

The Region's Agenda

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ABOUT RPA

For more than 75 years, Regional Plan Association has been the nation's most influential independent regional planning organization. Since 1922, RPA has worked to improve the quality of life in the 31-county New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan area by creating long-term comprehensive plans and promoting their implementation across political boundaries. On the basis of rigorous professional study, RPA recommends policy initiatives and physical and human infrastructure investments and involves the public in considering and shaping its future. RPA takes positions on major current public policy issues and works constructively and cooperatively on a non-partisan basis with public and private sector interests to advance its agenda.

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interested agencies; and local, state and federal politicians. This outreach will spread the word about the project and help RPA develop and improve the proposal through constant feedback.

- Development of additional project details and resolution of potential problems. RPA will continue to develop the **MetroLink** proposal, refining details, estimating capital costs, identifying and measuring benefits and integrating it with related capital projects.
- Advocacy for a comprehensive MTA Capital Plan. RPA recognizes that the MTA has a broad range of important capital priorities, including continuation of the State of Good Repair program, construction of the highly desirable LIRR-Grand Central Terminal connection, upgrading of signals and communications and the purchase of additional buses and subway cars. The construction of **MetroLink** should not come at the expense of these important projects. Rather, the MTA must recognize that the funding pie must grow, so that all of these priority projects can progress.

This campaign will aim to achieve broad-based consensus on the urgent need for **MetroLink**, and the need to commit sub-

stantial resources to its implementation. Inaction that leaves us with overcrowded subways and a stunted economy is clearly unacceptable.

Other world cities continue to build and expand their transportation infrastructure. In Paris the stated goal is to make the daily commute "an uplifting experience" and Metro has just completed their *Meteor Line*, a state-of-the-art subway running through the heart of the city. London recently completed the *Jubilee Line*, which ties into their extensive Underground. Even Seattle, a region one-tenth the size of New York, has committed \$4 billion in local funding to build a new regional transit system.

These cities are building these systems because they have bold leadership, they are willing to commit local funds to critical infrastructure improvements and they are unwilling to accept a status quo that leaves them with no room for economic growth. Is the New York region, which prizes itself on being the world leader up to this challenge?

For more information on **MetroLink**, contact Steve Weber at 212-253-2727 x303 or send an email to weber@rpa.org.

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A Report
from
RPA
Volume 1
Number 1

The Region's Agenda

Regional Plan Association • New York • New Jersey • Connecticut

MetroLink: New Transit for New York

New York City's economic growth and quality of life are dependent on a transit system that can deliver people to their jobs and other destinations quickly, reliably, and in reasonable comfort. The recent surge in transit ridership has pushed our transit system to its limits, to the detriment of service quality. Trains are packed with riders, delays related to boarding crushes undermine service reliability, and the rush hour commute has become a twice-daily ordeal of congestion and frustration.

With further increases in ridership forecast as the city's economy continues to grow, new transit capacity has become an imperative. The alternatives—either more people driving into Manhattan or the relocation of jobs and residents to Atlanta or Houston—are unacceptable.

Regional Plan Association has developed a proposal called **MetroLink**, a new rapid transit system that will provide the capacity for 240,000 riders entering Midtown and Lower Manhattan during each morning commuting period. It will serve new markets, including Co-op City and Parkchester in The Bronx, Laurelton and Locust Manor in southeastern Queens, and the East Village and Lower East Side in Manhattan. First and Second Avenue Upper East Siders will be able to get to Wall Street in less than 20 minutes. Suburban commuters from Westchester County, Long Island, and Connecticut will get new high-speed connections to Lower Manhattan. Midtown and Lower Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn will have a half-hour-or-less ride to JFK Airport. Queens and southern Brooklyn riders would for the first time get one-seat access to Manhattan's East Side. It will

also eliminate the worst of the overcrowding on the Lexington Avenue and Queens Boulevard subway lines.

MetroLink builds upon the Second Avenue and Downtown *Rx* lines proposed in *A Region At Risk: the Third Regional Plan for the Tri-State New York/New Jersey/Connecticut Metropolitan Region*. The Regional Express (*Rx*) Rail proposal is a keystone of the Plan. *Rx* calls for improved operating efficiency and increased capacity by integrating the New York Region's 1,250-mile commuter rail and subway networks, rationalizing agency structures and operating plans and constructing only 25 miles of new right-of-way in key locations to connect previously independent systems.

This proposal for **MetroLink** was developed in consultation with many of civic, business and transportation interests. RPA has embarked on a campaign to secure the support and commitment of Governor Pataki and other political leaders to fund and build the project as part of a robust and comprehensive MTA capital program.

THE NEED FOR NEW CAPACITY

As the New York City economy continues to grow following the 1989-1992 recession, so does job growth in the Midtown and Lower Manhattan CBDs. In the last six years the City has added nearly 200,000 new jobs. Official economic forecasts indicate the potential for the City to add another 500,000 jobs by the year 2020.¹

Additional riders, added to those who have been attracted by the introduction of MetroCard discounts and weekly and monthly passes, are expected to boost subway ridership to nearly 4.5 million

trips per day in 1999 (up from 3.4 million in 1994). This ridership growth can be expected to continue with employment growth (which could add another 270,000 daily work trips to Manhattan by 2020)—except that the subways are running out of space.

Already many subway lines are operating at or above their design capacity. The MTA estimates that the average peak hour Lexington (Lex) Avenue #5 train operates at 126% of capacity.² Many of the trains are actually much more crowded. Other lines on the West Side of Manhattan and in Queens are nearly as crowded.

Subway riders are often packed into trains like sardines, with less than 3 square feet per person. At the most crowded stations on the Lex—86th Street, 51st Street, and Grand Central—riders must frequently let one or more trains pass by, because they are already packed to the point of bursting. And conditions on the Lex in particular will get even worse when the Long Island Railroad connection to Grand Central Terminal is completed in 2010. That project, which RPA fully supports, will nonetheless add 2,000 riders (the equivalent of two full subway trains) to the Lex during the peak commuting hour. If that occurs in the absence of **MetroLink**, the conditions on the Lex will go from intolerable to impossible.

In some cases, more trains can be added to existing lines to accommodate the extra riders. However, the Lex and Queens

continued on next page

¹ Based on forecasts prepared for and accepted by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC).

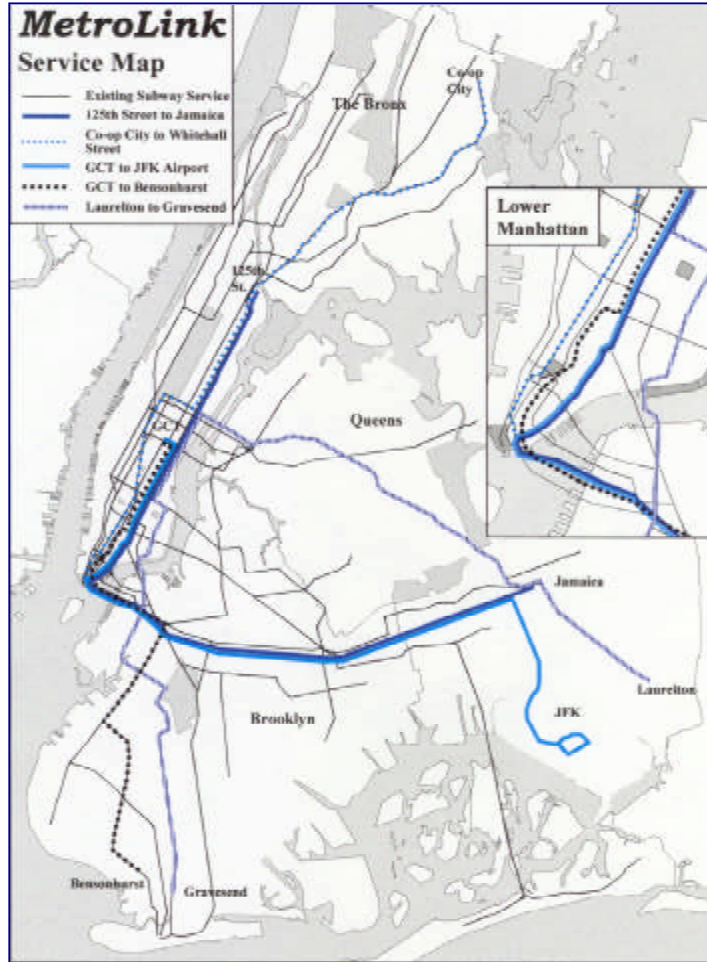
² NYCT 1997 AM Peak Passenger Counts by Line at Peak Load Points.

Boulevard lines already operate at or near capacity, and therefore cannot add trains. Modern signals and equipment may allow for closer spacing of trains, and this may be effective on less crowded lines. However, on the East Side, in Queens and in The Bronx, there is no substitute for new construction.

MetroLink IS THE ANSWER

MetroLink addresses the subway system’s capacity problem by adding new lines where they are most needed and by making more efficient use of the capacity it already has. Six new services are envisioned (see attached map, right):

- **Second Ave. Line from 125th Street to Jamaica** (dark blue, solid line): running down Second Avenue to Water Street, through a new tunnel to Downtown Brooklyn and connecting with the LIRR’s Atlantic Branch (converted to rapid transit) for a high-speed run to Jamaica. This line would serve the *Upper East Side, Turtle Bay, Murray Hill, Kips Bay, East Village, Bowery, Financial District, Downtown Brooklyn* and LIRR riders who are commuting to Lower Manhattan.
- **Second Ave. Line from Co-op City to Whitehall Street** (blue dotted line): Running past the *Bronx Hospital Center, Parkchester, Melrose and the Hub* and then heading down Second Avenue to 63rd Street. From there it would turn onto the Express tracks of the Broadway Line (N, R) to serve *West Midtown and Union Square*, and then run to Whitehall Street at the tip of Manhattan.
- **Grand Central Terminal to JFK Airport** (light blue solid line): This line would have a terminal beneath Grand Central Terminal and would run as an express with one stop at 34th Street to allow for transfers to *Lower Manhattan*. Trains would then run through the new East River tunnel to *downtown Brooklyn*, then out the Atlantic Branch to a connection with the JFK Airtrain on the Van Wyck Expressway. The trains would then turn onto the Airtrain system and make stops at the *JFK* terminals.
- **Grand Central Terminal to South Brooklyn (Bensonhurst)** (black dotted line): this service would also use the terminal under Grand Central and run as an express on Second Avenue. It would turn onto the Nassau Loop (J, M, Z) at Delancey Street and run through the cen-



ter of the *Financial District* before entering the Montague Street tunnel and running out to *Bensonhurst* on the West End Line (M, N).

- **Southeast Queens (Laurelton) to South Brooklyn (Gravesend)** (dark blue hatching) This service would begin in *Laurelton* and run northwest along the LIRR Atlantic Branch right-of-way to *Jamaica* and then join up with the Queens Boulevard line express tracks. Trains would make express stops at *Forest Hills* and *Jackson Heights* and then run into the 63rd Street tunnel. These trains would then turn south on Second Avenue and make local stops until 14th Street. They would turn east into a new

tunnel under 14th Street and then south through the *East Village* and *Lower East Side* in a new tunnel under Avenue C, Pitt Street and East Broadway. Trains would connect to the Rutgers Street tunnel and run through *Brooklyn* on the Culver (F) Line, terminating at Avenue X in *Gravesend*.

These new services would require new subway tunnels along Second Avenue, Water Street, 14th Street, Avenue C/Pitt Street/East Broadway, and East 43rd Street in Manhattan; Third Avenue, Boston Road and Co-op City in The Bronx; and from the East River to Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn. The total length of

these tunnels would be about 19 miles, including about 2.4 miles with four tracks (from 43rd Street to Delancey Street along Second Avenue).

These new tunnels would be built using tunnel boring rather than traditional cut & cover. This will allow for the project to be built with considerably less disruptive street closings and utility relocations that made previous subway projects a tremendous burden on many city neighborhoods.

The LIRR Atlantic Branch from Flatbush Avenue to Jamaica would be converted from commuter rail to rapid transit. Subway tracks would be installed on the Amtrak New Haven ROW in the Bronx and along the Atlantic Branch between Jamaica and Laurelton.

MetroLink would also employ unused capacity on many existing subway lines, including the Queens Boulevard³, Broadway (N, R), and Culver (F in Brooklyn) lines.

MetroLink would use the proposed “Rx” car, designed to operate on subway (IND & BMT) tracks, but providing a higher level of comfort than the typical subway car. Features could include additional seating, cushioning, and modern technology to reduce noise and provide a smoother, faster ride.

BENEFITS

MetroLink stands out from other proposed transit projects because of the synergy it offers by addressing a broad array of transit problems with an integrated approach.⁴ The most significant direct benefits can be summarized in terms of new capacity and reduced crowding, service to new markets, and travel time savings.

³ Bypass tracks would be needed at the Roosevelt Avenue and Forest Hills stations of the Queens Boulevard line in order to add trains to this already crowded line.

⁴ MTA has undertaken a number of studies, including: East River Crossings, which examines subway services between Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan; Manhattan East Side Alternatives, which proposes a Second Avenue subway from 125th Street to 63rd Street; Lower Manhattan Access, which examines the suburban commute to Lower Manhattan; and an examination of options to provide a one-seat ride from Manhattan to JFK Airport.

MetroLink will provide capacity for an additional 240,000 riders entering the Manhattan CBD (below 59th Street) between 6:30 and 9:30 every workday. Some of this capacity will likely serve new riders who have been discouraged by the current intolerable conditions and some of it will help relieve crowding on the Lex and Queens Boulevard lines by diverting riders from those sardinelike trains and station platforms.

The new tunnels and tracks will provide service to important residential areas that have long suffered from their lack of transit access. These include *York, First and Second avenues on Manhattan’s East Side, the East Village, the Lower East Side, southeastern Queens (Laurelton and Locust Manor and Co-op City and Parkchester in The Bronx*.

Other neighborhoods will finally get direct access to important destinations. *Queens and South Brooklyn* will finally get direct subway service to Manhattan’s *East Side*. The *Upper East Side* will have direct service to *West Midtown*. Metro North and Long Island Railroad commuters will get a high-speed shuttle to *Lower Manhattan*. JFK Airport will have a direct rail connection to *Manhattan* and *downtown Brooklyn*. *Melrose Commons*, and the *Bronx Hospital Center* will be connected to the city’s subways.

These services will run faster than many

of the existing lines and will also eliminate difficult and time-consuming transfers at places like 51st Street and Lexington, Fulton/Broadway/Nassau and Pacific Street/Atlantic Terminal. Table I (below) shows the travel time savings riders will experience over their currently available trips (according to MTA schedules). Many trips to Manhattan from Queens, Brooklyn and The Bronx will be shortened by a half-hour. Trips in Manhattan will be shaved substantially too, with especially large savings for Upper and Lower East Side residents. Metro North commuters will have a reliable 12-minute ride from Grand Central to Lower Manhattan. Moreover, since many of today’s trips regularly encounter unscheduled delays due to crowding, the travel time saved are likely to be even greater.

MOVING TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of *MetroLink* will require substantial effort. RPA has embarked on a campaign to gain necessary political approvals required to build *MetroLink* and to include *MetroLink* in the next MTA Capital Plan. This campaign will include the following activities:

- Outreach to civic, business, and other stakeholder groups; MTA and other in-

TABLE 1: TRAVEL TIME SAVINGS WITH MetroLink

	Current Travel Time ¹	Trip Time on MetroLink	Time Saved
86 th St & Second Ave to Water St.	34	16	18
Co-op City to City Hall	63	34	29
GCT to Nassau & Wall streets	18 ²	17 ²	1
GCT to JFK Airport Terminal 1	78	32	46
Whitehall & Water streets to JFK Airport Terminal 1	53	20	33
East Broadway & Clinton St. to 44 th St. & Second Ave.	27	9	18
Jamaica to Water & Whitehall streets	54	15	39
Kings Hwy. & McDonald Ave. to 34 th St. & Second Ave.	55	24	31

¹ Actual trip times often exceed currently scheduled times because of crowding-related delay.
² Includes 5 minutes for transfer from Commuter Rail.