralize impediments to successful TOD. For example, minimum parking requirements can impede mixed-use development in already dense and overly developed downtown areas. Alternatives to minimum parking requirements, including unbundled or shared parking arrangements should be explored. The New York City Council recently passed the Manhattan Core parking text amendment that essentially changes minimum into maximum parking requirements in the Manhattan Core. Although this is a different context from southern Westchester, a similar approach could promote transit oriented development.

Lastly, the municipalities should also evaluate regulatory frameworks and incentives that could be effective in attracting developer interest. Examples include consolidating application processes for developers, and improving coordination among public and private financing sources. The adoption of form-based zoning codes should also be considered as a mechanism to allow for much greater flexibility in use types, and a way to establish standards for building form and public space.