

RPA Blueprint

The Newsletter of Regional Plan Association

Winter 1999

RPA PROPOSES **METROLINK**: NEW TRANSIT FOR NEW YORK

also inside this issue:

- Guest Column: Elliot Sander on a Campaign for a Smart Transportation Program in New York State
- Lincoln Park Arts District
- Low-income Communities and the Changing Regional Economy

On January 26th, Regional Plan Association proposed the largest expansion of New York City's rail transportation system in 60 years. The plan would enable the city and region to reach their economic growth potential by significantly alleviating congestion, adding 250,000 morning peak hour rides, extending service to scores of under-served areas, and reducing transfers and travel time.

This new system, called **MetroLink**, incorporates five new transit services offering fast, convenient rides that will allow for easy linkage among many areas of the city and provide the transportation necessary for the continued rebirth of Lower Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn.

MetroLink consists of a new trunk line running from 125th Street in Manhattan, mostly under Second Avenue, that will extend north into the Bronx and continue to the Financial District and then through a new East River tunnel to Brooklyn's Atlantic Terminal. There will be major connections to the Bronx, Eastern Queens, the East Village, the Lower East Side, South Brooklyn and a one-seat ride to JFK Airport.

"**MetroLink** is a four-borough system that solves the worst capacity and connection problems of the subway system and brings it up to modern standards," said Jeffrey M. Zupan, RPA's Senior Fellow for Transportation. "**MetroLink** combines the construction of 19 miles of new tunnels, 3 miles of new surface rail and 31 new stations, with new uses for 13 miles of under-utilized commuter rail lines and 40 miles of under-used subway track. This is the most cost-effective way to bring New York City and the region's rail systems into the 21st Century and make them a positive force for our growth."

MetroLink will:

- Increase capacity by 250,000 riders each morning;
- Relieve overcrowding on the Lexington Avenue and Queens Boulevard lines and increase individual passenger space by 60%;
- Bring subway transportation within easy walking distance of large areas of Manhattan's East Side, the Northeast and Central Bronx and Southeast Queens;



Photograph by Alan Klein

Presenting **MetroLink** at a January 26 press conference were (l-r) RPA Senior Fellow for Transportation Jeffrey M. Zupan, Executive Director Robert D. Yaro, President H. Claude Shostal and Board Chair Peter W. Herman.

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MetroLink

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- Provide better connections between residential areas and job centers, particularly in Lower and Midtown Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn;
- Reduce travel times for many riders—up to 30 minutes per trip in some cases;
- Eliminate burdensome transfers and improve transfer connections;
- Provide a one-stop express from Grand Central Terminal to the East Side and the Wall Street area;
- Allow for fast and frequent service for Long Island Rail Road commuters to Downtown Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan; and
- Permit a fast, one-seat ride to JFK Airport from Midtown and Lower Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn.

MetroLink would cost \$13 billion and take 13 years to complete. It would be constructed at the same time as the Long Island Rail Road connection to Grand Central Terminal and soon after the completion of the Airtrain to JFK Airport, significantly improving the effectiveness of these two projects.

“Subway ridership is now at a 30-year peak and seriously over capacity levels on several critical lines,” said H. Claude Shostal, RPA president. “With the new global economy offering the potential for 650,000 new jobs in the city by the year 2020, we need to increase capacity and reduce travel times to allow the city and region to maintain their growth and prosperity.

“Moreover, the subway system does not take many New Yorkers where they want to go.” Shostal noted that since early in this century, when the system was planned and built, residential and job centers have moved, and our 1930s subway network is now badly mismatched with today’s travel patterns. For example, a person living east of Second Avenue in Manhattan and going to the growing downtown area around Water Street, has long walks at both ends of the trip, as well as a ride on the overcrowded and often delayed Lexington Avenue subway. **MetroLink** would significantly

reduce travel time, make subway travel more accessible and provide a less crowded ride. Residents in South Jamaica, Locust Manor and Laurelton in Queens, as well as those in the Parkchester and Co-op City areas of The Bronx, would also benefit.

Gene Russianoff, Staff Attorney of the Straphangers Campaign, said, “It’s been more than half a century since New York built a new subway line. For riders, this has meant decades of out-of-the-way trips that waste billions of dollars in delays and lost productivity and elbow-in-the-ribs crowding that violate the USDA’s guidelines for shipping cattle.

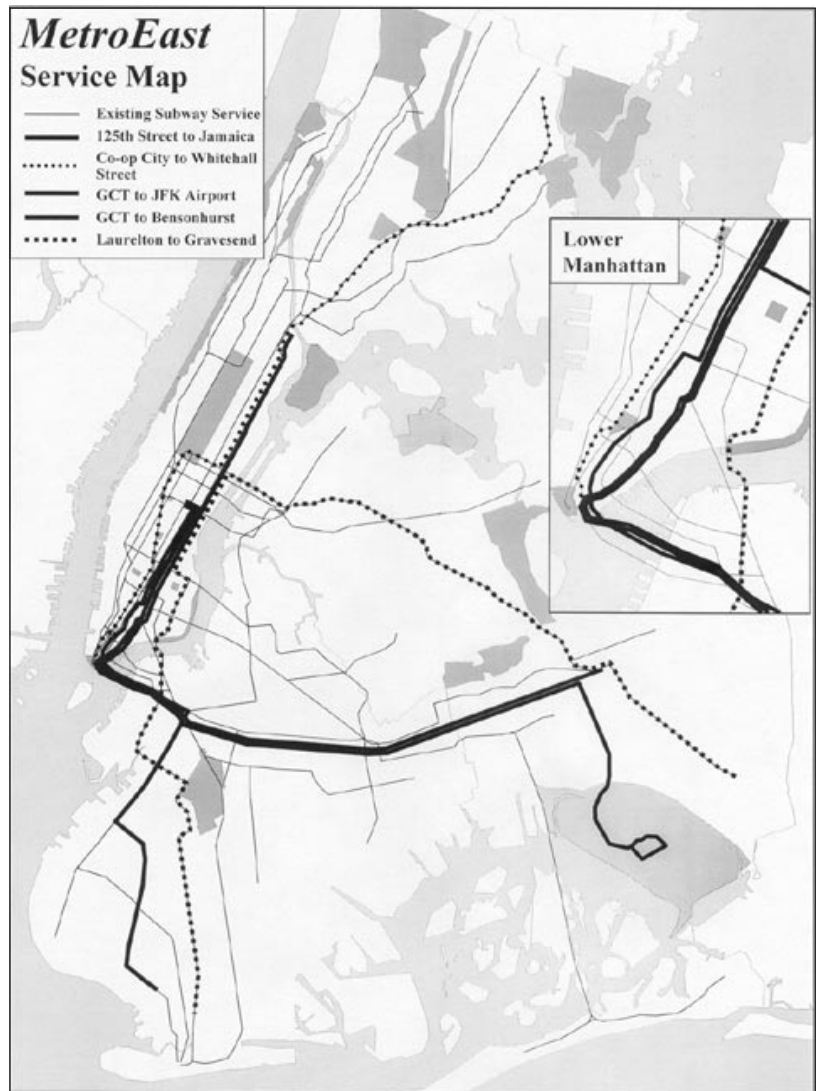
“For New York City, it’s meant falling behind our global competitors like Paris, London and Tokyo. These cities have added new subway lines and bolstered their economies through massive invest-

ment in new transit, while New York has stood still.”

Said RPA Chairman Peter W. Herman, “In 1996, RPA’s Third Regional Plan, *A Region at Risk*, proposed a regional express rail system to connect the metropolitan region’s seven commuter rail and subway systems. **MetroLink** is the linchpin of that system.

“**MetroLink** is a modernization and realignment of the great subway system created at the beginning of this century, which fueled our growth. Unless we have the same foresight as the planners 100 years ago, we will find that we will lack the transportation capacity to continue our growth and prosperity.”

For a full copy of the report, visit our website at www.rpa.org. For more information on **MetroLink**, contact Steve Weber at 212-253-2727 x303 or send him an e-mail at weber@rpa.org.



GUEST COLUMN: Elliott Sander on a Campaign for a Smart Transportation Program for New York State

December 1999 will be a memorable month for New Yorkers, not only because it is the last month of this century, but because it is also when the state's mass transit and highway program run out of money.

The MTA has made substantial progress in bringing its subways, buses and commuter rail systems back to a state of good repair, and the New York State Department of Transportation has accelerated its efforts to repair and replace deteriorating highways and bridges. Normal infrastructure replacement and modernization must continue in order to ensure that we do not fall back to the neglect of the 1970s and early 1980s, which was most remembered for repeated subway derailments, highway deterioration, bridge collapses and closings, and other related misfortunes.

The growth of the economy has added more traffic on our highways and more riders on the subways and buses. This has led to a growing realization that there is a desperate need to begin to expand our downstate regional transportation system. Consider that:

- the last significant addition to the highway network came 35 years ago with the construction of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. As concern about environmental and community impacts has grown, major highway expansion has become politically untenable;
- our subway system has been shrinking since 1940; and
- our global competitors, including London, Paris, Tokyo and Hong Kong, are making strategic transportation expansion investments, as documented by the Institute of Public Administration's *4 World City Study* and the Citizen's Budget Commission's forthcoming report on transportation investment in New York, and its peer cities.

Our current challenge is to secure the progress we have made in the past 15 years while simultaneously adding new capacity for growth. New York's status as a world capital city is indisputably linked to its extraordinary multi-modal transportation system whose development began in the early 1800s, but has not advanced

since the 1960s.

The financial and political environment in which funding for New York State's transportation program will be considered appears more forbidding than any in recent history. On the financial side, this is because many of the existing funding sources for the current five year \$25-billion transit and highway programs are bonded out, and thus cannot be used to fund post-1999 expenditures. In the most recent capital program and for the first time, fare-box revenues have been used to support MTA capital expenditures, putting pressure on both the operating and capital budgets. Previously dedicated tax subsidies to the capital program were reallocated to non-transportation needs. The recent MTA "surplus" comes primarily from a rise in non-farebox revenues, which is tied to the recent strength of the local and regional economy, but cannot be depended on to indefinitely continue at this level. Also, transit operating expenditures are increasing due to MetroCard and MTA fare discount programs which have spurred ridership on the buses and subways.

On the political side, any funding proposals for transportation will compete with state priorities and obligations, including education and tax cuts. Many in the state's transportation agencies express genuine alarm about what will occur in December 1999. Some progress has been made in commitments for expansion of the network, including Governor Pataki's MasterLinks program, Mayor Giuliani's support for a cross-harbor tunnel and a subway link to LaGuardia Airport and Senator Moynihan's sponsorship of the redevelopment and expansion of Penn Station into the Farley Post Office Building. These proposals are far from fully funded. However, they do reflect positively on the inclination of these decision-makers to engage in transportation investment. But, will they be able to figure out a way to pay for it?

In recognition of this crisis, RPA and the Council on Transportation have formed the Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA).

ESTA is a coalition which focusses public attention on the need for a state transit and highway program that maintains normal transportation infrastructure replacement, modernizes the system, and begins to support capacity expansion. ESTA is comprised of leading private and non-profit organizations in the downstate region, such as the New York City Partnership, the AFL-CIO, the Long Island Association, the New York Real Estate Board, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Straphangers Campaign and the Citizen's Union.

Co-chaired by myself and RPA Executive Director Robert D. Yaro, the campaign will sponsor a series of activities including research, symposia, and outreach to concerned civic and elected officials as New York's Governor and Legislature move towards authorization of a new state transportation capital program. Our objective is to educate the community as to what choices exist, show how high the stakes are, and achieve a level of funding that preserves what has been gained in the last ten to fifteen years and provides for a transportation system worthy of the next century.

Nobody wishes to go back to the derailments, collapses and closings that epitomized the 1980s. Some closings are still in effect today as the city continues its bridge rehabilitation program. There is a growing consensus that the system needs to be modernized and expanded. Hopefully, with the support of concerned elected officials, the media, civic groups and most importantly the public at large, we will resolve this crisis in a manner that advances economic growth and assures environmental sustainability, rather than returning us to a chapter in the region's history that would best be left behind.



Elliott Sander is Executive Director of the Council on Transportation Policy and Management at New York University.

PARK TO PARK IN NEWARK

At the north end of Broad Street, facing Military Park, is the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC), a powerful symbol of the Newark renaissance and of the role that the arts can play in revitalizing our region's downtowns. At the south end of Broad Street, facing Lincoln Park, is Symphony Hall, a powerful symbol of another kind. This magnificent structure, which was to Newark in a former time what NJ PAC is today, is a symbol both of Newark's glorious arts tradition and of Newark's troubled recent history of disinvestment and depopulation.

RPA recognizes the importance of addressing the needs of this neighborhood as a complement to RPA's other two major initiatives in Newark: the establishment of the downtown Special Improvement District (SID) and the brownfields reclamation projects. With support by the Prudential Foundation, RPA has been facilitating meetings of key stakeholders as well as researching the economic, urban design, social and programming dimensions of a Lincoln Park arts district with a revitalized Symphony Hall as its centerpiece. RPA's partners include the Newark Arts Council and Integrity House, a Lincoln Park-based community service

organization.

In January, RPA convened a two-day community design workshop that brought together over 200 people—community-based organizations, city agency representatives, leaders in the arts and business and design professionals to envision what a Lincoln Park arts district would look like. Appropriately, the workshop was held in the Terrace Ballroom of Symphony Hall, perhaps anticipating the role that Symphony Hall can play both as a performance venue and community center.

The first day of the workshop began with a series of introductory presentations on the history of Lincoln Park and on issues relating to developing artist live/work space and the "Coast" Proposal of Newark jazz musician, Amiri Baraka. The afternoon focused on community visioning, and facilitated discussion groups on issues and opportunities.

The second day followed two parallel tracts. Ann Davlin of RPA's New Jersey office conducted a discussion on issues of policy and implementation. Rob Lane, RPA's Director of Regional Design Programs, led architects and urban designers in a "charrette" to put into drawings the ideas explored by the focus groups the day before.

Both days were punctuated by performances by local artists including the Newark Boys Chorus School, which is housed in Symphony Hall.

During a final plenary session, the policy/implementation and design working groups shared their work and arrived at some key findings. These included:

- the need for an indigenous "Lincoln Park Arts Authority," a non-profit entity with a diversified board of directors that has the authority and resources to implement a community-based vision, and
- the potential for a "gateway" to Lincoln Park that would build on the location of Symphony Hall on the proposed extension of the Newark Elizabeth Rail Link (NERL) to Lincoln Park and the renovation and reuse of the South Park Presbyterian Church.

The workshop galvanized considerable interest in the future of Symphony Hall and the neighborhood. RPA has formed two task forces, one devoted to outreach and building community-based support; and one devoted to defining the community-based entity that will carry this agenda forward.

For more information, contact Ann Davlin at RPA's New Jersey office, 973-623-1133, or visit our website at www.rpa.org.

RPA HAS RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING NEW GRANTS:

Surdna Foundation, \$180,000 for Rx . . . **The Energy Foundation**, \$112,500 for Rx . . . **The Highlands to Ocean Fund**, \$98,500 for the H2O Mapping Project . . . **The German Marshall Fund of the United States**, \$40,000 for the New York-Milan Planning Exchange . . . **The Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation**, \$35,000 for general purposes . . . **The Research Foundation of the City University of New York**, \$33,245 for the Gowanus Tunnel . . . **The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation**, \$30,000 for the Regional Y2K Initiative . . . **The Schumann Fund for New Jersey**, \$30,000 for Newark Brownfields . . . **J.P. Morgan & Co.**, \$25,000 toward the Building Civic Leadership project . . . **The Fairfield County Community Foundation**, \$20,000 for the Connecticut Utility Lands Project . . . **The J.M. Kaplan Fund**, \$20,000 toward Governors Island . . . **Mrs. Elizabeth Gilmore**, \$20,000 toward Governors Island . . . **The New-Land Foundation**, \$10,000 for general purposes . . . **The New York Times Company Foundation**, \$10,000 toward the Open Space programs . . . **The Donald A. Pels Charitable Trust**, \$5,000 for Governors Island . . . **Albert W. Merck**, \$5,000 for the Newark Arts Project.

THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES CONTINUED THEIR SUPPORT BY MAKING LEADERSHIP GRANTS:

Chase Manhattan Bank, \$50,000 . . . **Merrill, Lynch & Co.**, \$50,000 . . . **Johnson & Johnson**, \$40,000 . . . **Bell Atlantic**, \$35,000 . . . **KPMG Peak Marwick**, \$35,000 . . . **MarketSpan**, \$35,000 . . . **Deloitte & Touche**, \$25,000 . . . **TIAA-CREF**, \$25,000 . . . **New York Life**, \$27,500.

*Special thanks to **Mr. Stephen R. Beckwith** for his \$40,000 matching gift and to the members of the RPA Board of Directors whose personal contributions made it possible for us to meet the terms of this gift.*

Thank you

LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES AND THE CHANGING REGIONAL ECONOMY

Since 1992, more than 500,000 jobs have been created in the Tri-State region. Wall Street is booming, tourists are coming in record numbers and technology industries that no one had heard of a decade ago are now leading growth sectors. In spite of these gains, urban unemployment and poverty remain stubbornly high. In a study funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, RPA analyzed the reasons behind this dilemma and identified potential opportunities to connect low-income communities to new sources of economic growth.

As in past expansions, both the location and type of job growth have determined who is likely to benefit from gains in employment and wages. Geographically, growth has been more balanced in the 1990s than it has been in previous decades. Private sector job growth has been nearly as strong in New York City as it has been in other parts of the region, and many downtowns and urban neighborhoods are experiencing new vitality. Still, jobs have grown most rapidly in the region's outer suburbs and other locations that are inaccessible to communities with the highest poverty and unemployment. And although there has

been growth in low-skill jobs such as sales clerks, security guards and home health care aides, the greatest demand is for jobs requiring post-secondary education or advanced technical skills.

As a consequence, there have been few gains in reducing the region's wide economic disparities. Poverty rates have declined only slightly since the beginning of the expansion, and unemployment has dropped much more rapidly in the suburbs than in urban areas. Nearly 10% of the labor force remain unemployed in places like the Bronx, Brooklyn, Newark and Jersey City, while many suburban counties have unemployment rates of around 3%.

Within these broad trends, however, there are also the following indications of growing opportunities for residents of low-income communities:

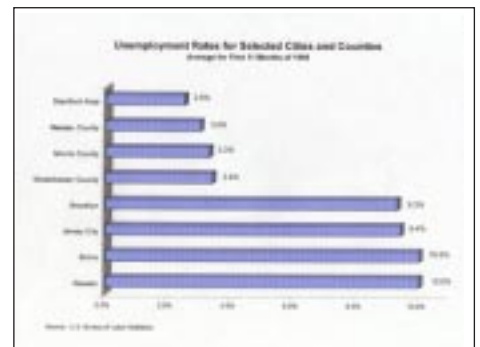
- Neighborhood revitalization, location advantages and an available workforce are supporting the growth of industry clusters such as computer and data services in Brooklyn, health care and construction in the Bronx, apparel manufacturing in Queens and Union counties, and air transportation in Essex and Queens.
- Tight labor markets in sub-

urban job centers, such as White Plains and Stamford provide employment opportunities for communities that can reach these centers via public transit.

- New transportation links, such as rail service to Kennedy and Newark Airports, could also expand employment options for some inner-city neighborhoods.

Taking advantage of these opportunities will require multi-faceted strategies that support community economic development while enhancing skills, job readiness and transportation access to jobs in the larger region economy. RPA will continue its efforts to help states, municipalities, neighborhoods and businesses to develop and implement these integrated strategies.

For copies of this report or additional information, contact Chris Jones, Director of Economic Programs at 212-253-2727, ext. 321 or send him an e-mail at chris@rpa.org.



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Helen S. Speck, Director of RPA's Connecticut office, has received legislative appointment to serve on the 19-member **Southwest Corridor Action Council**, a body created by the 1998 Connecticut General Assembly. The Council's mission is to advise the state's Commissioner of Transportation on implementation strategies for its plan to reduce congestion in the corridor by 5% over a five-year period. In formulating the plan, the transportation department relied heavily on the recommendations of the Coastal Corridor Coalition, a group of business environmental and civic organizations united around congestion reduction measures. Two years ago, RPA was instrumental in bringing this unusual group of diverse interests together. The Coalition's recommendations have been enthusiastically endorsed by Governor John Rowland.

• • •

Mayor Giuliani has invited RPA president **H. Claude Shostal** to join the **Governors Island Task Force**, which include city, state and federal officials, along with a very limited number of civic representatives. The principal goal of the Task Force will be to review the proposals which New York City has received through its recent RFEI process and consider a comprehensive plan which will satisfy the requirements of the Federal Government while presenting a fiscally responsible approach for the use of the Island.

• • •

RPA continues its efforts to protect the **East End of Long Island** by activating the **transfer of development rights (TDR)** from farmlands to nearby areas that would be appropriate for incremental development. New York State enacted legislation authorizing the East End towns to establish a real estate transfer tax to raise funds for acquisition or protection of critical land sites. In November, town residents approved local referenda to implement this tax.

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