

Civic Alliance Meeting Notes  
Thursday, June 03, 2004

## **I. LIRR/ Kennedy Airport Access**

Bob Yaro opened the meeting at five minutes after 9:00, introducing Jeff Zupan, senior transportation fellow at RPA, to give a presentation on improving transit connections between Lower Manhattan and Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and Kennedy Airport (JFK). Jeff's presentation, entitled "Access from the East," focused on the recent study led by the LMDC, which explored transit options for connecting Lower Manhattan to the LIRR and JFK. Governor Pataki's announcement on May 5 of this year marked the end of the study and its conclusion that a \$6 billion new tunnel under the East River was the preferred option for offering this service.

The LMDC study estimated the new tunnel would serve approximately 4,000 – 6,000 commuters to and from the airport, and "up to 100,000" a day for commuter service. Jeff suspected the 100,000 number referred to the capacity of the service, as opposed to the projected ridership, since it was unlikely there would be quite that much demand for the service. The recommendations emerging from the LMDC study were somewhat rudimentary because of the highly compressed timeline of the study dictated by the Governor. The next steps are to complete a draft EIS for the project, which should take about two years and will examine all alternatives anew. Jeff noted that the project will require careful monitoring by the civic community to ensure that a cost effective project can be created. If it is found to be a cost-effective project, then new revenue sources should be explored to fund it. Until then, existing funding should not be allocated.

In the second portion of his talk, Jeff presented a range of alignment possibilities for the new service with a new tunnel. To maximize the value of the investment, the new project should serve multiple markets of transit riders and enhance the capacity of the transit system as much as possible. This may be achieved by connecting the service to the Second Avenue Subway, and/or the E train. Jeff displayed diagrams of eight different possible alignments of the new services and possibilities for connecting to the Second Avenue Subway, the E train, and for terminating in the vicinity of the WTC site. He also displayed a diagram of options for station stops in Downtown Brooklyn, which would provide varying benefits to the transit system for corresponding levels of investment.

Jeff made several observations about the project as a whole:

- The project depends on serving enough riders to merit the substantial investment.
- The frequency of service will depend on the peak hour demand.
- Demand will not reach 100,000 without connections to the rest of the transit system.
- More information on ridership will be gained after talks with the LMDC.

Regarding ridership, he observed:

- LIRR riders will comprise the bulk of new service.
- The tunnel is unlikely to be used by Lower Manhattan bound commuters only, thereby providing capacity for connecting services up the east and west sides of Manhattan, and in Brooklyn.

Finally, multiple uncertainties regarding the project persist, including the alignments in Manhattan and Brooklyn, the connections to different services including the Second Avenue Subway, and the availability of funding. Jeff Zupan's full presentation is posted as a pdf file in the "meetings" section of the Civic Alliance website, [www.civic-alliance.org](http://www.civic-alliance.org).

After the presentation, the floor was opened to questions and comment.

Roger Herz asked Jeff Zupan to comment on the desirability of providing airport access to and from Lower Manhattan versus to and from Midtown Manhattan. Jeff responded that in general, projects that are designed solely to provide airport access fail. The JFK Airtrain is a successful project because it provides connecting services to the subway, as well as acting as a circulator for JFK Airport. This underscores the point that the LIRR-JFK to Lower Manhattan project should not be construed as an airport-access project alone, but rather as a way to expand transit service to and from the Brooklyn and Long Island commuter markets, and provide airport access as an additional benefit.

Next, the discussion focused on what agency would take the lead on the forthcoming EIS. Gene Russianoff speculated that the MTA was likely to take the lead on the EIS since some of the options studied would involve MTA's existing tunnels and/or tracks. He recommended that the Civic Alliance encourage the MTA to take the lead on the study. Beverly Dolinsky added that if the MTA does conduct the study, an outside source of funding should be used, so as not to take away from MTA's currently constrained budget. Jeff Zupan shared his impression that a \$250 million line item in the \$4.5 billion of federal transportation funding for Lower Manhattan may be available for the EIS.

Al Papp raised his concern over providing access to JFK Airport when PATH service could be extended to Newark Airport for a much lower price and on a more expedient timetable. He stated that the NJ Association of Railroad Passengers has opposed the proposed \$6 Billion tunnel to JFK Airport in favor of extending PATH service to Newark.

George Haikalis raised several points about the importance of a regional approach to transportation investments, including the need for an integrated fare for all inner-city transit, including commuter services offered by different agencies traveling within New York City's five boroughs. He passed out a flyer illustrating his "Liberty Loop" light rail proposal for Lower Manhattan and a "Liberty Links" proposal for a regional rail plan connecting Long Island and Brooklyn to Lower Manhattan to New Jersey.

Bob Yaro noted that he was pleased that the LMDC had heeded the concerns that RPA and others had communicated to them going into the study, specifically, that the proposed project should not disrupt existing subway service, and if a new tunnel is proposed it should allow for connections to the Second Avenue subway. Both of these stipulations were respected. Additionally, the LMDC seemed to respond to the Civic Alliance and LCAN's advocacy that no CDBG funds should be used for the project.

David Kallick agreed that he was heartened by the seeming victory on not using the CDBG funds – although he suspected that the Governor may have left the door open when he ambiguously mentioned “LMDC funds” in his May 5th speech. David remarked the worst aspect of the project may be the 2013 target date -- since it should not be pushed in front of pre-existing priority projects.

To conclude, participants agreed that a Civic Alliance resolution should be issued by the voting members in the coming week to make the following points:

- Thank/ commend the LMDC on observing Civic Alliance stipulations that the preferred the option should not disrupt existing subway service and should provide for connections to the Second Avenue Subway.
- Recommend that the MTA be the lead agency for the EIS
- Stipulate the MTA funding should not be used to pay for the EIS
- Recommend that the new project be designed to provide as much additional capacity to the transit system as possible.
- Stipulate that the new project get in line with other priority projects for regional transit investment based on its projected merits and efficacy as a regional transit investment (considering cost, benefit, ridership, etc.)

A draft resolution will be circulated by the end of the week to voting members for a one-week review period.

## **II. West Street/ Route 9A**

The next item on the agenda was the evaluation of the Route 9A Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) recently released by New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). Jeff Zupan also presented on this subject, walking meeting participants through his summary of the options presented by the West Street SEIS.

Upon completing the summary, Jeff recommended that the Civic Alliance hold on taking a position at today's meeting, since NYSDOT had requested an additional meeting with RPA and any other Civic Alliance members that were interested, so they could provide additional information and answer any outstanding questions. Jeff suggested the Civic Alliance could use its tentative meeting date of June 23 to take a position on West Street the day before the public hearing on June 24. Civic Alliance members then raised numerous points regarding Jeff's summary and his suggested plan moving forward.

Beverly Willis opened the discussion by stating R.Dot's case for supporting the "No Build" Alternative as the preferred option for the Route 9A Project. She noted that Battery Park City is adding approximately 10,000 new residents in the coming years with five new high rise residential buildings, and that this area has a high number of families with children, making pedestrian safety and safety for children of utmost importance. Regarding the options, the "No Build" six lane alternative provided a shorter distance for pedestrians to cross, recommending the option in terms of pedestrian safety. She noted that the biggest traffic backup currently on West Street occurred between Chambers and Canal Street, and that the Short Bypass option would do nothing to alleviate this traffic. Finally, she observed that the Route 9A project seemed to favor connections between office buildings at the World Financial Center and office buildings at the World Trade Center and points east, over connections between residential areas in Battery Park City and points east.

Gene Russianoff stated the Straphanger Campaign's opposition to Short Bypass alternative and the reasons for it. Specifically, he observed that the design elements and so-called pedestrian improvements described in the SEIS for the At Grade alternative and the Short Bypass alternative to be fairly similar for a \$700 million cost difference between projects. Both have sidewalks of at least twenty-five feet in width; both have ample median sizes. He noted that the SEIS failed to describe the experience of the pedestrian crossing West Street at points such as Murray Street. Furthermore, the Short Bypass option would induce more traffic, almost twice as much as the At-Grade in the evening peak. He was satisfied that enough information about the project has been provided to oppose the Short Bypass now and recommended the Civic Alliance take action immediately, as opposed to waiting for June 23.

Ariel Teshler from Environmental Defense called on the Civic Alliance to push for stringent regulation of particulate matter emissions by construction vehicles, delivery trucks and electric generators during the construction period of the project, no matter the alternative selected. He noted that the SEIS has described a preliminary effort to control particulate matter in accordance with the State executive order regarding Lower Manhattan projects and Local Law 77, but could do about 90% more. He offered his assistance in crafting Civic Alliance language to call for strict regulation of particulate matter.

Numerous subsequent speakers added their support for taking a position immediately against the Short Bypass option as described in the SEIS, and for the support of the No Action alternative.

Jeff Zupan cautioned the group against necessarily supporting the No Action alternative without fully understanding all the implications of this option. He noted he was not yet familiar enough with the option to endorse it over the At-Grade alternative. Gene Russianoff concurred that it would be sufficient to oppose the Short-Bypass alternative at this time.

The group arrived at consensus that a resolution will be drafted opposing the Short Bypass tunnel option, yet not picking between the At-Grade and No-Action alternatives at this point. It was agreed that a resolution would be circulated Friday for a one-week review and approval period.

### III. General Project Plan

Petra Todorovich introduced the last item on the agenda, a discussion of the recently approved General Project Plan (GPP) of the LMDC. She recounted that the LMDC had approved the GPP of the WTC Memorial and Redevelopment Plan at their board meeting on June 2, thus clearing the way for construction to begin on the first element of the plan, the Freedom Tower, on July 4. Work will go forward in accordance with the project description detailed in the Final GEIS.

Her suggestion was that this was another opportunity for the Civic Alliance to reassert its position that the density of office development on the World Trade Center project plan site be scaled back to correspond with market demands and to diversify uses on the WTC site, placing a greater emphasis on civic, cultural, and possibly housing uses. Whether or not this statement is picked up by the press, she stated that an extra push would be useful as the Port Authority renegotiates its relationship with Silverstein Properties.

Participants agreed that this sort of statement was in order, and that a draft a resolution would be circulated among voting members in the coming week.

Before closing, it was announced that the June 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting was likely to be cancelled since the West Street issue would be decided before then.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 AM.