

Draft Meeting Notes
Monday, November 21, 2005
8:30 – 10:30 a.m.
St. John's University

The meeting was brought to order at approximately 8:30 a.m. Petra Todorovich announced that the LMDC has created a Cultural Enhancement grant program that provides \$35 million in funding to applicant groups for cultural facilities and programming in Lower Manhattan. The deadline for the grant applications is December 22, 2005. More information is available on the LMDC website at www.renewnyc.com. She also announced that Mayor Bloomberg appointed six new members to the board of the LMDC, many of them members of his cabinet, prompting Governor Pataki to fill his empty seats on the board as well.

Next on the agenda, William Wheeler, Director of the MTA's Special Project Development and Planning, presented an update of the Fulton Street Transit Center. He began by discussing the design review process to determine how the design has changed.

Mr. Wheeler described the Transit Center project as opening in phases, like the earlier Times Square project, ending with the opening of the Transit Center building. The project's completion is scheduled for the summer of 2009 and will be functional by the end of 2008.

The first three contracts are for the 2/3 station rehabilitation at Williams Street and Fulton Street, the Dey Street concourse between Broadway and Church Street, and the stairs at the south end of Lexington Avenue 4/5 station between Maiden Lane and Cortland Street. The 4/5 stairs should be finished within one year, the construction of the 2/3 will begin in June and the Dey Street construction is scheduled to take place between July 2005 and October 2007.

Mr. Wheeler outlined the project's goals: to overcome the obstacles to access to Lower Manhattan, unify the transit complex with a central portal, and to improve the overall transit experience, including congestion relief, safety improvements, and easier pedestrian activity.

Mr. Wheeler illustrated the current and future experiences of several sample trips that could be taken in Lower Manhattan. The first was a trip from Grand Central Terminal to the World Trade Center area. Presently, the southbound 4/5 train station is congested and full of dark and narrow passageways. After the renovation, there will be an escalator leading to the Dey Street concourse with passageways that are 27 feet wide and 13 feet high.

The second sample trip was from the Port Authority Bus Terminal to Water Street, via the A/C subway. Persons leaving the east end of the eastbound train must use ramps that force individuals to go west before heading east exiting through a narrow, congested exit to Williams Street. In the future, the ramps will be replaced by stairs and escalators and

there will be a new entrance at the south side of Fulton Street and the west side of Williams Street. The third example highlighted a trip from Brooklyn to the World Trade Center. Trips on the A/C train from Brooklyn now use a narrow tunnel under Lexington Avenue that has a congested two flights of stairs leading to the street. The new Fulton Street complex will have clear sight lines to the Dey Street concourse and an access point to the surface at the new Dey Street Plaza.

A problem that Mr. Wheeler mentioned was that the current street access to the subway lacks visibility. The new, signature transit building will be accessible and readily apparent with access points at its corners, shops on the first and second floors, and transit management offices on the third floor. The visibility of the entrances is especially important for tourists who will be visiting Lower Manhattan.

Mr. Wheeler continued with a synopsis of the construction process, beginning with the real estate acquisition portion. 189 Broadway has been acquired and the relocation will take place this winter. Currently the MTA is in discussions with tenants and owners of the buildings on the east side of Broadway. The relocation assistance program is defined by the New York Eminent Domain Procedure Law and Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. (More specific information on the entitlements provided by the Uniform Act is provided on the Internet at www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/index.htm.)

Mr. Wheeler quoted the current cost estimate of the project at \$785 million with a reserve fund of \$62 million. He emphasized that MTA is approaching this project with the intent to build in a “neighborhood friendly way,” citing the meetings with the community board and the community task force, and referencing the project website in the Capital Construction section of the MTA website, at: www.mta.info

The floor was open to comments, which Petra Todorovich moderated.

Catherine Hughes from Community Board 1 asked several questions:

- What will be done with the garbage generated from Fulton Street?
- How will the windows on the new Transit Center be kept clean?
- Will the E be reopened? Will it connect to the N/R?

Mr. Wheeler responded by saying that his organization is looking into the E train issue internally and the Fulton Street Transit Center can be accessed from underground but there is no direct access. The question asked about the garbage would be best answered later in the process.

Jeff Zupan from Regional Plan Association asked whether Dey Street will be open to general traffic and how Fulton Street will function.

Roger Herz from To Improve Municipal Efficiency (TIME) asked whether data on time saving was available. He repeated that he thought there should be information about this issue.

Mr. Wheeler replied by citing the improved level of service for pedestrians, making walking easier. The route from the platform to the surface is where he believed the time would be saved, although it was not available at the meeting (information on project benefits is located in Section 3.5 of the project EIS, found on the MTA website).

David Kallick from the Fiscal Policy Institute asked what the plans were for retail in the Transit Center.

Mr. Wheeler cited the “quick retail” that would be available, such as newsstands, for commuter convenience, as well as ground floor retail that could contribute to the street life of the community. The plan for retail is currently being done in consultation with Nancy Marshall who works with Grand Central Terminal. There will be 25,000 of square feet of space available.

Catherine Hughes asked whether there would be food made available in the style of Grand Central Terminal.

In response, Mr. Wheeler noted that food possessed different challenges and was not sure what it would be available.

William Henderson, PCAC to MTA, inquired what would be in the third floor of the transit center.

Mr. Wheeler answer by saying that there will be station management offices and possibly district offices in the building.

Bob Yaro noted that the Transit Center is something that the Civic Alliance wanted from its inception and he is pleased with the MTA’s response.

Mr. Wheeler next discussed the South Ferry project, saying it has been underway for a year, and they have been inside Battery Park from October 1st and will be there until June. The project is on schedule, and should be completed by the end of 2007. Sandra Bloodworth of MTA/Arts for Transit is currently developing a nature-themed design for the project which can be discussed at future meetings. The main problem with the park is rock that needs to be removed by blasting. The noise will sound like a “thump” from street-level, and the vibration readings that have been taken from Our Lady of Rosary Church across the street have registered below normal. Additionally, an exhibition medal has been found and now there is a possibility of displaying artifacts found in the area.

Paul Lee wanted to know whether there could be incentive for retailers that had to be relocated to return to the area.

Mr. Wheeler noted that the possibility of relocation to the FSTC would not be available until the new retail opened, at earliest, in fall 2009, so he was unsure whether that would

be desirable to present tenants. Mr. Wheeler suggested retail planning questions be directed to Roco Krsulic, MTA's Director of Real Estate.

The next speaker was Steve Weber, the Lower Manhattan Borough Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation. The Lower Manhattan office at DOT was developed during the beginning of the Bloomberg Administration and Mr. Weber is the second person to hold the post. The office has three main responsibilities: management of a federally funded street reconstruction program for Lower Manhattan; issuing all street construction permits and coordinating projects; and representing the Department of Transportation in discussions about the future of Lower Manhattan.

Mr. Weber acknowledged that a succinct definition of the street management program, which is now one year old, is difficult, but he explained that it works with the Lower Manhattan environment and the existing network of streets, which were laid out in the 17th and 18th centuries. The project is developing a "tool box" that will help DOT understand its system's assets and its customers. The goal is to provide the various constituent groups with the most efficient access and circulation possible using the street capacity available. As part of this program, he noted that two dynamic traffic models of the financial district and the West Side up to Leonard Street have been developed separately and will eventually be stitched together.

Mr. Weber discussed how Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are used to map curb regulations and provide uniform data collection methods. He also described a Church Street traffic signal pilot program, which has introduced a leading pedestrian interval of 6 seconds at Cortlandt Street, Dey Street and Fulton Street.

Mr. Weber mentioned an overall street framework that distinguishes through streets, access streets, activity streets and residential streets. Using the dynamic traffic model, analysts can input a particular change and the program automatically redirects traffic. Mr. Weber showed a short clip of the program making these changes on Pine and Nassau Streets. The program measures construction delays and impacts, signal timing and truck traffic, but does not measure pedestrian traffic well. A goal of the project is to improve the availability and service of taxis in Lower Manhattan.

Mr. Weber noted a few initial studies that are underway. The South Battery Park City Initial Study is investigating ways to improve pedestrian safety. Since the streets in the area are very wide and there is not much traffic volume, the study team is looking at neckdowns and medians to reduce the distance pedestrians need to cross South End Avenue and West Thames Street. Some possible solutions include implementing angled parking and neckdowns. Since streets with heavy bus or truck traffic cannot have speed bumps, this is not a viable solution.

The Catch-A-Cab Initial Study that Mr. Weber mentioned is being researched in conjunction with the Downtown Alliance. The questions being considered are how to get customers to cab stands and where to locate the cab stands in order to provide the most effective route out of Lower Manhattan.

A goal that Mr. Weber noted was the implementation of a real-time data collection system which makes decisions based on a typical day and can deal with large scale incidents such as the 2003 blackout and September 11th.

Other goals that Mr. Weber has for the future include video improvements, signal timing that can be adjusted in real time, and ways to convey better, more accurate information to pedestrians and drivers. Additionally, DOT wants to work with other organizations in order to plan different neighborhoods and to address the emerging security situation and traffic impacts around the World Trade Center. The issues of parking availability and cross-town vehicle access are the issues community members refer to most.

DOT is investigating options to help increase the turnover rate of parking spaces and decrease double parking, which is perhaps the most significant cause of congestion in Lower Manhattan. DOT also plans to investigate pedestrian improvements at the intersection of Pike Street and East Broadway and a Greenwich Street pedestrian safety study.

The floor was open to comments, which Bob Yaro moderated.

Joan Byron from PICCED wanted to know if the goal was to reduce the number of people entering the area by vehicle.

Mr. Weber responded by saying that DOT's goal is to make Lower Manhattan a welcoming place for people who live, work, and visit, but that there were clearly limitations on the amount of space for vehicles. Drivers already encounter several deterrents, such as congestion, tolls on some river crossings, and expensive parking that have discouraged many people with alternatives from driving. Those who continue to drive in Lower Manhattan have accepted these already significant costs. Mr. Weber said agency parking is an enforcement issue.

David Kallik liked the framework and wanted to know how to make retail better on pedestrian streets.

Mr. Weber addressed this issue by discussing some of the issues on Fulton Street, which is only 58 feet wide from building line to building line. There have been a variety of suggestions for improving this street, such as adding buses, widening the sidewalks, and adding parking. To implement all of these functions would require an additional 30 feet of cross-section. Given the constraints of the existing space, it is necessary to prioritize the activities by time of day.

Mark Donfeld of Community Board 1 wanted to know what the interaction was between Mr. Weber's program and the EDC. He also wanted to know if the program addressed issues and areas not in the presentation, such as John Street, Gold Street, the Beekman parking lot, South Street Seaport and the exit of the Fulton Fish Market. Additionally, he inquired about how the framework addressed the growth of the residential community.

Mr. Weber replied by noting that since the Lower Manhattan Office is responsible for giving the permits, they will always have a way of knowing about the development. He also mentioned that in order to be efficient, some projects need to occur at the same time.

Alison Simko from the Broadsheet asked where the proposed angled parking was proposed in Battery Park City and how neckdowns are created.

Mr. Weber replied that the Battery Park City study was still in its early stages, but that angle parking would probably work best on West Thames Street. Neckdowns are created by extending the curb at a crosswalk. The design and construction of a neckdown would also need to address impacts on drainage and utilities.

Catherine Hughes asked whether the Lower Manhattan DOT was in charge of the gutters and if Mr. Weber had comments on the article in Saturday's New York Times about the Port Authority's plans for retail on Cortland Street.

Mr. Weber said that a clogged sewer catchbasin would fall under DEP's purview. Mr. Weber noted that the City is in ongoing talks on Cortlandt Street issue with the Port Authority.

Bob Friedrich, a resident on 85 South Street, stated that he did not want restrictive vehicle use. He also wanted more parking for residents, commenting that there were not parking meters before.

Mr. Weber replied by acknowledging that the parking demand has increased as the number of residents has grown.

Jeff Zupan thought that the purpose of the Street Management Study was to determine which streets would be open to pedestrians and which to vehicles at particular times of day and asked whether that was still the goal.

Mr. Weber said that it was still a goal and that he was waiting until he knew the outcome of the security discussions and discussions about various development proposals. He also commented that different pedestrian streets played different roles in Lower Manhattan. Some, like Stone Street, have become outdoor food courts. Nassau Street is a merchant's street. Fulton Street is also a merchant street, but it also must contend with an overwhelming volume of pedestrians from the Fulton Transit Center. The streets around the NY Stock Exchange are pedestrian-only for security reasons.

Hilary Kitasei of Henry Hudson Parkway/9A Scenic Byway inquired about the DOT's assumptions on future traffic growth.

Meghann Rowley from DOT noted that the EIS work that has been done to date assumes traffic growth when there are new projects that bring more people, truck deliveries, etc

into Lower Manhattan. They are currently considering whether there should be incentives or disincentives for truck delivery.

Paul Lee suggested that there should be parking placards and that the agencies do not need free parking.

Roger Herz asked how the dynamic traffic model is controlled and how the word “dynamic” was used. He also wanted to know whether experimentation with signal timing for the LPI was possible.

Mr. Weber responded that the six-second LPI was a DOT standard and that DOT did not have actuated signals. DOT signals are centrally controlled.

Roland Gebhardt noted the concern that the security argument could be exploited by real estate owners. The public is in danger of losing public space to security concerns.

Mr. Weber noted that the City strives to maintain public access for pedestrians, even when security considerations require restricted vehicle access. With the exception of the immediate surroundings of the NY Stock Exchange, it has not been necessary to exclude pedestrians from any public street or sidewalk for security reasons.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30.

Notes prepared by Jen Steinberg, RPA.