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Charting The Future Direction For Route 110

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KEY issues like transportation, affordable housing for young employees and energy needs for high-technology companies are being raised by businesses and government officials concerned over the development of Route 110, a direct north-to-south route in the middle of Long Island. The 12-mile state road parallels the Nassau and Suffolk border and includes parts of the towns of Babylon, Huntington and Oyster Bay, with about eight miles in Huntington.

Known as Long Island's Main Street because of its central location, Route 110 will be the focus of a conference to be held in late spring by Action Long Island, a nonprofit business group of about 300 companies. The meeting will discuss ways of making the entire road attractive to new corporations that might move along its central six-mile section, known as the Melville corridor, where modern corporate office buildings are replacing obsolete industrial sites and potato farms.

Donald J. Middleton, deputy director for Huntington's department of planning and environment, said development in the Melville corridor had picked up in the last 15 years. In 1986, the corridor had 5.25 million square feet of office space and 6.6 million square feet of industrial space. Since then, three million square feet of additional office and industrial space has been built or is under construction, and an additional half a million square feet of industrial space has been converted to offices, Mr. Middleton said.

As a result of the area's growth, traffic along Route 110, which varies from two to six lanes, has become congested. The highway serves the 100,000 employees of the corridor as well as being a main north-south artery for delivery trucks and shoppers visiting the million-square-foot Walt Whitman Mall in South Huntington, with its four major department stores and 85 smaller stores.

Making the the Route 110 area attractive to young professionals is a priority, said Ted Weiss of T. Weiss Realty Corporation of Melville, which has 11 office buildings on Long Island. The company is converting a commercial bakery into a 149,000 square-foot office building on nine acres in the Melville corridor. The \$22 million Melville Corporate Center includes a

25,000-square-foot, high-technology incubator with space for about a dozen start-up companies.

"The young people need a lifestyle, and we have Huntington Village, which is very vibrant with its restaurants, nightclubs, theaters and bookstores," he said. "We have to bring it all together with transportation and affordable housing for these professionals earning \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year."

JIM MORGO, president of the Long Island Housing Partnership, a nonprofit group based in Hauppauge, said demand for homes affordable for entry-level workers was "acute in the corridor, most of which is in Huntington, and those house prices are among the highest on Long Island." Median level income for a family of four in Nassau and Suffolk is \$76,200 and entry level is 80 percent of that, or \$60,960, Mr. Morgo said.

In Huntington Village, the average single-family home, with three or four bedrooms, sells for \$300,000. Outside the village, they bring more than \$350,000, said Mary Rice, a manager at Coldwell Banker Sammis in Huntington.

In planning its conference, Action Long Island is working with government organizations like as the Route 110 Partnership, which was formed last year by Huntington and Babylon to encourage redevelopment of old buildings and attract new business.

"We have in place the components to develop a commercial biotechnical corridor that can create a downtown Long Island -- no factories, just offices and light laboratories," said the Huntington supervisor, Frank P. Petrone. The town, which has an annual budget of \$150 million, gets 20 percent of its tax assessment, or \$14 million to \$15 million a year, from the Melville corridor.

Proximity to two major biotechnical institutions is a lure to attract "clean industries" like pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies, Mr. Petrone said.

A biotechnology incubator developed to nurture start-up companies is at Broad Hollow Bioscience Park at the State University of New York at Farmingdale, on Route 110. And the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, a leading biological research institution, is about eight miles north.

Mr. Middleton said that "of 11 businesses spawned at Cold Spring Harbor, seven moved out of state."

Mr. Petrone added: "There's a talent pool out there. We have to keep them on Long Island by attracting business to Route 110, and by making it easy for them."

There is room for expansion in the corridor, but only if the infrastructure is improved, Mr. Petrone said. "We need an express lane for people flying through the corridor that are not part of the local traffic," he said. "It's very congested. There is talk of a shuttle to restaurants, possibly a monorail, and we have to improve the bus system."

In addition, Action Long Island is looking to reopen the Long Island Rail Road station in Melville, which closed 15 years ago, said Sheldon Sackstein, chairman of Action Long Island and a partner in Sackstein & Company, a certified public accountant on Route 110. The closest stations are in Amityville and Huntington, five and 10 miles away, respectively, from the Melville corridor.

A RELIABLE energy source is also needed, Mr. Sackstein said. "If we are to attract companies, with high-tech computer systems we can't have a system that is subject to blackouts and brownouts," he said.

Major corporations adding their concerns about traffic in the Melville corridor include the Reckson Associates Realty Corporation and Estée Lauder.

The bulk of Melville's office space is Class A -- that is, well-located with quality amenities. Of the 7.6 million square feet of office space, 5.5 million is Class A, said Martin L. Lomazow, senior marketing director in the Syosset office of Insignia/ESG, the real estate services company. The vacancy rate for Class A space has increased to 17.82 percent in 2000 from 15.88 percent in 1999, he said. The average asking rent for Class A also rose to \$27.75 per square foot a year in 2000 from \$24.73 in 1999.

"This is, in good part, due to Reckson's new building coming on line," Mr. Lomazow said. "They pushed the asking price up, because their price is \$32 a square foot, and \$34 for the top floor."

Reckson Associates, a publicly traded real estate investment trust in Melville, has two million square feet of office space in 14 buildings, and 600,000 square feet of industrial research and development space in eight buildings along the corridor, according to Kathleen Giamo, senior vice president and director of corporate development. The company recently opened its largest building, the \$55 million Reckson Executive Center, a 277,000 square-foot office building, near the Long Island Expressway.

Estée Lauder, a global cosmetics company based in Manhattan, has five buildings in the corridor, with a million square feet, on about 60 acres that was once a potato farm. The company, which has 2,000 employees in Melville, first came to the area in 1967, according to Brendan Sullivan, executive director of marketing.

"Public transportation has to be addressed on Route 110," Ms. Giamo said. "That's the concern of a lot of the tenants and companies."