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### [Coming soon to Oyster Bay: The NUMBY movement](#)

Posted in [infrastructure](#), [traffic](#), [transportation](#) at 2:43 pm by Henry E. Powderly II

It's February and legacy hangs heavy in the air.

On the election front, Hillary Clinton is campaigning hard on her husband's record. In Washington, President Bush is finally ready for peace with the Palestinians.

And on Long Island, Vince Polimeni wants to build a tunnel to Connecticut.

You may know Polimeni. Over the past 30 years, he's developed some of the Island's top office and retail space, including premier addresses in Mineola, Garden City, Holbrook and Islandia, plus projects in Maryland and New Jersey, among other spots.

A decade ago, he realized the potential of the emerging East bloc nations. Since then, Polimeni International has built hundreds of thousands of feet of retail space in Poland and is now moving into office and condo projects. At the moment, he's also looking around in Ukraine, Romania and Panama.

Through what he calls "dumb luck," his overseas profits have been doubled by the surging strength of the Polish zloty and the euro.

Polimeni has a long record of Big Ideas, including a proposal to replace Nassau County's crumbling government buildings with spanking new leased facilities. Sadly, Nassau never seriously pursued the idea.

With all that under the belt, you'd think Polimeni would be satisfied to sit back, count all those zlotys and turn the operation over to his son, Michael, who is no slouch in his own right. But no. He's serious about this tunnel thing.

Connecting Long Island with the New England mainland is no original thought, and at one time as many as six different crossings – by bridge – were under discussion. The most likely, connecting Oyster Bay with Rye, was a favorite of master planner Robert Moses, who went so far as to build Route 135 as its southern approach.

Gold Coast residents never warmed to the idea, however, and Gov. Nelson Rockefeller gave it the final kibosh in the early 1970s. But dreams of a cross-Sound connection never died, and the ranks of supporters swelled noticeably following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorists attacks.

Polimeni has advocated a Sound tunnel for several years, noting that the Island's economic lifeblood – and any chance for retreat from a killer storm or other disaster – must negotiate 45 miles of crowded New York City thoroughfares.

An 18-mile tunnel to Rye could take as many as 80,000 cars a day off NYC streets and cut wear on the aging Throgs Neck and Whitestone bridges by perhaps 25 percent. By Polimeni's estimates, it would reduce gasoline consumption by 24 million gallons a year and shrink the Island's carbon footprint by

some 200 million tons a day.

Now, with Democrats in power across the state, with the green movement taking hold and congestion pricing tolls on the table, with cutting-edge tunneling equipment available and the expertise from eight big digs around the world, it is time.

Did I mention all those zlotys?

Polimeni proposes picking up pretty much where Moses left off. He'd build a parkland cap over the northern reaches of Route 135 to mask the construction, then start digging through what is essentially sand and soft glacial debris on this side.

There's bedrock to deal with on the other end, but it's no big deal for the giant, pressurized tunneling machines of today, which bore, remove debris and install a sealed, interlocking concrete liner all in one pass. Average progress: 30 feet per day.

"It's like a submarine," says Michael Polimeni, his dad's key pitchman on the project. "Think of it as a monster cutting head trailed by four or five Home Depots."

Polimeni envisions two traffic tunnels, each 55 feet in diameter, with a 38-foot utility tunnel running in between. With air scrubbers and other equipment located in this central "utilador," motorists would enjoy an expansive, claustro-friendly ride, all that head space punctuated only by smart signs and, OK, maybe some advertising.

Much of the necessary land is already government owned, eliminating the need for time-consuming negotiations with home owners or pesky eminent domain battles. Essentially, the tunnel eliminates the objections of the NIMBY crowd by going under their backyards, at a depth of 150 feet.

"It's a stealth project," son Michael says. "People won't see or hear or feel anything."

The Polimenis have teamed up with Hatch Mott MacDonald, diggers of the Chunnel and other world class burrows, including an innovative tunnel in Kuala Lumpur that turns into a giant storm drain during the rainy season.

The cost of the Long Island dig, in 2008 dollars, is estimated at \$10 billion. While that's a lot of zlotys, Polimeni has assurances from Bear Stearns that public-private financing is no big deal. Once finished, it will make money, he says.

What's needed is political will – you know, pretty much what's been lacking on the project for the last 50 years. State Sen. Carl Marcellino has stepped up with a fast public hearing, but the governor – and many, many other elected officials – will have to line up.

For now, Polimeni is willing to invest a million or two in a traffic study to prove that his numbers add up. If they do, he wants assurances that the proposal won't die the slow death of platitudes without progress.

Legacy aside, Ukraine is calling.

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