

Will this tunnel plan see the light of day?

Joye Brown

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Six years ago, my colleague, Robert Weimer, proposed substituting a tunnel for the failed bridge project between Long Island and Rye. He pushed the idea in one of the last editorials he wrote before retiring.

Bob, a smart man and gifted writer who cared deeply for Long Island, died a few months later, but his idea lives on.

"Ignorance will kill this thing," Michael Polimeni told me yesterday. "If people rely on what they think, rather than what they know, the whole thing falls down."



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decker toll road that's the only quick way to get into and out of the congested city. And, as a bonus, tolls collected from motorists (no big trucks allowed) will help pay the project's estimated - yes, chances are it's going to be too low - \$525-million cost.

And then there's the daddy of them all, the Loetschberg, a Swiss project considered to be the most difficult engineering feat of the 21st century. Even now, 2,000 people are working (24 hours a day, 365 days a year) to bore 35 miles through the Alps, from Zurich to Milan. It will be a high-speed commercial train route.

"I looked at all of this," Polimeni was saying, "and I got to thinking, why not Long Island? Why is it that this technology is being used to solve problems all over the world and not where we are, which is one of the richest and most crowded places there is."

So Bob's dream has become Polimeni's dream.

In theory, it should work. The interchange exists; the technology exists, and so does our collective desire to secure another route off Long Island.

But is there enough space in Syosset for the project? Will it really reduce traffic and air pollution? What will it look like above the ground? Where would the new traffic, which the tunnel is certain to generate, line up? Why the emphasis on cars and not public transportation?

How will Polimeni and his partners overcome the opposition? The disbelief that such a thing is even possible?

That's where state Sen. Carl Marcellino - and you - come in. Today, Marcellino, who lives in Syosset, is slated to announce that he will host a legislative hearing on the matter in January.

"These are serious people and this is a serious proposal," he said. "I have concerns and the issue needs to be aired."

John Venditto, the Oyster Bay town supervisor, has yet to decide, either. "Is the idea brilliant, or is it nuts?" he asked yesterday. "I've heard people in the community say both."

He applauded Marcellino for scheduling a hearing so soon. "It's the way to go. Everybody's got to get the information, have the questions answered," he said.

It's Venditto's job to look the thing over.

It's ours, too.

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Polimeni, for anyone who missed last week's announcement, is part of a private consortium of businessmen who want to build and operate a tunnel between Syosset and Westchester. It would run 16 miles, most of it under the Long Island Sound.

Bob's idea fires the imagination, which is fine, because, for Polimeni, imagination is where it began. Polimeni said he spent years doing business in cities around the world, where he saw technology at work.

Yesterday, we talked about the 31.3-mile Chunnel between England and France, which slides under the English Channel, and the Mega-tunnel under construction in Kuala Lumpur, which takes its name not from its length (a meager six miles) but from its circumference (43.3 feet).

The Mega-tunnel was designed to be a three-fer for the Malayan government. It's a monster storm drain that, when needed, could be used in its entirety to solve the city's nagging flooding problems. The tunnel is so big it includes a double-

But we should do it with open eyes, and open minds.

Maybe, just maybe, Bob's dream finally can come true.

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