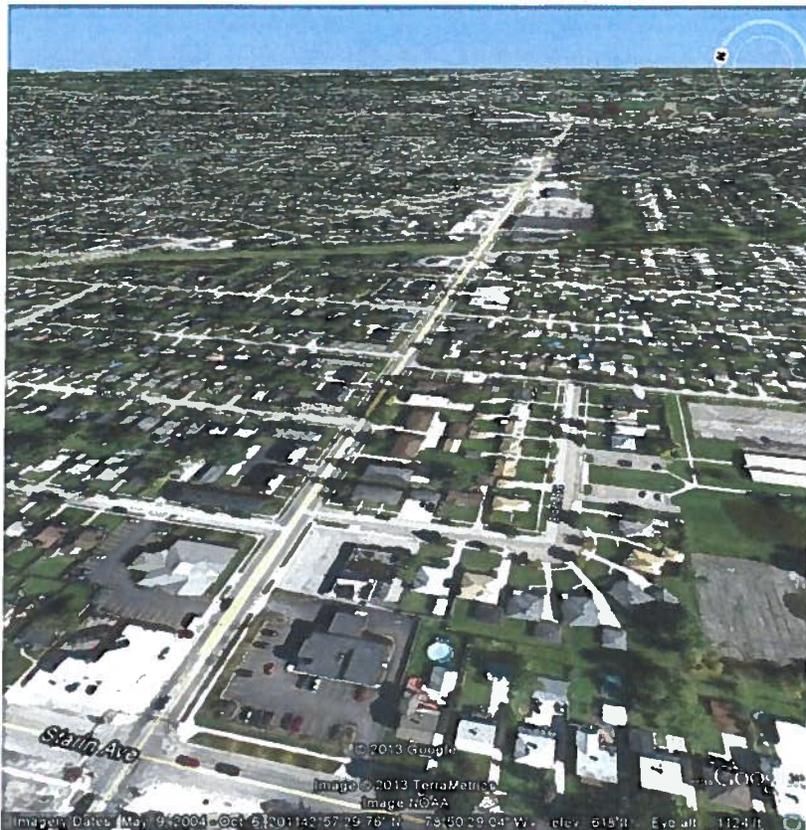


# SUSPENSION

## Kenmore Avenue Improvement Project

### Project Background and Status



## **Kenmore Avenue Improvement Project**

A project to improve Kenmore Avenue, jointly owned by Erie County and City of Buffalo, has been included in the GBNRTC Transportation Improvement Program for several years. The project is nearing construction for the first segment; interest has been expressed in several venues regarding the project in terms of status, history and next steps. A brief summary of those issues follows.

### **Chronology:**

Project was originally envisioned as a complete reconstruction of Kenmore Avenue from Main Street to Military Road. The proposal was submitted by the City of Buffalo and Erie County, reflecting the joint ownership of the road. Submitted in 2004, the project cost estimated was a total of \$17.7M. The project was deemed eligible in the Surface Transportation Program (STP) Urban funds category.

In the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) process, the Kenmore Avenue project was reviewed for inclusion in the 2006-2010 program. Recognizing that complete reconstruction would consume approximately two full years of all the region's federal funds in that fund source, the project was revised to a more rehabilitation type initiative, improving road surface, drainage, sidewalks, etc. The project was successfully added to the TIP for the entire Main Street to Military Road length with a cost estimate of \$5.7M and a scheduled start date of December 2009.

In August of 2006 by Minor Amendment #12, the TIP was revised to reflect available funding. The limits of the project were reduced to Starin Avenue to Main Street, and the Project Proposal submitted on July 24, 2006 indicated that the project would include complete reconstruction of the existing roadway, a traffic signal system upgrade, sidewalks and related work. The cost estimate remained at \$5.7M.

Project activities commenced in December of 2009 as funding for Preliminary Design activities were obligated. The project appeared on the 2008-2012 TIP with an estimated cost of \$7.4M and 2010 construction start forecasted.

The project was included in the next TIP (2011-2015 TIP) and the construction forecast for Main Street to Starin Avenue rehabilitation was now 2014. Programmatic changes at the federal level reflected in new legislation; and at the state level, in fiscal priorities and significant focus on preservation types of projects constricted the ability to advance major projects. In the currently proposed TIP (2014-2018), the existing Kenmore Avenue project is included at an estimated cost of \$7.3M, with funding for construction available in federal fiscal year 2015 (starting October 1, 2014). The project has progressed to a point where construction at the scheduled date appears firm, assuming no further funding reductions to the overall program occur. Current preservation focus is resulting in project sponsors examining different design treatments for portions of the project.

As noted, revised State focus in transportation has constricted the ability to include major reconstruction projects in the TIP, focused rather on basic preservation activities to maintain assets. Reconstruction projects proposals are being reviewed individually at the State level for consistency with this approach, and proposals are being rated for competition statewide for inclusion in future programs. This State initiative is identified as STEP, recently requesting submittal of proposals from NYSDOT regions. A project for the balance of Kenmore Avenue (Starin Avenue to Military Road) was assembled by Erie County, City of Buffalo and GBNRTC staff and submitted for consideration. It was not forwarded

by NYSDOT for statewide completion, ranking sixth in ratings by NYSDOT regional offices, only the first five were eligible to proceed. Inclusion in a future round and diligent review of other non-traditional funding opportunities for completing the project are in process.

### **Concerns from the Community**

Two major areas of concern have been brought forward in regard to the Kenmore Avenue project:

1) Significant interest has been expressed in terms of accelerating the construction schedule for the project. This is challenging in terms of federal funds availability. A specific federal requirement is that the TIP display strict "fiscal constraint" that is programming no more projects than forecasted funds available. Previously some "over programming" was allowed, which a technique was used to advance more projects that fundable, in the event some projects were delayed due to process issues, or in case more funds became available. At the same time, the Highway Trust Fund, comprised of gasoline and other tax receipts began showing deficits, requiring Congress to authorize General Fund transfers just to keep existing funding levels sustained. These factors have led to a narrowed window of opportunity to move all projects in the TIP. As noted, other non-traditional sources continue to be sought for projects in the Buffalo Niagara region.

2) Members of the public, at TIP public meetings, have expressed interest in shifting focus of the current project away from Main Street to Starin Avenue to a more Village of Kenmore focused project. Sponsors have explained the rationale for the current project in terms of linkage to the Main Street reconstruction project, ability to address the worse road scores, serve the highest volume sections and possibly include savings at the intersections of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Main Street since both were included in other adjacent projects at the time. That latter point would allow the funds to stretch the project even farther westward. It is too late to design and build a different project, the work done to date (final design 70% complete) would have to be scrapped and money found to start over with the likelihood of the City and County having to pay back the federal share of funds spent to date.

### **Path Forward**

Improvements to the entire section of Kenmore Avenue are vital to the transportation mobility and economy of Erie County, City of Buffalo and the entire region. Recognizing that, key activities would be:

- Continue to proceed with preparations for the Main Street to Starin Avenue project on the current schedule, and carefully manage the entire portfolio of projects to accelerate the Kenmore Avenue project should an opportunity arise.
- Proceed to seek additional funding for the balance of the project (Starin Avenue to Military Road), through other fund forces (STEP, TIGER, REDC, etc)
- Organize local support and advocacy for the project as applications proceed through the funding process and to bring attention to the needs of the corridor.

