

Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York
Meeting Notes
General Meeting
November 12, 2002
Merrill Lynch

Bob Yaro opened the meeting and provided an overview of the day's topic: transportation. He mentioned that there has been some disagreement between the RPA and the downtown business community over the prioritization of transportation investments for Lower Manhattan. There is little question that Lower Manhattan needs better access for suburban commuters. Lower Manhattan has traditionally been at a competitive disadvantage compared to midtown because it does not have a one-seat ride from the suburbs. However, there has been some disagreement how to best provide that service (if it is possible) to Lower Manhattan. Jeff Zupan, Senior Transportation Fellow at RPA would present two different alternatives to improve transit service from the outer boroughs and suburbs to Lower Manhattan. The first option is to expedite the construction of the Second Avenue Subway, and accelerate its extension to Brooklyn, which would provide a one seat ride to JFK and Jamaica. The second option is the Brookfield proposal, which would use an existing subway tunnel currently used by the A/C train to provide a rapid rail service on a hybrid car between Jamaica and Lower Manhattan.

Jeff Zupan gave a presentation on short and long-term transportation improvements for Lower Manhattan. The PowerPoint can be viewed at www.civic-alliance.org.

Questions and Comments:

Al Papp, Association of New Jersey Railroad Passengers made the comment that Zupan's presentation had neglected to mention the prospect of connecting PATH service to the Lexington Avenue subway lines. He emphasized that this was a very important project for New Jersey commuters, and that the Association of NJ RR passengers has contacted many public officials who have responded positively to the project.

Ethel Sheffer, American Planning Association asked whether we have heard from the MTA or the other agencies when they expect all of these studies to be complete.

Ron Shiffman remarked that when thinking about prioritizing transit project we really should focus on how the financing is being carved up.

There was a motion to support "Rebuilding PATH train in its existing location and supporting the rationalization of the transit hub with major facilities at Church Street/ WTC Site and Broadway/Nassau Street, and a pedestrian corridor between them that is built with the flexibility to allow for both pedestrian and goods movement."

Before the motion was passed, Al Papp remarked that the two projects of extending PATH station to the Lexington Avenue line and rebuilding PATH in its existing location are not mutually exclusive. We would like to see the motion modified so that the rebuilt PATH that does not preclude the possibility of extending PATH to the Lexington line.

Jeff Zupan replied that he would be more comfortable if we only modify the motion to say that we support the study of extending PATH to the Lexington line. I'm not sure if we want to support rebuilding PATH with that flexibility if it turns out to be technically unfeasible.

Marian Imperatore brought up that an important aspect of the Civic Amenities work was providing an east-west connection across Lower Manhattan. This should be emphasized in the pedestrian corridor, and it should possibly be extended river to river.

The motion was modified to state that the Civic Alliance endorses the location of PATH at the permanent site with connection to the Fulton complex to not preclude the study of connection to Lexington line, or other lines, and calls for the agencies to design a concourse that is integrated into the broader circulation system with possibilities for goods movement and waste transfer.

Short Term Recommendations

Next the discussion shifted to a series of short-term recommendations for improvements in transit service that Jeff had included in this presentation. These included:

- Expanded ferry service
 - Long Island City to LM
 - Demonstration of subsidized ferries
 - Battery Marine Terminal
- Shorter term subway improvements
 - J train express
 - Train to the AirTrain to the Plane
- Pedestrian corridor at Grand Central to Lexington Avenue line
- Kennedy Airport's AirTrain will be connected to Howard Beach and A train soon; could provide interim good quality two-seat ride to Kennedy Airport
- *Recommendation: Support MTA's look at J train; support marketing of the 21 Century "trains to the planes"*
- *Recommendations: LIRR upgrade facilities and service in LIC. NYC should begin a demonstration of subsidized ferry service. Study of Battery Marine Terminal should be undertaken to accommodate added services.*

There was a motion to approve these recommendations as having general support from the meeting participants. The motion was seconded and passed with one abstention.

South Ferry Station

Next the discussion shifted to the subject of rebuilding the South Ferry station of the 1/9 line. The station is one the oldest subway stations in the city and suffers from a reduced platform at which only the first five cars can disembark. This presents safety issues for people who have to transfer from car to car, an inconvenience for riders. It also slows service on the entire 1/9 line because cars must slow down and laboriously turn the loop, slowing down service. The proposed position for the Civic Alliance is to support the straightening of the loop and possibly extending

it to the Battery Maritime Building to create an inter-modal link between ferry service and the subway.

Rick Muller from the Office of Manhattan Borough President Virginia Fields pointed out that residents of Lower Manhattan are concerned about the impacts that construction on this project might have on their community and particularly to Batter Park. Apparently there are 120 mature trees that could be dislocated by the construction of this project.

Jeff Zupan replied that a great number of London Plain trees were temporarily dislocated during the renovations of Bryant Park and they were replanted successfully, as they continue to grow today.

After some discussion, there was a motion that the “sense of the meeting” is to support the renovation of the South Ferry station, in order to straighten the loop, and connect it to the Battery Maritime Ferry terminal to create an inter-modal transportation hub, if possible. The motion was seconded and passed, with one abstention.

Rector Connector

Discussion on the Rector Connector project was introduced. This project would cost an estimated \$80 million dollars and would connect the 1/9 subway with the N/R subway lines. While not providing a direct benefit to commuters traveling Lower Manhattan, the project is located in Lower Manhattan, and improves mobility between those traveling between parts of Brooklyn and the Lower West Side.

George Penesis asked whether the need for this project was passed on hard data of travel patterns.

The studies for this project have not been completed.

There was a motion to support further study of the Rector Connect project. The motion was seconded and approved.

Tolls on East River Bridges

The discussion then shifted to the subject of tolling East River Bridges. Several people commented on the importance of tying value pricing or congestion pricing techniques to the prospect of providing clean air. It was echoed that for people in Brooklyn (and this project must be palatable for people in Brooklyn if it will pass) clean air is an important issue.

Bob Yaro mentioned that funds generated by East River tolling could be put towards East Side access tunnels, and other important transportation projects. He also described a recent conversation he had with Bob Kiley, who now works for the City of London Transit authority who suggested that if politicians were intent on using the money generated to close the city’s budget gap, this could possibly be agreed upon for a two-year time limit, at the end of which the funding would be used for transportation projects.

Roger Herz objected to this approach as a starting point. He thought that we should begin by demanding any funding generated be devoted to transportation project, and only adopt the position described by Bob in the last stages of negotiation, if necessary.

After some more discussion a motion was proposed that we support east river tolling on bridges with the goal of using the funding generated for the transit system.

The motion passed with one abstention.

Brookfield Proposal

Al Papp opened the discussion on the Brookfield proposal by wondering how we can justify spending several billion on what is basically the embellishment of an existing subway line. He suggested that we should put two tunnels under the East river, and they should be regional rail connections. If you're going to spend that much money, it should be on commuter rail.

Jeff Zupan replied that it is still a question whether you can bring commuter rail into Lower Manhattan. The MTA studied this option several years ago and found it very difficult.

David Kallick made the comment that if the Second Avenue subway is presented as an alternative we're now talking about a price tag in the high billions. At a macro level, we are comparing suburban sprawl to the multi-center city concept. How does the Second Avenue subway proposal support the idea of multi-centered cities?

Jeff Zupan replied that the Metrolink proposal for Second Avenue Subway is a four-borough system connecting Jamaica, Downtown Brooklyn, and other centers. It would definitely improve mobility between these centers, benefiting their economy and commuters all over the city.

Beverly Willis made the point that roughly 11% of commuters to Lower Manhattan are coming from the suburbs. Some years ago, after extensive hearings in Long Island, Long Islanders voted against increasing Long Island Rail Road service in favor of adding a third lane of traffic to the Long Island Expressway.

Ron Shiffman pointed out that the argument of providing transportation for the "executive class" from the suburbs is not necessarily a strong one because increasingly executives are located in Brooklyn in places like Park Slope, Fort Greene, and Brooklyn Heights. He was willing to bet that there may be as many executives who would be negatively impacted by the Brookfield proposal (by reduction in the A & C subway service) than would benefit.

He added that in supporting a regional transportation network, we must also look for ways to increase mobility between New York and New Jersey.

Gene Russianoff argued that the Brookfield project is a misallocation of resources. It is an exclusive project. Just yesterday a booster for the project made the comment at an ESTA meeting that they would charge a higher fare for this service so that it would remain exclusive for Long Island Railroad riders, not passengers boarding at Jamaica.

George Penesis asked whether we can examine the demography of who is being served by this proposal.

Jeff Zupan speculated that the Brookfield proposal would take five years to build if there was absolutely no opposition to the project (Gene Russianoff pointed out that the Straphangers will most definitely oppose the project.) The question of getting good data depends on the journey-to-work data from the 2000 census, which is still not out yet.

Jeff Zupan suggested that we the Civic Alliance call for the \$250 million recently allotted to study the Brookfield proposal to be used instead to do a definitive study of all the alternatives for improving regional and inter-borough connections to Lower Manhattan. We support the study of the 2nd Avenue subway and extensions of the 2nd Avenue subway into Brooklyn using these funds, and we express skepticism of the Brookfield proposal.

There was some discussion around whether or not to pass the proposed language. Someone made the comment that the Brookfield proposal would only benefit approximately 7000 commuters. It was suggested that instead of “expressing skepticism” we should instead “reject” the Brookfield proposal as the sense of the meeting.

It was motioned that the sense of the meeting is that we reject the Brookfield Proposal, and encourage the use of the \$250 million for a definitive study of all the transit options for improving regional access to Lower Manhattan, including and extended Second Avenue Subway.

The motion passed with one abstention. This concluded the transportation portion of the meeting.

Planning Workshop

Bob Yaro then gave an update on the Civic Alliance Planning Workshop, planned for December 13 – 17, 2002. The workshop will take three scenarios developed by the economic development working group of the civic alliance and create alternative development programs for Lower Manhattan, and visualizations on the scale of Lower Manhattan, the World Trade Center Site, and the Region.

At the workshop each team will focus on one of the scenarios and will look at the entire district of Lower Manhattan, not just the World Trade Center site. The timing of the workshop will take place before the LMDC and the Port Authority release the results of their second phase of the design study, but we hope to add constructively to that process.

There will also be a resource team providing technical expertise to the team members, and ESRI, the firm that create GIS software has volunteered software and technical assistance to the exercise. The Civic Alliance meeting on Monday, December 16 will serve a mid-course correction to the team members, at which we will get a chance to critique what they have come up with half way through the exercise. A summary of the workshop is included with these minutes.

Finally, Diana Balmori gave an update on the Memorial Conversation series. Two dinners have taken place at her home recently in which members of the Civic Alliance memorial committee, family members, historians, artists and scholars have gotten together to discuss the subject of memorializing, and have started to broach difficult questions about the memorial in a convivial relaxed setting. The dinners have been very successful, and created a lot of good will. One of the dinners was recently written up by Paul Goldberger in the "Talk of the Town" section of The New Yorker Magazine. The memorial committee plans to host some more dinners and possible a lecture series.

The meeting concluded at approximately 10:45 AM.