

4-BJ Wednesday, April 30, 1986 The Philadelphia Inquirer ♦♦

I-95 ramps are expected to get OK

By Beth Gitlin

The state Department of Transportation is expected to approve by the middle of May a plan for improving access to and from Interstate 95 that calls for five new ramps near Penn's Landing and South Philadelphia. The \$21 million plan is favored by the mayor, the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and other business groups, but it faces opposition from residents of Queen Village, who for years have been battling with highway planners to limit the road's intrusion into their neighborhood.

Yesterday, PennDOT spokesman Lois Morasco said the department was still "carefully evaluating" the "Direct Connection," an alternative proposal favored by the Queen Village Neighbors' Association that adds two new ramps.

And Morasco said no public announcement of a decision would be made until after PennDOT notified city officials of its decision next month.

Last week, however, Morasco and PennDOT project manager Vito Genoa strongly indicated that PennDOT ultimately would decide in favor of the five-ramp plan, called the "Double Slide Under with Combined Ramps."

Of the Queen Village proposal, Morasco said, "Our initial evaluation presents serious problems." And Genoa said that such a proposal might require returning to the courts for an amendment to the 1975 consent decree that permitted the building of I-95 in Philadelphia.

The plan that PennDOT is expected to approve calls for southbound on-ramps at Market and Morris Streets and two ramps that would pass under the highway in Penn's Landing, a northbound on-ramp and a southbound off-ramp that would link the interstate with Delaware Avenue near South Street. The fifth ramp, which would deposit northbound I-95 traffic onto Wharton Street, would replace the Tanker Street and the partly built Queen Street off-ramps.

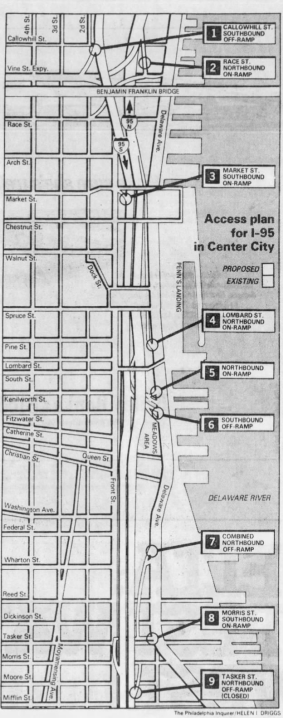
Those who favor the five-ramp plan say it would facilitate traffic flow, create jobs, attract tourists and aid development of the port area.

But the Queen Village Neighbors' Association disagrees, and last month, in a move that took neighborhood commissions by surprise, the group unveiled the ramp-less Direct Connection, its own alternative to improving access to Penn's Landing and I-95. This plan calls for construction of an underpass beneath I-95 that would link the Vine Street Expressway with Delaware Avenue.

The Direct Connection proposal upset residents of nearby neighborhoods, who contended that Queen Village was attempting to dump its traffic onto their streets.

In evaluating the Direct Connection, PennDOT has considered neighborhood opposition to it, Morasco said, noting that a number of commuters with whom we have worked in trying to get this issue resolved are opposed to the Queen Village proposal.

In addition, Morasco said the Direct Connection proposal was similar to a proposal that PennDOT previously dismissed because of "various problems, including its adverse im-



act on the Vine Street Expressway." Proponents of the Direct Connection have said that an underpass, when combined with a new interchange connecting Vine Street with I-95, would give motorists access to the Delaware River without disrupting I-95 traffic and would minimize the impact of traffic on residential areas.

Not so, said Miriam Camitta, head of Franklin Bridge North Neighbors, a group representing the neighborhood bordered by I-95 on the east. Franklin Square on the west, the Ben Franklin Bridge on the south and Callowhill Street on the north, Camitta said the Direct Connection would have the effect of "damp-

ing traffic, including tour buses, in Penn's Landing, Society Hill, South Street and the eastern section of the city." Camitta said that was because, without additional I-95 ramps, a proposed Vine Street Expressway exit at Third and Callowhill Streets "would be used in a way that was never intended."

Camitta insisted that "the worst alternative of all is a no-action plan," and William A. Kingsley, president of the Old City Civic Association, agreed. "The state gov has enormous impact on us, because of the traffic through our neighborhood," said Kingsley, whose group represents 138 residences and 119 businesses in Old City.

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Thu, Feb 20, 2020