

DRC Executive Committee/NY Secretary of Transportation Karen Rae  
Interstate 98 Project Discussion Overview—February 25, 2014

*The DRC Executive Committee suggests that the following overview serve as a framework for the discussion on the Interstate 98 project to be held at Ms. Rae's office on February 25, 2014.*

Background

For the past six weeks, there has been considerable discussion about Governor Cuomo's intent to develop the Interstate 98 corridor specific to statements he made during his 2014 State of the State address and subsequent budget presentation. Project advocates believe that they understand the Governor's commitment to the project correctly. Project detractors have used written statements, presumably edited by NYS DOT staff, to chide the contrary. As a result, controversy looms.

Recent Dialogue

During his 2014 State of the State Address, Governor Cuomo issued the following statement regarding the Interstate 98 project:

"In the North Country, the proposed Route 98 could reduce travel times and speed up commerce. Let's see if we can make it a reality. We've been talking about it for years. Let's get DOT to undertake a study and see if we can make this project happen."

The Governor then offered the following during his 2014 budget presentation:

"...\$2.5 Million dollars for the Route 98 feasibility study. This is a roadway that the North Country has talked about for a long time. Different people have different opinions as to whether or not it will work. Lets spend the money and lets do the study and lets find out if it works; because if it does, it could make a tremendous difference for the North Country."

Contrary to the perceived intent of the Governor's comments, Mr. Michael Wojnar, Special Assistant for Intergovernmental Affairs, rendered the following text (presumably from the budget overview book) to DRC Chair Irene Stein in an email on January 17, 2014:

"Residents and businesses in the North Country region have long expressed interest in better connecting I-81 in Watertown to I-87 in Champlain, running south of the Canadian border and just north of the perimeter of the Adirondack Park. Numerous projects have been proposed since the 1950s. Route 11 follows nearly the same route, within a few miles of the proposed highway. It is a vital transportation link between the cities and village centers of the North Country, which are home to most of the region's population, employment centers and educational institutions. It passes by the main gate of Fort Drum, then into Canton and Potsdam, which are home to four colleges and universities."

“Over the past ten years, the NYS Department of Transportation has twice evaluated use of this corridor to improve East-West transportation south of the Canadian border: once in 2003, and again in 2008. The evaluations considered several options: constructing a 172-mile interstate at an estimated cost of \$6 billion; improvements to Route 11 at an estimated \$320 million; and construction of five bypasses at a cost of at least \$213 million.”

“This past fall, an additional option was endorsed by the North Country Regional Economic Development Council: construction of a Canton-Potsdam bypass. The highest traffic in this corridor is in the Canton-Potsdam areas. The NYS DOT will work to immediately add the environmental study for bypasses for Canton and Potsdam and a connector for the two to the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The results of the study will guide consideration of next steps.”

### Questions for Discussion

DRC leadership would like to discuss the following questions in order to clarify organizational misunderstandings about the Governor’s intent specific to comments he made about Interstate 98 during his 2014 State of the State Address and Budget Presentation.

1. The DRC would like to clarify the true intent of the Governor’s recent comments regarding Interstate 98.
2. Why did Mr. Wojnar not reference the results of the other studies commissioned by NYS DOT related to Interstate 98 during the past decade?
3. There are numerous factual inaccuracies in the written statement presented by Mr. Wojnar. Please explain the editorial process for statements like these as they negatively expose the administration.
4. How did Mr. Wojnar conclude that \$213 MM would construct 5 bypasses and ~70 miles of connector facilities when actual costs for the construction of ~3.5 miles of I-781 was ~\$179 MM?
5. Is there a specified timeframe in place to initiate the tiered EIS referenced by Mr. Wojnar?
6. With so many entities competing for a voice in the development of the Interstate 98 corridor, how does the administration intend to centralize the dissemination of project information?
7. How can the DRC or another entity assist in that effort?