

Draft Meeting Notes  
Tuesday, June 28, 2005  
9:00 – 10:30 a.m.  
Center for Architecture

The meeting was brought to order at approximately 8:55 a.m. Bob Yaro welcomed the group to the Center for Architecture and introduced Chris Bastian, project manager for the Lower Manhattan-Jamaica/JFK Transportation Project and Manager of Transportation Systems Research for the MTA Planning Division.

Mr. Bastian opened by noting that this project is being run by a partnership of transportation agencies and acknowledging the agency representatives who were present at the meeting. They included Lou Venech of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Joan McDonald and Patti Ornst of New York City Economic Development Corporation, Phil Plotch of the LMDC, and Nancy Danzig of the Federal Transit Administration.

The charge to the project team is to improve access between the downtown central business district and the east. Specifically, the need to improve mobility between Lower Manhattan and JFK Airport and Jamaica Station emerged as a priority among business leaders in Lower Manhattan shortly after 9/11. The study will also consider how the service could connect to other intermediate hubs, such as Atlantic terminal in Brooklyn, a major transfer point.

Last year, the project team undertook a preliminary study that considered different options for providing mobility between Lower Manhattan, Jamaica and JFK Airport. They considered several options for establishing a transit service, including:

1. Routing trains through the existing Montague Tunnel
2. Routing trains through the existing Cranberry Tunnel
3. Splitting service by routing trains through both the Montague and Cranberry Tunnels.
4. Building a new tunnel under the East River.

Each of these alternatives utilized the LIRR Atlantic Branch between Jamaica and Downtown Brooklyn, with the track connection at Jamaica to the AirTrain JFK system to provide service to John F. Kennedy International Airport.

The study concluded that the most feasible option to not disrupt existing subway service was the fourth option. This service would run along the existing Atlantic Branch through Queens and Brooklyn, travel through a new tunnel under the East River, and stop in Lower Manhattan, somewhere in the vicinity of the Fulton Street Transit Hub and the PATH WTC Station.

The project will now begin the process for conducting an Alternatives Analysis and preparing an Environmental Impact Statement. The scoping for the AA/EIS began on June 21, during which comments will be solicited on project goals and alternatives to be considered. A

recommended alternative is expected to be identified at the end of the Alternatives Analysis phase in April, 2006. The Draft EIS for the recommended alternative is expected to be ready by January 2007, with public comment accepted until the following March. A Final EIS will then be prepared. Scoping meetings will be held this July 18, 19, and 20 in Lower Manhattan, Downtown Brooklyn and Queens, respectively. The deadline for comments in the scoping phase is September 17.

The alternatives analysis will consider all reasonable options, including non-rail options, for improving mobility between Lower Manhattan and JFK/Jamaica. It will not presume the vehicle type, operator, rail or non-rail, and will consider commuter rail, subway, AirTrain, ferry, bus, and improved highway options, as well as alternatives proposed during the scoping process. The study will also provide detailed information to ensure the project would be eligible for funding programs such as the Federal New Starts program. By the spring of 2006, the study will develop recommended alternatives. The alternatives will be judged by a range of criteria, including constructability, projected ridership, cost, service frequency and economic benefits. The study will also consider a no-build alternative.

Moving forward, Mr. Bastian stated that the project team intends to hold a robust public process throughout the study. In addition to the upcoming public meetings and those that will take place at key points in the EIS, they will assemble a technical advisory committee of public agency representatives and a public advisory committee of concerned citizens, civic leaders and transportation experts.

The presentation was concluded and the floor opened to questions and comments. Steve Greenfield spoke first, asking about the wisdom of moving forward with this project when it may compete with other priority capital projects such as East Side Access and Second Avenue Subway.

In response, Mr. Bastian noted that a variety of funding sources have already been identified for the project, including the conversion of about \$1 billion in Lower Manhattan tax credits, \$400 million in the MTA's capital program (which also provided funding for the SAS and ESA projects), and up to \$500 million from the Port Authority. However, the job ahead of the project team right now is to do the planning work to evaluate the alternatives and provide the most accurate information as possible about the project so the public and their elected officials can make informed decisions about the project.

David Dyssegaard Kallick asked whether there was new information about the budget for the project, new estimates on ridership, and which agency was expected to build and operate the service.

Mr. Bastian responded that because the project was still in the scoping session, a refined cost estimate and new ridership numbers were not yet completed. Because the ridership projections are complex, the project team is exploring new methodology and will add more staff to examine this important criterion. On agency control, he noted that it will not necessarily be just one agency that builds and operates the service, it could be a partnership of one or more agencies, but this too has not yet been determined.

Roger Herz asked whether the Federal Railroad Administration restrictions on running subway and railroad cars on the same tracks might prove to be a problem in this project.

Mr. Bastian replied that these are restrictions that the study will need to take note of because of the potential use of Long Island Rail Road tracks, but they hope it will not be a fatal flaw. Lou Venech added that the EIS will evaluate airport service and commuter service somewhat independently, and will consider the potential engineering constraints of airport service.

Rick Bell asked about the Lower Manhattan terminus – who will run it and where will it end up? The Calatrava PATH station has not yet been discussed, and while Fulton Street may make sense if it's a subway-based service, it seems like there may be excess capacity in the PATH station.

Lou Venech responded that the possibility of terminating a JFK/Jamaica service in the WTC PATH station will be explored in the EIS. They've also looked at stacked stations under Church Street, which would be connected to the PATH terminal. And the WTC Master Plan is designed so as not to preclude bringing in JFK/Jamaica service.

Caroline Martin asked a question based on her experience using the Heathrow airport train service in London, which comes in at ground level, and may be more convenient for families carrying bags. Then again, she noted that in London, airport commuters take a taxi to the service and then get on the train. Is an at-grade service being considered for this project?

Mr. Bastian acknowledged this situation in London but pointed out the much higher impact on the community if a service was brought into Lower Manhattan at grade. Also, the service is not expected to serve 100% of airport passengers. There will still be people who commute to the airport by car. The current problem with getting to JFK airport is that there is no direct highway and travel time is not reliable. They hope to provide a reliable service for those who need it with this project.

Lance Brown asked whether the urban design impacts of the project would be explored in the EIS – both positive and negative.

Mr. Bastian replied that under NEPA, they must look at the impacts on visual and aesthetic conditions, historic properties, and socio-economic conditions in the project area. Urban design is not specifically spelled out as an evaluation criterion, though they will try to evaluate the net economic benefits of the project. The aesthetic benefits are a bit trickier to evaluate.

This prompted a discussion generally about how neighborhood change resulting from a project like this might be accounted for in the EIS. Joan Byron asked how closely the study will look at improving opportunities for folks in Southeast Queens to commute to Manhattan, and could the service be offered at the price of a subway fare.

Again, it was noted that this was something that would be explored in the EIS.

Bob Yaro spoke about the history of this project, noting that the Civic Alliance and RPA pushed the LMDC and its partners to look closely at the new tunnel option in their original project study, and were pleased that this option was recommended.

Mr. Yaro reiterated the importance of connecting the service to Southeastern Queens and other fast-growing markets in the City. NYMTC forecasts that Queens will have the greatest population growth than any other counties in the region in the coming decades.

Regional Plan Association has made several recommendations to the project team already, including recommending that the project team set up a peer review process for ridership projections, to ensure additional reliability and validity of the data.

Mr. Yaro noted that this project cannot be seen as free-standing, but must be integrated with the transit system to provide maximum benefits to riders and additional capacity. If this project moves forward and other important projects, such as Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access do not, RPA would have to oppose it.

In response, it was noted that it would be a shame if choices needed to be made between these projects, which are all important to expanding a transit system that has not been expanded in 60 years.

Chris Bastian concluded by noting again that the focus of the project team currently is on providing the best information about alternatives for the desired service so that decision makers can make an informed choice about the project.

This concluded the transportation portion of the meeting. Next on the agenda, Petra Todorovich gave a brief update on the Community Development Block Grants of the LMDC. At the April meeting of the Civic Alliance, Kevin Rampe, former president of the LMDC and Michael Samulelian of the New York City Department of Planning, came to speak about the draft allocation plan for LMDC's remaining federal funds and the City's plans for the East River waterfront, respectively. Since that meeting, both projects have made significant steps forward. Following the Civic Alliance's comments on the Draft Allocation plan and a public hearing in late April, the LMDC issued a revised Allocation Plan that distributed funds throughout Lower Manhattan that took into account many concerns of the Civic Alliance and the public. Notably, it did not direct funds to the JFK/LIRR project or on-site infrastructure. Instead, most funds were directed to the memorial and cultural program at the WTC site, and revitalization projects throughout Lower Manhattan, including the East River waterfront study.

The floor was then open to announcements. Barbara Maxwell Zwart, a designer, announced a new plan for the World Trade Center site that she had brought to the meeting and distributed. She stated that she would be happy to provide more information or answer questions from anyone who was interested.

The meeting adjourned shortly before 10:30 a.m.

Attendance:

David Dyssegaard Kallick, Fiscal Policy Institute  
Amos Ilan, A. Ilan Consulting  
Caroline Martin, Family Association of Tribeca East  
Lance Jay Brown, AIA  
Jen Hensley, Downtown Alliance  
Rivka Mazar, CUNY Graduate Center  
Joan Bryon, PICCED  
Jon Orcut, Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
Alan Marlis, CUNY  
Heidi Gorman, Downtown Alliance  
Barbara Maxwell Zwart, Designer  
Jason Havens, AFG Construction Management  
Ned McGuire, Civic Alliance Memorial Committee  
Al Huang, NRDC  
Bill Zwart, Independent  
Jonathon Cohn, PANYNJ  
Lou Venech, PANYNJ  
Larry Graham, Brookfield Properties  
Roger Herz, TIME  
Ron Lem, DDP/STV  
Lucas London, DDP/STV  
Shirley Secunda, Community Board 2  
Steve Greenfield, PB Inc.  
Jonathan Oakman, Downtown Alliance  
Bob Olmstead, ASCE  
Annie Kurtin, NYNV  
Marnie McGregor, PICCED  
Rick Bell, AIA & New York New Visions  
Ernie Hutton, New York New Visions  
David Fields, Nelson Wygold Consulting Architects  
Nancy Danzig, Federal Transit Administration  
Ken Lustbader, Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund  
Philip Plotch, LMDC  
Patty Ornst, NYC EDC  
Joan McDonald, NYC EDC  
Petra Todorovich, RPA  
Bob Yaro, RPA  
Jeremy Soffin, RPA  
Chris Jones, RPA  
Carolyn Konheim  
Alexis Perrotta, RPA