

First Avenue/Second Avenue Select Bus Service Community Advisory Committee Meeting #3 Summary

Thursday, January 14, 2010, 6:30 pm-8:30 pm
Hunter College School of Social Work, Hexter Lounge
129 East 79th Street, New York, NY

I. INTRODUCTIONS

Arnie Bloch of Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates (HSH) opened the meeting by welcoming the CAC members and asked all attendees to introduce themselves. Bruce Schaller, Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) then thanked the CAC members for their attendance and their feedback at the September CAC meeting. He briefly introduced the general street design concept for SBS on the corridor.

II. PRESENTATIONS

Arnie Bloch reviewed the project schedule including the 2009-2010 outreach efforts and project milestones leading up to SBS implementation on First/Second Avenues. Ted Orosz, the director of Long-Range Bus Planning for NYCT, then gave an update on the proposed SBS station locations that were of particular concern to the members during the September CAC meeting. Stations included:

- Grand Street/Allen Street;
- 57th Street/First Avenue;
- 79th Street/First Avenue;
- 86th Street/First Avenue;
- 106th Street/First Avenue; and
- 79th Street/Second Avenue.

NYCDOT Director of Transit Development Joseph Barr then explained the design goals for the project and presented the three design option layouts that could be implemented throughout the corridor. Designs selected for specific location along the corridor are contingent on the traffic levels, street width and curbside access needs. Arnie Bloch reviewed the next steps of the project process, including community board meetings and public open houses in February.

III. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Following each part of the meeting, CAC members were invited to comment or ask questions about the project. Arnie Bloch of HSH facilitated questions, organizing them into a number of different categories. These questions and comments were addressed by Joseph Barr of NYCDOT; Joshua Benson, Director of NYCDOT's Bicycle & Pedestrian Program; and Ted Orosz of NYCT. Participants were also encouraged to fill out comment sheets to provide their additional feedback. All questions asked by CAC members during the meeting are categorized and summarized below (**Q**=question, **C**=comment, **A**=answer):

SBS Station Locations Updates

79th Street & First Ave.

C: Consider placing the SBS station between 80th and 81st streets, as most transfers are being made at the north side of 79th Street. Customers would only need to cross one street to access SBS.

A: The goal is to keep transfers within the same block. The protect team will consider an 80th-81st Street station if the 79th -80th Street station does not work.

67th Street & First Avenue

Q: Many local bus riders use the current stop between 66th and 67th streets to access Sloan-Kettering Hospital. Can the local bus stop remain at its current location and SBS be placed south of the local stop?

C: Is it possible to rearrange the space between 67th and 68th Streets so that both stops can fit in the area?

A: The 67th - 68th Street/First Avenue SBS station location is optimal, as it will allow convenient transfers between the M15, M67, and the SBS. Also, with the various hospital transportation and other private operators accessing the hospital, only one station (either local or SBS) can fit on the block between 66th and 67th street.

C: There is a newsstand at 68th St. & First Avenue that may obstruct the SBS stop.

C: This newsstand is north of the proposed SBS stop, so will not cause any obstructions.

C: People with limited mobility will prefer to use SBS because of easy boarding, so it's best to place SBS closest to transfer locations at all times.

Q: Will low floor buses be used? Will the local M15 bus type be replaced?

A: The MTA recently ordered low floor, 3-door buses which will be used in a pilot run for SBS service. If successful, more will be purchased and used city-wide.

57th Street & First Avenue

Q: Will the current local stop between 55th and 56th streets be eliminated, since a new local stop is being installed at the northeast corner of 56th Street?

A: It will most likely be eliminated because it is only one block away from the new local stop.

Q: Would it be possible to create one long bus stop between 57th and 58th Streets to accommodate the M15, M57, and SBS buses?

A: Many options and configurations were considered for this location, but space is limited and there are also some large trees there that would obstruct the bus stop.

C: It would be helpful to see a more detailed map of the design area between 55th and 58th Streets. Newly planted trees in the area should be considered, as well as incorporation of the M57 into the design.

C: The largest gap between stops on the local M15 route is between 57th Street and north of 62nd Street. Moving the local stop south of 57th Street will further increase the gap. It may be appropriate to add another local stop. Also, please consider the safety of passengers having to cross 57th Street to transfer between the local and SBS at this accident-prone intersection.

Grand & Allen

C: Because of heavy congestion on Grand Street and the location of the bike lane connector at Broome Street, it may be more appropriate to place the southbound SBS stop between Grand and Broome streets, closer to Broome Street.

Other Stations

Houston Street

Q: Can you please reassess the configuration of this stop? In the current northbound configuration, the SBS and the local buses are a block apart and passengers will need to travel two blocks to transfer between SBS and the Houston Street crosstown buses.

A: The street geometry of the area and the location of businesses limit where the stops can be located, making it impossible to install a bus shelter.

Q: Is the location of Thompson Hotel the main issue prohibiting locating SBS stops south of Houston Street?

A: The block south of Houston has never been good for a bus stop. Constraints for this station are much more extreme than other places.

C: I am satisfied with station location of this station at Houston Street.

42nd Street (First & Second Avenues)

Q: Why aren't there any SBS stops 42nd and 57th Streets? The Turtle Bay area is being left out.

A: Street geometry and underpasses around 50th Street make creating a bus stop difficult in the area. Also, there is a trade-off between convenience of stops and maintaining adequate speed for SBS. Ridership in that area was low comparing to other parts of the corridor, with minimal transfers being made to the 50th Street crosstown bus.

Design Updates

Q: Will the bus lane be in effect 24 hours a day?

A: Some bus lanes may be in effect at all times, while others will be in effect during extended peak periods, the hours of which will be determined as the project progresses.

Q: How will SBS work in the Second Avenue Subway construction zone?

A: No bus lanes or bike lanes will be implemented within the construction zone as part of this project, and no parking regulations will be changed. Station locations will not be relocated during construction, particularly because fare machines and other equipment will be installed at the stations.

Q: What is the anticipated level of speed improvement? Are there different implications for speed for the three design options?

A: A 20-25% speed increase over limited service is anticipated, due to fewer stops, better design, better enforcement, better buses, and off-board fare collection. Design “A” yields the greatest improvement. Design “B” also significantly increases speed.

Q: A building will soon be erected at the corner of 36th Street and Second Avenue. Will SBS service be affected during this construction?

A: NYCDOT will work to minimize construction effects on bus service at this location and others.

Q: How will the transition occur from a separated bike lane to a shared bike lane?

A: The transition will be guided by pavement markings. The shared lane will be marked with bike symbols and chevron arrows. Also, bikers will emerge from behind a row of parked cars to enter the shared bike lane. Details are forthcoming as the project progresses.

C: Does Design “C” not include a separated bike lane?

A: Design “C” includes a shared-lane option. Pavement markings increase motorists’ awareness of cyclists.

Q: Are there any numbers to show the effectiveness of a shared bike lane versus other alternatives?

A: No numbers are available at this point, but the project team will get back to the CAC with this information.

Q: How is pedestrian safety being addressed near the Robert F. Kennedy (Triborough) Bridge?

A: Pedestrian refuge islands will be installed throughout the corridor. The project team will further assess the area near the RFK Bridge to consider appropriate pedestrian safety measures.

Q: Design “C” will be implemented on First and Second Avenues in Midtown (south of 57th Street) where there is a gap in the East River Greenway. Is it possible to use Class 2 bike lane marking in this area?

A: Design “C” will only be implemented in heavily congested areas. The limited road space in these areas does not permit the use of Class 2 markings.

Q: Has any consideration been given to the use of barriers during peak periods to protect bus lanes?

A: The effectiveness of barriers is counterintuitive. Buses at times may be blocked from passing stationary vehicles using the curb (e.g. garbage and delivery trucks). Barriers may also prevent SBS from passing local buses on the same route. Lane painting similar to that on Fordham Road and 34th Street will be used and has proven to be a successful bus priority measure.

Q: How will the proposed designs address the extreme congestion around the Midtown Tunnel at 34th Street, especially since SBS buses are longer than current buses?

A: SBS buses will only be one foot longer than current articulated buses used in M-15 service. Design initiatives (such as improved bus lanes and traffic signal optimization) will designate a place for buses to be, which will help diminish the possibility of buses blocking intersections.

BRT Elements

Q: When will bus bulbs be installed?

A: Installation of bus bulbs is anticipated by 2012, depending on the availability of funding.

Q: Has it been determined whether stations will have platforms for level boarding?

A: Buses will have the capability to kneel to the level of the raised curb, allowing for level-boarding. A detectable warning strip will be located along the raised curb to signal the curb height.

Q: How will off-board fare collection work?

A: Off-board fare collection is currently in effect for Fordham Road SBS. The machines look like the small machines in subway stations. Instead of selling Metrocards, the machine will debit the rider's Metrocard (and accept transfers, as well). A receipt will be issued to show that the fare was paid. Riders must keep the receipt to show fare inspectors. Fare evasion summonses will be issued if necessary. Machines will have full ADA functionality and foreign language options.

Q: How will interfering trees be addressed in SBS design?

A: It may be necessary to remove trees to accommodate a station design. They will however be replaced as close to their original locations as possible.

Q: Are bus bulbs, signal priority, and off-board fare collection all part of Phase 1?

A: Bus bulbs and signal priority will be part of Phase 2 (2011-2012). All other design elements will be implemented this fall as part of Phase 1.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The CAC Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.