

Arterial Scrapbook No. 3

Demolition Starts Next Week, 12 Years After Urban Report

By H. P. DONLON

Next week, when the Pelnik Wrecking Company of Yorkville moves equipment into Amsterdam and begins demolition of the first of the 67 structures that are in the path of Arterial Routes 5 and 30, the latest phase of traffic modernization will bring to mind an event of Feb. 5, 1954.

It was that date when State Superintendent of Public Works B. D. Tallamy submitted to Mayor Burtiss E. Deal and members of the Common Council what was designated as an "Urban Area Report."

The document represented years of study by traffic engineers in effort to find out how Amsterdam was to maintain traffic movement despite the rapidly-growing number of vehicles. What New York State wanted was an answer to: "What do you think of it?"

The figures of the first report caused gasps because of the responsibility being assumed. Estimated cost of the Amsterdam Arterial Program was \$6,576,000 which was considered a lot of money in the days before "It won't cost you a dollar" philosophy was so widely accepted.

The Amsterdam share in obtaining rights of way was estimated in 1954 at \$1,024,000, this in addition to a loss of tax base in far greater amount.

Improvements Without Cost?

Times have changed since 1954 and proportionate shares of responsibility have changed, too. Under the present rules, real estate owners of the community are not asked to pay one-half the costs of the rights of way. The state takes care of everything.

The big saving — as some prefer to look at it — comes in having all the taxpayers of the state pay for all the arterials built in every part of the state. All the taxpayers have to worry about is the shrinkage in the tax base on the home front.

Proposals of the state met with official approval, however, and the Amsterdam arterial program received the community OK. First results were evident 10 years ago.

The first section of the Amsterdam arterial, opened on Oct. 27, 1956, was a 2.6-mile relocation of Route 5-S through the Fifth Ward, completed by Collins

Bros., Mechanicville, under contract for \$876,586 let June 23, 1955. The City of Amsterdam share for obtaining rights of way was \$42,000.

Also completed on the south side of the river was the Route 30 Arterial section leading from a point near Thruway Interchange 27 to the south bank of the Mohawk which was opened on Dec. 20, 1960.

This contract was awarded to a Kiewitt-Johnson combine for \$1,816,102, one of seven bidders whose offers were made public on Sept. 18, 1958. Obtaining rights of way for elimination of Minaville St.'s "Brickyard Hill" necessitated demolition of 70 parcels, including 30 dwellings. The route modernized was 0.63 of a mile but accessory relocations brought the project to 1.78 miles of new construction. Rights of way cost about \$650,000. The City of Amsterdam paid one-half.

Route 5 Plans — 1960

The next project presented to the City of Amsterdam administration, by the State Public Works Department was made public on Jan. 22, 1960, when the forerunner of the present arterial plan was shown. Modifications have been made since that time.

The 1960 version made use of two bridges — the present one and a proposed new structure across the Mohawk at the foot of Railroad St. for both north and south lanes of Route 30. Cross-overs between Church and Market Sts. near City Hall were proposed at that time and Shuler St. was to be blocked by a fill.

East-West traffic designs of 1960 differed greatly, however. Both West Main and East Main were to be used for eastbound Route 5. Westbound traffic would have veered northerly from East Main St. at a point west of St. Mary's Church, cut across Liberty below Forbes, cut across Church St. and also bisect Chuctanunda St. to emerge on Market St. at a point opposite Division St. At that time Division was considered for westbound traffic.

The presently proposed connecting link between Church St. and Guy Park Ave., with westbound flow on Guy Park Ave. was devised in 1960 to assist local traffic. Eastbound Route 5 was to come in by West Main St.

Problem of 1962

Two years later, on April 10, 1962, the state engineers were here again with disturbing news and another arterial program. Someone had slipped a bill

through the Legislature to require increased clearance for railroad bridges. The Amsterdam railroad overhead on Bridge St. had overnight become outdated.

Reconstruction at greater elevation would give to Bridge St. a hazardous grade and at the same time make the southerly end of the railroad overhead much higher than the river bridge, the engineers reported to city officials. It would be necessary to abandon both structures and to construct at the foot of Railroad St. a new type bridge with four lanes to carry both north and south traffic.

As result of the plan changes, razing of many additional buildings in the central part of the city would be necessary. A new eastbound Route 5 to parallel the New York Central was recommended. Westbound Route 5 would follow both East Main and West Main — directly opposite to the previously scheduled traffic flow.

Bridge Complications

Since April of 1962, no major change in the arterial planning has been made, but designers of the new bridge have been altering sketches from time to time to meet later-discovered requirements of Amsterdam traffic. One of these areas is the southerly end of the new bridge, redesigned in 1965, for pickup and discharge of both northbound and southbound traffic at the fifth ward end of the bridge. A traffic light would not take care of everything, it was learned.

April 8, 1966, is another important date in Amsterdam arterial history, this marking the State Department of Public Works go-ahead for removal of 67 buildings in the downtown section of Amsterdam. It came 12 years and two months after the original presentations had been made to city officials.

Designs for the project had been on the drawing boards for more than 15 years. A half-dozen bridges in assorted sizes are still to come.

An estimated cost of \$4,380,000 provided for in the 1966 state budget for the impending project caused some conjecture and an interesting question: What would have been the cost had the north side arterial route been built in 1954? Estimated costs for the modernization as then proposed were \$2,251,000. Inflation may have set in, perhaps?