



RPA Blueprint

The Newsletter of Regional Plan Association

Spring 2000

THE SECOND AVENUE SUBWAY: UP FROM OBLIVION

Just over a year ago, the Second Avenue Subway was a symbol of New York's inability to ever again build a significant public works project. The project, proposed in the 1920s and the subject of numerous false starts, was moribund. In January 1999, RPA brought this desperately needed subway line back to life. Today, it is the centerpiece of debate about the size and scope of the MTA five-year capital program, tied to the state highway program and to the state budget.

Throughout 1999, dozens of local, state and federal officials have endorsed RPA's version of the Second Avenue Subway dubbed *MetroLink*. Most recently, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver has announced that the Assembly will not approve a State Budget unless it and the MTA Capital Program includes a long term funding strategy for the full-length Second Avenue subway.

MetroLink is a four-borough subway system built around a Second Avenue subway line running the length of Manhattan, which would connect with the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, and offer a one-seat ride to Kennedy Airport. It would connect 19 miles of new tunnel to 40 miles of existing but underused tracks to provide nearly 60 miles of new service with five new lines.

A review of major milestones since January of 1999 includes:

» **January 1999:** RPA releases its *MetroLink* proposal, jumpstarting a campaign for a

full-length Second Avenue Subway. Two days later, a standing-room-only rally held by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney on the Upper East Side brings out over 400 citizens who virtually unanimously call for construction of the line. Virginia Fields forms a Second Avenue Subway Task Force to promote the "full-build" line. The New York Times, New York Post and Newsday editorialize in support of RPA position.

» **February-June 1999:** RPA meets with over 30 community boards and civic organizations in four boroughs. We receive solid support for *MetroLink*.

» **August 1999:** MTA releases the Manhattan East Side Alternatives (MESA) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that recommends construction of a 3.2 mile segment, derisively called the "stubway" to connect the Upper East Side to the Broadway Line. RPA joins a chorus of elected officials and community groups to condemn the proposal as inadequate. RPA testifies that the MTA proposal will leave the Lexington Avenue line more crowded when the line opens than it is today.

» **September 1999:** The Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA) releases "Investing in New York's Transit Future" an RPA-prepared assessment of the capital needs of the MTA. This report calls for \$18.2 billion in investment to continue

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Second Avenue Subway

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- restoration of the existing system, convert the bus fleet to clean fuels, expand bus and subway fleets and design and begin construction of East Side Access (Long Island Rail Road connection to Grand Central Terminal) and *MetroLink*.
- » **Late September 1999:** The MTA Releases its draft \$17.5 billion (\$16.5 billion for transit) Five-Year Capital Program, which is universally severely criticized because it fails to commit the agency to expanding the bus and subway fleets, does nothing to convert the bus fleet to clean fuel and makes only a weak commitment to advance the MTA "stubway" proposal.
 - » **December 1999:** Both the Assembly and State Senate veto the MTA's proposed Five-Year Capital Program. The Assembly's objections to the program center on its failure to commit the agency to converting to a clean fuel bus fleet and the absence of funding for a full-length Second Avenue Subway.
 - » **March 2000:** RPA and the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign are rebuffed in their attempt to purchase advertising space in the subways for ads that would promote the need to invest in the transit system and call upon riders to reach out to their elected representatives. The ads feature a website, www.bettertransit.org. RPA and Straphangers sue the MTA because the rejection violates the First Amendment protecting free speech. Never before had RPA been a plaintiff in a lawsuit. The press's news stories and support on the editorial page gives the ads' message free publicity, and the website receives 3000 "hits" on the first day. Later in the month the MTA relents, belatedly recognizing the hopelessness of the case. The ads ran in April.
 - » **March 2000:** Assembly Speaker Silver's call for a full-length subway is supported by editorials in the New York Times, New

York Post and Newsday. These events have moved *MetroLink* to the center of the debate on the next MTA Capital Program and the top of the civic agenda in the City. The debate has now shifted from, "do we need a Second Avenue subway?" to the more practical, "how do we finance and build such an ambitious but essential project?" As we move the campaign toward a resolution, RPA has established the following positions:

- The next Capital Program must include \$2 billion to complete the design and begin construction of *MetroLink*.
- *MetroLink* and East Side Access must proceed in tandem, so that there is sufficient subway capacity to accommodate the additional riders from East Side Access when it opens in 2011.
- A sustainable long-term funding strategy is necessary to ensure that *MetroLink*, East Side Access and the rest of the MTA's capital needs are met. RPA believes the MTA's capital needs (including

MetroLink) over the next five years are about \$18.5 billion, of which only \$9 or \$10 billion are currently available.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to return to the can-do tradition of the early twentieth century that gave New York the finest infrastructure in the world. The economy is the strongest we've seen since World War II. We have government surpluses at the federal, state and local levels. New York City is generally recognized as one of the most attractive places to live by the generation that is driving the new economy. These strengths make investments like *MetroLink* possible. But if we fail to act—even as our global competitors from London to Hong Kong and Tokyo continue to build new transit systems—this era of prosperity will crash against the limits of our inadequate transit system.

RPA and the Straphangers Campaign are co-sponsoring an advertising campaign and website to promote MTA Capital Investments. Log onto

**With livestock
it's called animal cruelty.
With people it's called
a morning commute.**

Fight for Better Transit. Send the politicians a message loud and clear.
www.bettertransit.org

Sponsored by NYPIRG, Straphangers Campaign and the National Plan Association.

Banned in New York: This is the ad that the MTA did not want you to see.



www.bettertransit.org to find out more and send email postcards to Governor Pataki and the leaders of the Senate and Assembly.

For more information, please contact Steve Weber, Senior Transportation Planner at 212-253-2727, ext 303 or visit our website at www.rpa.org.

**CONNECTICUT OFFICE
HONORED FOR
BIKEWAY EFFORTS**

RPA/CT was one of 14 individuals and groups in Connecticut honored by the state's Greenway Council for their outstanding contribution to protect open space.

RPA was cited in the Planning category for its continued efforts to push for the development of a bicycle/pedestrian pathway adjacent to the Merritt Parkway in Fairfield County. The award noted that RPA initiated a feasibility study of the proposed pathway in 1994 and has continued to work with a variety of individuals and organizations to develop a demonstration project in the corridor.

The awards were presented by Sidney J. Holbrook, chief of staff to Governor John G. Rowland, at a major statewide conference, "Greenways: A Path to Smart Growth" held in late March in Meriden, CT.



RPA's **MetroLink** proposal is a four-borough subway system built around a Second Avenue subway line.

**THE NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE: EXIT INTO THE AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS
A conference on the Turnpike in American Life**

Keynote address by
Judith Brodsky, Mason Gross School of Art at Rutgers University

To be held at the: New Jersey Historical Society, 52 Park Place, Newark, NJ • Saturday, November 4, 2000

Though an indispensable roadway to millions of car, van and truck drivers, the New Jersey Turnpike is more than just a massive highway. Appropriated for literary inspiration by some, for stinging jokes by others, this famous pathway has also become something of an American icon. The Turnpike's story is an American story, one that captures many of the essential ingredients of postwar life. In the year 2002, the Turnpike celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. This anniversary provides a prime opportunity to explore such topics as the meaning of highways, the growth of suburbs and decline of cities, and car culture, and to pose critical questions about change, the notion of progress, and identity within the context of New Jersey and the nation.

"The New Jersey Turnpike: Exit Into the American Consciousness" will further the study of this roadway, its impact on New Jersey and its emergence as an icon in the postwar period.

RPA is collaborating in this conference, which is part of a series of Society-sponsored programs and exhibitions relating to the New Jersey Turnpike and its history that are funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the New Jersey Council on the Arts.

The New Jersey Historical Society is a statewide, private, nonprofit historical museum and library dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting the intricate political, social, cultural, and economic history of New Jersey for the broadest possible audience. For more information or to be included on the mailing list, please call 973-596-8500, ext. 234.





IN MEMORY OF JOHN PIRIE KEITH, FORMER RPA PRESIDENT



Dr. John P. Keith, RPA president from 1969-1989, died on March 2nd at the age of 78.

As president of RPA, John Keith significantly broadened the base of support by bringing in corporate and business community support, and establishing RPA as one of the region's premier civic organizations.

Major issues RPA influenced during his leadership included:

- » Saving Breezy Point, NYC's last open oceanfront, from becoming a city of 60,000 people to become a public park—then persuading the federal government to create the first national park in an urban area, Gateway National Recreation Area, of which Breezy Point is a part.
- » Preserving commuter rail service in the Tri-State Region with the ultimate establishment of MTA

and NJ Transit and the first federal subsidy of public transportation.

- » Stopping the Port Authority from constructing an unneeded fourth regional airport
- » Stimulating the downtown redevelopment of Stamford, CT, and MetroTech in downtown Brooklyn
- » Rapid expansion of large regional and local parks following the 1960 study, "The Race for Open Space." The campaign that recently resulted in completing the acquisition of Sterling Forest State Park was begun over many years during Dr. Keith's leadership. Federal aid to purchase state and local parks also emerged from the 1960 report.
- » Formation of the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission to achieve inter-municipal planning.
- » Urban design concepts followed in the Citicorp building.
- » Pioneering public participation processes, including two television series with organized listener-discussion groups and ballot responses in 1963 and 1973, and year-long grass roots planning projects in The Bronx, Westchester, Morris and Fairfield Counties.
- » Pioneering research, including the first Regional Accounts measur-

ing money flows in the Tri-State Region to understand the metropolitan area economy, and the first attempt to calculate the cost of sprawl—in "Spread City," 1962.

After leaving RPA, John was Senior Associate at the Institute of Public Administration until the time of his death. At the Institute, where he also received his Doctor of Public Administration in 1952, John organized and oversaw New York participation in a study comparing transportation systems in New York, Tokyo, Paris and London, published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1998. He was also a strong supporter of the Institute's affiliation with the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University.

John P. Keith is survived by his wife, Doris and daughter Janet, of Manhattan, his son Alexander, of Elko, Nevada and one granddaughter.

To honor the memory of Dr. John P. Keith, the Keith family and the Institute of Public Administration have established the John P. Keith Fellowship Fund to provide international research and travel opportunities for urban planning students at the Wagner School. Memorial contributions to the Fund may be sent to the Institute, at 411 Lafayette Street, NYC 10003.

TO SUPPORT RPA

- **RENEW** your membership on time. We need you!
- Check with your employer for matching gift programs which could multiply the value of your membership contribution. We will be happy to help with any forms.
- Enroll a friend in RPA. If each of our members enroll just one person, our membership will double, and so will our ability to make ourselves heard on important issues.
- Consider a donation of stocks or other financial assets. The appreciation of these assets in recent years has left many people facing huge capital gains taxes. When you make donations to RPA of all or part of these assets, you will receive a tax deduction equal to their current market value. Instead of paying capital gains taxes, you'll actually save on your tax bill.
- Remember us in your estate planning.

For more information on any of these topics, contact RPA's Vice President, Program Development, Aram Khachadurian at 212-253-2727 x310, send him an email at aram@rpa.org or visit our website www.rpa.org.

WE COVER THE WATERFRONT

RPA is leading efforts to revitalize waterfront communities and create new public access to the newly-cleaned waters of the New York/New Jersey Harbor. The 1,500-square miles of open waters and 800 miles of urban waterfronts that comprise the Harbor are poised to become one of the region's preeminent open space resources. Thanks to billions of dollars invested in sewage treatment plants, the Harbor's water is now the cleanest it has been in 90 years. While problems remain, the era when the Harbor was an industrial waterway that was unappealing to the public is receding into the past.

Over the last two decades, public interest in waterfront reuse and access to the Harbor has steadily grown. A first generation of waterfront parks, highlighted by the Battery Park City, Hudson River Park and Liberty State Park, is being completed. New commercial and residential centers have risen along New Jersey's "Gold Coast" and Long Island City. Private ferries—non-existent a dozen years ago—now carry 20,000 commuters on a typical weekday. And the number of successful projects will grow exponentially. RPA's recent survey of land use initiatives along the Harbor tallied over 350 public access, habitat restoration and development initiatives along the waterfront.

But much of the work of waterfront revitalization remains to be done. Large numbers of vacant or underutilized properties on the waterfront still thwart the public's desire for waterfront access. There are many unresolved and difficult questions about integrating public access, new and existing housing and industrial needs in waterfront neighborhoods. There is little if any of the kind of physical or programming links between waterfront sites that can make the Harbor a place unto itself.

It is not just better planning that is needed. A lack of funding for waterfront revitalization and public access has stymied many promising waterfront initiatives. The

experience of the Hudson River Park and New Jersey's waterfront walkway has indicated that while public-private partnerships are valuable, relying on developer contributions for capital improvements and ongoing operations on a site-by-site basis will not result in quality public spaces. Finding the public funding required to create a public waterfront is of critical concern for all Harbor stakeholders.

RPA is working in a variety of waterfront neighborhoods to develop model approaches to waterfront revitalization in industrial and residential settings. We will use these community planning initiatives to identify options for capital and operating funding, including the potential of linking public access and habitat improvements to mandated capital investments in roads, ports and environmental quality. Many of these studies will take place along the Brooklyn waterfront—an area that is likely to be radically transformed in the coming years. Specific projects include helping to develop a plan for the Sunset Park community, developing programming options for the Brooklyn Bridge Park Local Development Corporation, a

proposal to bury the Gowanus Expressway, organizing a community planning workshop in Red Hook and an assessment for bringing public transit to the entire waterfront.

Building a new park on Governors Island continues to be one of RPA's top priorities. The recent announcement by the Governor and Mayor for transforming the Island into a "grand new civic space" on the Harbor was exactly the vision set out by RPA. But many important details must still be resolved in the planning process, most notably securing the Island from the federal government. RPA is also teaming up with a variety of cultural organizations to develop interim and long-term arts programming of the Island.

New York grew up by the Harbor. Long neglected, this open space on our doorstep—our watery front yard—still has the potential to transform both the perception and reality of life in the region's urban core. •

For more information, contact RPA's Director of Environmental Programs, Rob Pirani at 212.253.2727 x305, send him an email at rpirani@rpa.org, or visit our website.



James F. Gill, Chairman, Battery Park City Authority and RPA president H. Claude Shostal, at a event hosted by the Commonwealth Fund which celebrated Governors Island. In attendance were Congressman Jerry Nadler and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney.



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212-253-2727
<http://www.rpa.org>
email: mail@rpa.org

H. Claude Shostal
President

Robert D. Yaro
Executive Director

Karen Chin
Editor

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*Renew your
membership today.*

*For membership information,
contact RPA's Vice President
of Program Development,
Aram Khachadurian, at 212-
253-2727 x310, or send an
email to aram@rpa.org.*

Charles J. Maikish, Senior Vice President, Chase Manhattan Bank, has been elected to RPA's **Board of Directors**.

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To commemorate last year's successful **Lincoln Park Community Design Workshop** in Newark, RPA/NJ, in conjunction with the Lincoln Park/Coast community, has co-hosted a series of events, which included Renaissance Dance to celebrate, and heighten local resident interest and participation in the redevelopment activities of the area; and a one-day conference to update community residents, city officials and business leaders. The final event will be held on **May 13, 2000**. RPA and the LPCCD will host a **Walking House Tour of Lincoln Park**, which will showcase the unique architecture, homes and institutions of this great community. *For further information, please contact the RPA/NJ office at 973-623-1133.*

• • •

RPA and the General Services Administration are offering **free walking tours of Governors Island** the following dates: **April 5th, May 17th, June 14th, July 19th, August 16th, September 13th, October 18th, 2000. Preregistration is required.** The tours depart at 10am from the Battery Maritime Building Coast Guard waiting room, directly east of the Staten Island Ferry Terminal (at Whitehall and Broad streets) in Manhattan. *To register, call 212-253-2727 x393 or e-mail your response to priya@rpa.org, at least two days before the date you wish to attend.*

The tour is a rigorous 1.5 mile walk. Participants do so at their own risk. There are no restrooms or medical facilities available on the Island. Heavy rain cancels the tour. If you are in doubt, call Big Onion Walking Tours after 9:00 AM on the morning of the tour at 212-439-1090 to listen to the recorded message.

For more information on Governors Island, visit our website.

Regional Plan Association
4 Irving Place
New York, NY 10003

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