

GUEST ESSAY

Improving access to the bay's outlet swing bridge

We represent adjoining districts in the Monroe County Legislature, although they are physically connected only from November through March, when the Irondequoit Bay Outlet Swing Bridge is open to vehicular traffic from Lake Road on the Webster sandbar to Culver Road and Sea Breeze in Irondequoit. For the other seven months of the year, the bridge is turned to allow maritime traffic through the bay outlet channel.

Long before we took office in January, the swing bridge had been a source of frustration, both for boaters who want greater access from the bay to Lake Ontario and residents and business owners who want greater access by land. Therefore, as we approach the semi-annual rotation of the bridge at this end of the month, we wanted to update you on our efforts to improve this situation.

First, we are pleased to announce that the bridge will swing open for motorists on Friday, Oct. 31, instead of Monday, Nov. 3, as originally scheduled, since Nov. 1 falls on a Saturday this year. We want to thank the Monroe County Depart-

VINCENT ESPOSITO AND CARM GUMINA

Vincent Esposito, a Democrat, represents the 16th District, Irondequoit, in the Monroe County Legislature. Carm Gumina, also a Democrat, represents the 8th District, Webster.

ment of Transportation and the U.S. Coast Guard for their help in making this administrative change, at the request of business owners in the area.

It is our goal to have a permanent solution that will allow year-round access for all those who want to navigate through the channel by water and those who want to drive over it. This goal has several obvious benefits, most notably increased economic activity, enhanced security and evacuation routes for residents of north Webster who neighbor the Ginna Nuclear Power Plant, and unfettered access for commercial charter and recreational boaters.

We recognize a permanent, year-round solution will require substantial funding, which is not easily attained in difficult economic



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times. That is why our first step must be a comprehensive study to evaluate all the considerations related to the bridge, the surrounding area and the ultimate cost of any enhancements. We are pursuing several options to fund an initial study, from various levels of government. Assemblymen Joe Morelle and David Koon are strongly supportive of these efforts, and we have been in regular contact with various federal officials. We are also proposing a study of this manner be added to the county's capital improvement plan. It is our hope that one of these sources will come through with preliminary funding.

We are also attempting to pro-

vide short-term relief by changing the schedule to allow for an even six-month split for boaters and motorists. When the swing bridge was authorized in 1997, it was open to motorists only four months of the year, from November through February. To address complaints from residents, former County Legislator Stephanie Aldersley successfully led an effort in February 2000 to adopt the current schedule: driving through March. This change was a marked improvement, but discontent remains prevalent and was clearly expressed at two public forums held last year.

We are committed to working on this issue until we have improved access for everyone who lives, works in or enjoys the Irondequoit Bay area. We hope to continue to build consensus among residents, fellow county legislators and other community leaders. In that spirit, we plan to hold another public forum in March, to update you on our progress and hear your ideas about how to achieve our collective goals.