

North Country Transportation Study Moves Forward with Key Recommendations

After more than a year of study, the North Country Transportation Study has found that the phased improvement of Route 11 and various connector routes to a four-lane standard is justified based on potential regional, statewide and national benefits.

In concept, improvements would span the North Country - using largely existing highway right-of ways - to connect Watertown and Plattsburgh, via Gouverneur, Canton, Potsdam and Malone. The corridor would also serve the major communities of Ogdensburg, Massena and Lowville (refer to the map and full description inside this newsletter).

This recommendation is based on a detailed analysis of a series of transportation alternatives, the results of which are outlined in a series of technical reports posted at www.danc.org/ncts.

How Did We Go To This Point?

In earlier tasks, eight transportation strategies were introduced including rail, highways, transit, bikeways and border-clearance. Each of the strategies were screened based on their potential to improve transportation access for people and goods to the region, from the region and within the region.

The results of the screening process suggested that while all strategies were important to the region, however, for purposes of evaluation, the study should focus on the east-west and north-south highway alternatives further. Furthermore, the screening process confirmed that all of the other modes were critical and that the evaluation process should identify which alternative offered the greatest potential for helping the development of the other modal strategies within the region.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stay involved! See the back page for details.

Based on the results of the screening process, the analysis focused on three specific highway alignments, two east-west and one north-south in orientation.

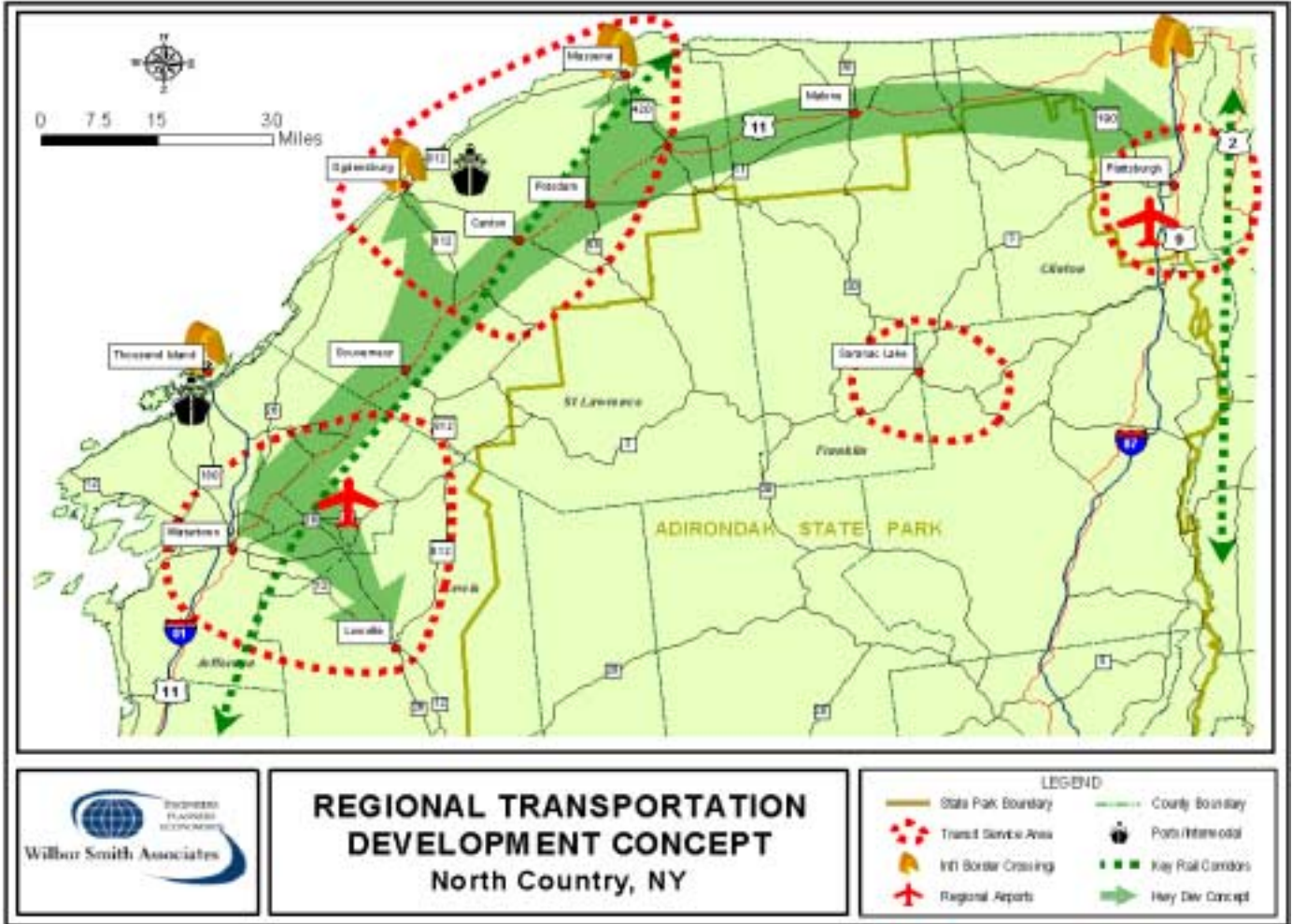
- **N/S Utica to Watertown/Ogdensburg** - Links the St. Lawrence Seaway to the New York State Thruway along Routes 12 and 812.
- **E/W St. Lawrence Seaway Alignment** - The entire east-west alignment between I-81 and I-87, including portions of Route 342 between I-81 and Massena, and portions of Rt 37, Rt 11 and Rt 190 eastward to I-87.
- **E/W Central Alignment** - The entire east-west alignment between I-81 to I-87, including portions of Route 11, 342 and 190. this alignment traverses across the center of the region.

Based on Economic Justification

At its onset, the overall motivation for this study was outlined as follows; The lack of accessibility to the region and mobility within the region creates barriers to desired economic development and hampers the goal of a well balanced quality of life for the region's residents.

In that light, the alternatives analysis used a variety of measures, including **efficiency measures** such as transportation system efficiency (travel expense, travel time, and value of accident reduction), and social efficiency (additional non-traveler benefits). All benefits are expressed in terms of a "willingness to pay" dollar value equivalent. In addition to these traditional measures, analysis was also based on **equity measures** such as the economic development impacts measured in terms of the additional income created in the region and aggregate economic growth which is the additional national income created due to enhanced productivity.

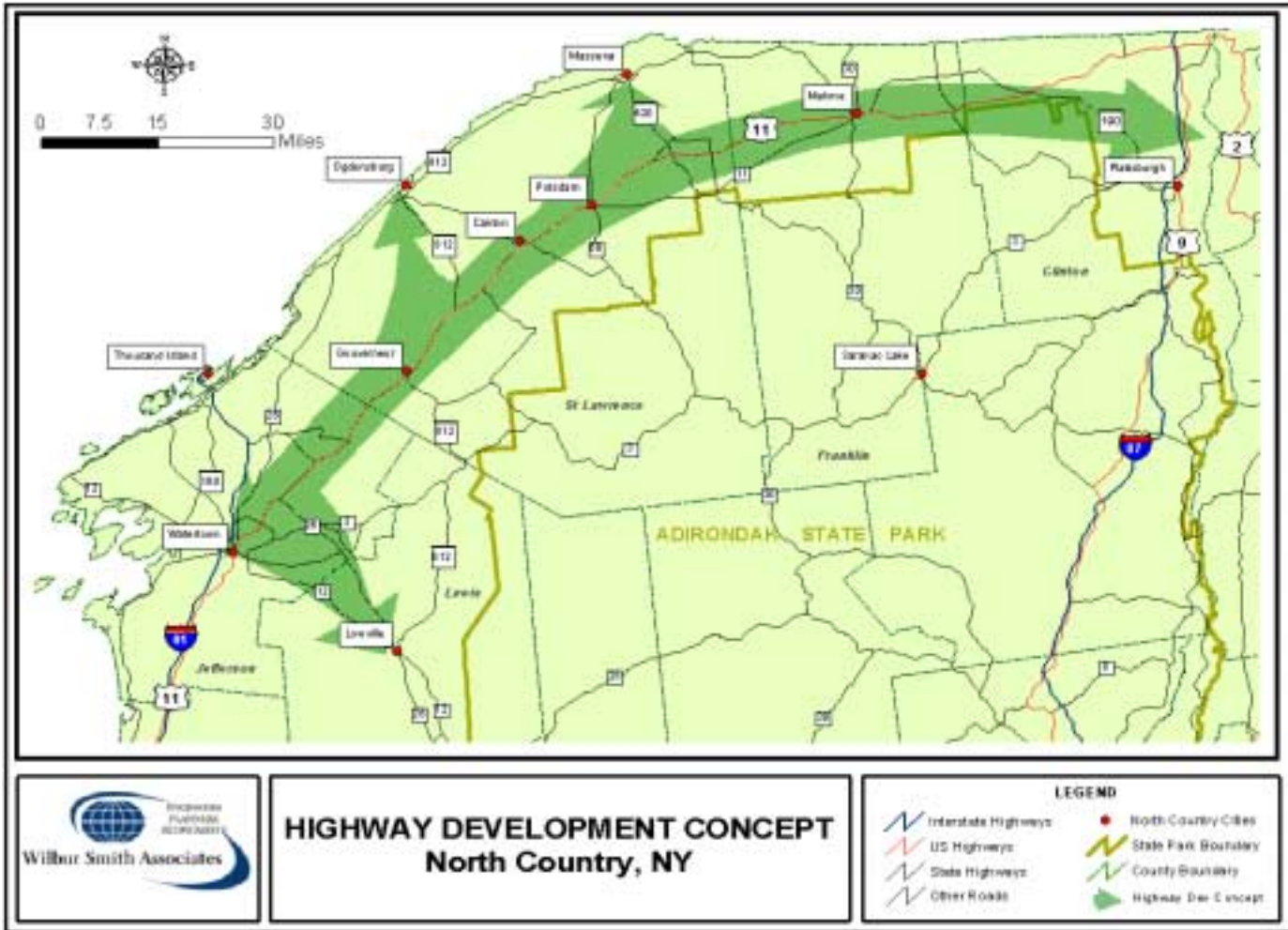
It is important to note that the analysis and the recommendations outlined in this newsletter are focused on identifying an overall corridor, which can include a number of specific routes in a "wide band" (see maps on next page). The selection of actual specific routes, "from mile marker to mile marker", are to be done in subsequent engineering and traffic detailed efforts.



The results of the study's screening process, the subsequent travel efficiency analysis and the economic development analysis produced the following conclusions: 1) While the region should pursue up to eight different modal development strategies, an east-west highway development approach should be pursued as part of a broader multi-modal strategy that also improves north-south travel routes. 2) Economic growth opportunities are maximized if the broad corridor concept follows generally along the existing Route 11 highway (ultimate alignment could include a variety of route options along the broad corridor). 3) Results further concluded that at the onset, the approach should center on using as much of the existing right-of-way along Route 11, to develop a four-lane expressway, or a freeway standard.

Proposed Corridor Supports the Other Modes

The proposed highway corridor development approach for the North Country provides the basis for a comprehensive multi-modal regional development concept. This regional concept is based on the eight strategies defined earlier in the study. All elements are included in the concept in the map shown above. These include supporting regional airport service, shoring up port/intermodal service, enhancing rural and intercity transit service, supporting rail service, augmenting international border clearance and designating bikeways/walkways (latter not shown on the map).



Economic Efficiency and Equity Impacts of the Proposed Corridor Concept

Transportation Efficiency Goal

- Save Travel Time - \$13 million/year
- Save Operating Cost - \$16.5 million/year
- Reduce Accidents - \$29 million/year
- Reduce Business Costs - \$9.5 million/year

Economic Equity Goal

- Enhance accessibility to Labor & Customer Markets - 8.8% growth of population market.
- Enhance accessibility to Supplier/Buyer Delivery Markets - 5.3% growth of business market size within 3hr reach.
- Enhance Accessibility to Tourism Markets - 8.7% growth of population market size.
 - potential for 400 jobs and \$4.5million/year wages added.

- Enhance Air Travel Accessibility - Time savings to enhanced regional airports (Rt. 11 supports west & east airports).
- Draw Students to Area Universities - \$3 million/year of additional spending.
- Support Dairy Farmers – cut \$2.2 million/yr of excess cost for dairy delivery.
- Total Potential Growth (rounded):
 - 2,000-3,800 jobs in the region with \$134m-\$257m of Gross Regional Product (GRP)
 - 1,500-2,700 jobs in NYS (excl. intra-state transfers), with \$103m-\$186m of GRP
 - \$14 million/yr of savings in transfer payments for welfare, food stamps, unemployment
 - Loss of age 22-44 year olds reduced from 3.2% year to 2% year

THE NEXT STEPS

This study has accomplished a great deal of work thus far. While the reports produced by this effort (available at www.danc.org/ncts) cover several tasks (Task 4 – Predictive Analysis, Task 6 Benefit/Cost analysis, and to some degree Task 5 – Environmental Analysis and Task 8 – Comparison Across Screening Factors), they follow-up on Task 1 (Establish Study Framework), Task 2 (Existing Conditions) and Task 3 (Screen Evaluation Alternatives).

But there are additional steps still to be completed. While these reports do present an overall concept, there are some details which need to be further outlined, some of which are dependent on consensus over the development concept proposed herein. These details include:

- Completing the assessment of environmental, regulatory and land use issues – currently underway;
- Assessment of funding and financing options, including guidelines for phasing and assessment of highway spurs and other related projects – currently underway;
- Complete comparison across all screening factors – partially complete;
- Outline overall strategy plan.

The final stage of the study will also identify key “early start” projects that will pave the way toward accomplishing the concept proposed herein.

UPCOMING EVENTS – PUBLIC MEETINGS

The consultant will present the study findings and invite public comment at a series of public meetings planned for Plattsburgh, Malone, Watertown, and Canton, as follows:

Wednesday, November 7, 2001

4:00 PM: Plattsburgh

(Government Center, 137 Margaret Street, 1st Floor Conference Room)

8:00 PM: Malone

(Franklin Academy High School Auditorium, State Street)

Thursday, November 8, 2001

4:00 PM: Watertown

(Dulles State Office Building, 317 Washington Street, 11th Floor, Room 4)

8:00 PM: Canton

(SUNY Canton, Campus Center Multipurpose Room)

How to Comment On or Ask Questions About The North Country Transportation Study

DANC invites your participation in the North Country Transportation Study through public meetings or submission of comments and questions. Reports are being made available on the project website, www.danc.org/ncts/, as they are completed. The website also has an electronic form for providing comments and feedback. Comments are also welcome in the form of letters and can be mailed to: NCTS Comments, c/o Development Authority of the North Country, Dulles State Office Building, 317 Washington Street, Watertown, NY 13601. Comments may also be directed by email to Arno Hart, Study Director, Wilbur Smith Associates, at ahart@wilbursmith.com.