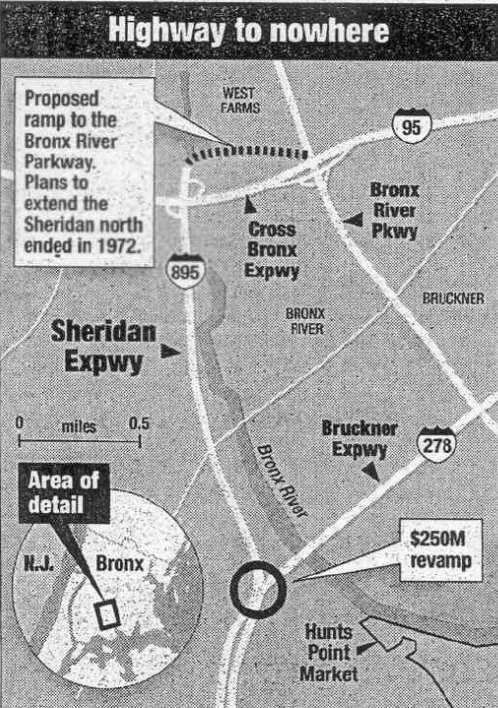


BOONDOGGLE HIGHWAY



ALL QUIET: This is how "busy" the Sheridan Expressway was (below) when members of the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance posed there at the height of the evening rush hour. Matthew McDermott

\$420M face lift for 'road to nowhere'

The Bronx's little-used Sheridan Expressway — long mocked as "the highway to nowhere" — is in line to get a projected \$420 million face lift in what some critics have dubbed the boondoggle of the decade.

Slicing through the South Bronx between the Cross Bronx and Bruckner expressways, the 1.2-mile Sheridan is one of the city's most underutilized highways, carrying only 37,000 cars a day. The Cross Bronx serves nearly five times as many vehicles daily.

But state highway officials, who recently rejected a proposal to turn the road into a riverfront park, have decided to improve the Sheridan anyway. The cost of the improvements is more than \$5,523 for each inch of road. The decision has riled some transportation advocates and Bronx community activists who say the money can be better spent.

"The Sheridan doesn't really serve a transportation purpose," said Jane Byron of Pratt Institute's Center for Community and Environmental Development, which has studied the

By TOM TOPOUSIS

road. "The Sheridan doesn't go anywhere anyone needs to go," Byron said. "In terms of use, it's pretty pathetic." "Spending \$420 million to try to make this a useful highway is a huge waste of money," said Lisa Schreiberman of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a watchdog group that's been calling for the Sheridan's closure.

Ripping up the four-lane, north-south highway would open up 28 acres along the Bronx River for use as park land, Schreiberman said.

She said cars can easily use the Bronx River Parkway, which runs almost parallel to the Sheridan, as



SHORT TRIP: The 1.2-mile Sheridan cuts through the South Bronx between the Cross-Bronx and Bruckner expressways. Matthew McDermott

an alternative, while the 3,000 trucks using the Sheridan daily can take the Major Deegan to the Bruckner.

Peter King, the state Department of Transportation's supervisor for planning and development, defended his agency's decision to upgrade the Sheridan, insisting that there's a need for the road.

"You're talking about 37,000 vehicles. That may not be a lot compared to the Cross Bronx Expressway, but where are these vehicles going to go?" he asked.

He blasted calls to shift Sheridan traffic to the Bronx River Parkway. "That would be putting a

lot more traffic a lot closer to more residential areas," he said.

In fact, preliminary state plans call for building an elevated ramp over 177th Street to draw traffic

from the Bronx River Parkway to the Sheridan.

The rest of the state proposal provides for new interchanges from the Sheridan to the Bruckner and Cross Bronx expressways and a direct link between the Sheridan and the bustling Hunts Point Market.

The Bruckner interchange alone is estimated to cost \$250 million.

"If we don't do that, guess where the trucks go — they go on local streets," said Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer, who wants the Sheridan kept and improved.

Ferrer sees the Sheridan as a key link in getting trucks in and out of the Hunts Point Market, which has been growing by leaps and bounds.

But Schreiberman said the Sheridan now accounts for

only 14 percent of the market's truck traffic.

Legendary megabuilder Robert Moses once had big plans for the Sheridan. Rather than a stub, it was supposed to be a major route that hooked up with New England-bound Interstate 95 at Baychester Avenue.

But the project, which would have cut across the Bronx Zoo, stalled six miles short of its goal in the face of protests from community groups and some of the zoo's wealthy benefactors.

Work on the highway stopped in 1962. And 10 years later, then-Gov. Nelson Rockefeller declared any extension of the Sheridan dead —

a rare defeat for Moses and a sign of his ebbing power.

King said any work on the Sheridan is several years away, after a lengthy environmental review

is conducted.

"We'll have some really interesting stuff to show the public in three to three-and-a-half years," King said.

The highway-to-park proposal has the backing of a host of community groups that have banded together as the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance.

Alexie Torres-Fleming, a lifelong resident of the area bounded by the Sheridan, Bruckner and Cross-Bronx expressways, said the neighborhood of 65,000 is desperate for park land.

"Some people call this the Devil's Triangle," Torres-Fleming said. "Everyday, 220,000 cars drive around us on those highways."

