4.0 INTRODUCTION

Consistent with Federal Transit Authority (FTA) guidance for the Alternatives Analysis process, public outreach was conducted at key milestones to solicit comments on work completed and to fully vet the alternatives with stakeholders. This chapter describes the public outreach efforts that have been undertaken for the 34th Street Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis.

4.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The public involvement process for the 34th Street Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis was outlined in Attachment A of the Project Initiation Package, which was provided to the FTA in October 2009. As described in the Project Initiation Package, the NYCDOT Project Team held its first Open House in November 2009 to present the proposed alternatives for the 34th Street Corridor. The purpose of the Open House was to provide information about the project, and to allow stakeholders to voice to their concerns, call attention to sensitivities, and explore potential solutions.

In addition to the Open House, NYCDOT met with several key stakeholders to present the Alternatives Analysis and receive feedback. Information about the project was also posted on the NYCDOT website, where written feedback was possible through an online submission form.

NYCDOT will present the results to the Alternatives Analysis at a second public meeting in January 2010.

4.1.1 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE #1—NOVEMBER 19, 2009

The first public Open House was held on November 19, 2009, upon completion of the Project Initiation Package, which included the Statement of Purpose and Need. The meeting reviewed the Project Initiation Package with stakeholders, presented the alternatives, and then solicited input on the alternatives under consideration. The format of the meeting included an opening and board viewing at 6:00 PM, followed by a PowerPoint presentation at 7:00 PM. Comments that were received at the Public Open House broadly fell into three categories (Proposed Alternatives, Analysis Methodologies, and General) and are summarized below. In instances where responses to comments were provided, these are also included.

4.1.1.1 COMMENTS ON PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

- The Murray Hill Neighborhood Association is opposed to a light rail system on 34th Street or 42nd Street in New York, unless there is a viable option to keep cars from shifting onto surrounding local streets. New York University (NYU) Medical Center has valet parking and emergency vehicles, and there are several hotels along the corridor where guests park to

check in, all of which could cause bus lane or light rail disruption. During peak hours, 34th Street and adjacent local streets are feeder streets for heavy tunnel traffic and residential streets become crowded and less safe for residents.

- An attendee suggested that the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association might be focused on the immediate problem of excess traffic on local residential streets rather than thinking of creative long-term solutions, such as a transit corridor with light rail which would ultimately be more cost-effective operationally. Deliveries in the area can be scheduled at off times to cause less disruption to light rail service. Attendee is interested in transit capacity and the environmental impacts of transit vehicles.
- Electric-powered vehicles may be infeasible because the electronic power source could be hampered by snow and flooding. After the great blizzard of 1888, all above-ground, outdoor electrical wires (of any type) were banned on Manhattan Island.
- Trackless trolleys should be considered as another alternative. There would be both pros and cons and the alignment would need to be reviewed.
- Because there is so much bus and auto traffic from the Lincoln Tunnel on the 34th Street Corridor, NYCDOT should consider connecting the Jersey City light rail through the Lincoln Tunnel onto 34th Street, creating a loop to 42nd Street, to alleviate congestion.

  Response: The alternatives are focused on the immediate area of 34th Street.

- Has a center bus lane been considered? The use of bus bulbs was also suggested.

  Response: The width of the street and physical feasibility of any alignment would need to be considered.

- The underground pedestrian corridor from Herald Square to Penn Station should be reopened to move pedestrians off the sidewalks and streets where they can cause pedestrian congestion when walking against a light.
- Light rail and buses should use their own power from biodegradable fuel, which would be good for the environment. There should be a separate lane with guard rails on the opposite side of walkways with pedestrian exits to the other side of the street. This prevents cars from illegally parking. There should also be a curfew on side streets so residents have privacy.
- There are doubts about whether or not the need outweighs the cost. If crosstown transit is an issue and if pedestrian traffic is too high, pedestrians should walk down 35th Street. The majority of pedestrian traffic is milling tourists. If the need is for a commuter to get from one line to another, they should go to Herald Square, Bryant Park or Times Square to transfer. However, if the need is larger, BRT with exclusive lanes is preferred—it's cheaper and easier than the other option; however, a streetcar would add local charm, which is valuable.
- How will a dedicated bus lane be enforced? Would cameras be placed on buses or would legislation need to be passed to have laws that enforce dedicated lanes?

  Response: Several control measures will be evaluated.

4.1.1.2 COMMENTS ON ANALYSIS METHODOLOGIES

- Pedestrian safety should be part of the study's primary goals rather than one of its secondary goals.

  Response: Pedestrian safety was indeed added as a primary objective.

- What is the timeline for implementing any alternatives? Is this study just to get ideas or is it being implemented within a specific time?

  Response: NYCDOT is looking at alternatives that could be implemented in a relatively quick time period, subject to the alternative needing to meet the purpose and need of the project.

- The study needs to consider bicycle lanes and bicyclist safety and look at the use of bicycles and safety along adjacent streets in the area.

  Response: There are bicyclists who ride along the greenway near the river but are uncomfortable riding into Midtown due to vehicle congestion; bicycle parking could help encourage use of the greenways. In addition, NYCDOT has identified 30th, 31st, 39th and 40th Streets as future travel corridors in its bicycle master plan.

- Sixth Avenue to Ninth Avenue near Penn Station has excellent transit access but other streets immediately south of 34th Street also need to be examined for access and impacts.

  Response: The study will look at the whole corridor, not just 34th Street.

- Local residents have complained about not being allowed to park curbside for a few minutes to unload groceries or other items. The study should look at the impact of curbside loading on bus speed and service, as well as how long each trip is delayed.

  Response: NYCDOT will also look at the impact of loading.

4.1.1.3 GENERAL QUESTIONS, COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

- Will NYCDOT be presenting to the transportation committees of Community Boards along the corridor when deciding on alternatives?

  Response: Community Advisory Committees (CACs) have been created for other corridor projects to keep stakeholders engaged and one could be formed for the 34th Street project. NYCDOT is working with the Community Boards throughout the process in addition to CAC meetings, and has presented the Alternatives Analysis to the Manhattan CB4 Transportation Committee and other community groups.

- Past community feedback points to community members supporting more major changes and real investments rather than something simpler like Select Bus Service (SBS), which will still cost money with relatively little change. More aggressive options for community buy-in were suggested.

  Response: Costs and benefits will also be considered when selecting alternatives, and significant public outreach will be involved as the project moves forward.

- How does the pre-boarding payment work on SBS or BRT buses?

  Response: There is a pre-payment machine on the street near a bus stop and a person pays the fare, takes a receipt, and enters the bus. Inspectors on the bus randomly check for

receipts, and fare evaders are issued a $100 summons. This payment method has worked well on BX12 in the Bronx, and the fare evasion rate is the same as for on-board fare payment.

- How would turning 34th Street into a one-way route affect emergency vehicles and patient access to the NYU Langone Medical Center?

  Response: Emergency vehicle travel was considered as part of the Alternatives Analysis. Hospital access is an important consideration for the design phase.

- Since the Lincoln Tunnel, Penn Station, and PATH Trains are located in the area of 34th Street, did the Port Authority have comments about the original proposal for 34th Street transit?

  Response: NYCDOT is working with other agencies and a representative of the Port Authority was in attendance at the Open House.

4.1.2 OTHER FEEDBACK

In addition to feedback from the first public meeting, NYCDOT received additional feedback from meeting with Community Boards and other community groups, as well as via the online feedback form. These comments are summarized below.

4.1.2.1 COMMENTS ON PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

Recommended technologies to be included in the evaluation process were presented for comment during the first public meeting in November 2009, as well as on the NYCDOT website and through other public presentations. During the outreach, other technologies were also suggested for consideration in the Alternatives Analysis. These suggestions, as well as the project team's evaluation and response are provided below.

- Monorail: Elevated modern monorail was suggested for inclusion in the Alternatives Analysis study.

  Response: Monorail is very similar to the AGT Alternative and could potentially be the final technology selected during the design process, should AGT emerge from the Alternatives Analysis.

- Taxi Service: Improved taxi service could serve as mass transportation on the corridor without significant new infrastructure.

  Response: Based on taxi GPS data, approximately 11,000 taxi trips per day have both origins and destinations within the 34th Street corridor (defined here as between 23rd Street and 42nd Street for the full width of Manhattan). Of these trips, approximately 6,000 can be considered crosstown trips (defined as crossing one or both of Fifth or Ninth Avenues). The average speed for these trips is approximately six miles per hour.

  This volume of taxi trips indicates that while taxis play a significant transportation role in crosstown travel on the 34th Street corridor, they still carry a minority of the passengers using public transportation. To carry either the existing crosstown bus travel, or the projected future growth in travel, one or both of taxi occupancy or taxi availability would need to be increased significantly, with attendant impacts on travel speed and passenger comfort. In addition, improved taxi service does not fully address the purpose and need of

the Alternatives Analysis, as this does not address either pedestrian congestion, or mobility for express buses. As such, this alternative was not included in the formal analysis.

However, although they will not be the primary focus of this study, taxis will continue to play an important mobility role for travel in the 34th Street corridor. Improvements to taxi service, such as improved ride-sharing capabilities, may be appropriate to consider in some locations. Through the design process, the potential and needs of taxi service improvements will be considered with the LPA.

- Heavy Rail Shuttle: A shuttle could be constructed from Penn Station to Twelfth Avenue using the existing LIRR tracks to the Caemmerer/Hudson Yard.

  Response: This suggestion is considered separately from the Heavy Rail Alternative described above, as it suggests a different alignment, different proposed ridership, and different level of construction required. This mode does not meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Project, as it does not address the full-length of crosstown trips, does not improve express bus service, and does not affect pedestrian space along 34th Street. As such, this alternative is not included in the Alternatives Analysis. However, the proposal could be considered as a companion project at a later point. Based on community input, the project sponsor worked with NYCT and MTA Long Island Rail Road to evaluate the idea. What follows is a summary of the LIRR response to the proposal, which outlines some of the challenges involved.

  There are a number of operational and access challenges to the LIRR being able to implement a shuttle service between Penn Station and Hudson Yards:

  - Penn Station Access/Crowding: As the busiest train station in North America, Penn Station is a very fragile operation, particularly during rush hour periods. The East River tunnels and Penn Station's tracks and platforms are owned by Amtrak, with operations shared between the LIRR, New Jersey Transit and Amtrak. It would be extremely challenging to incorporate additional passenger service into a system and station that is already at capacity.

  - Impacts to Yard Storage/Operation: A new shuttle would require the construction of an ADA-compliant station at Hudson Yards. Multiple exits, wide platforms, elevators, and escalators would be required in order to move customers between street level and a new station deep underground. This new station infrastructure would severely reduce the LIRR's space in the Yard for train storage, maintenance, and inspections, and this would thus hinder LIRR's ability to meet the demands of the PM rush hour.

  - Shuttle Operation: As a commuter railroad, the LIRR's fleet is sized and designed to handle longer distance trips. Because of the interior car configuration and limited number of car doors, it takes longer for LIRR trains to load and unload customers as compared to a subway car. This prevents the LIRR from implementing a frequent and rapid shuttle service, particularly given the limited dwell time and crowded platforms and staircases at Penn Station.

    Fare collection on the proposed shuttle would be difficult to implement, as the trip is far too short to allow train crews to service tickets on board. Due to the crowding conditions, it is impossible to construct any type of fare gates within Penn Station.

4.1.2.2 COMMENTS ON ANALYSIS METHODOLOGIES

- Key goals for the project evaluation expressed by the public include:
  - Increased transit speed
  - Allowing for deliveries and curb access
  - Improving pedestrian movement
  - Minimizing impacts to other traffic circulation, including private and commercial vehicles
  - Include priority for express buses
  - Do not denigrate the quality of the streetscape
  - The transit mode should not be blocked or have conflicts with other modes

4.1.2.3 GENERAL QUESTIONS, COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

- All street changes should be handicap-accessible
- Any system implemented should be expandable in the future
- The impact on surrounding streets will need to be evaluated
- 34th Street is a 24-hour street, and should be looked at for many times during the day and night

4.1.3 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE #2 – JANUARY 2010

The second Open House will be held in January 2010 following completion of the Alternatives Analysis report. The purpose of this second outreach meeting is to present the preferred alternative, to solicit comments on the completed analysis, and to solicit input on the alternative(s) recommended for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) documentation. Invitations to the second Open House will be extended to the general public, including elected officials, community boards, business improvement districts, business owners, property owners, major cultural institutions, advocacy groups, and the general public. The meeting format will be an evening presentation of the process and the preferred alternative, followed by a public discussion.

The proposed stakeholder invitee list is presented below. Additionally, those included in a database of organizations/individuals provided by NYCDOT will receive notice of the public meetings.

4.1.4 STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Throughout the course of the project, NYCDOT has held meetings with the MTA, MTA Bridges and Tunnels, NYCT, MTA Bus Company, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, NJTransit, and the FTA. These meetings are targeted to specific concerns and issues that will need to be addressed to fully implement the project given the various functions that 34th Street serves. NYCDOT will continue to conduct these targeted meetings as the project advances to solicit input from these agencies and advance the project.

In addition, DOT will continue to meet with other public stakeholders throughout the course of the project.

4.2 STAKEHOLDER LIST

The following agencies, organizations, and individuals have been invited to participate or have participated in the public outreach process to date.

4.2.1 ELECTED OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY BOARDS

4.2.1.1 FEDERAL

Senator Charles Schumer
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney

4.2.1.2 STATE

New York State Senator Thomas Duane
New York State Senator Liz Krueger
New York State Assemblymember Richard Gottfried
New York State Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh
New York State Assemblymember Jonathan Bing

4.2.1.3 CITY

Mayor Michael Bloomberg
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
City Council President Christine Quinn
City Councilmember Rosie Mendez
City Councilmember Daniel Garodnick
Manhattan Community Board 4
Manhattan Community Board 5
Manhattan Community Board 6

4.2.2 AGENCIES

4.2.2.1 FEDERAL

Federal Highway Administration
Federal Transit Administration

4.2.2.2 STATE

New York State Department of Transportation
Metropolitan Transportation Authority
MTA Long Island Rail Road
MTA New York City Transit
MTA Bus Company
MTA Bridges and Tunnels
New Jersey Transit

Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
Bee Line Bus/Westchester Department of Transportation
Empire State Development Corporation

4.2.2.3 CITY

New York City Department of City Planning
New York City Department of Environmental Protection
New York City Economic Development Corporation
New York City Department of Sanitation
New York City Police Department
Fire Department of the City of New York

4.2.3 BUSINESSES/BUSINESS GROUPS/INSTITUTIONS:

34th Street Partnership
Macy's
Madison Square Garden
Amtrak
Hotel Pennsylvania
Bolt Bus, Inc.
NYC & Company
NYU Medical Center
US Helicopter
Empire State Building
1 Penn Plaza
Hammerstein Ballroom
Jacob K. Javits Center
Association of Private Carriers
Academy Lines
CUNY Graduate Center
New York Public Library (Science, Industry, and Business Library)
New York Waterway
New York Water Taxi
SeaStreak

4.2.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Coalition for Pedestrian Safety
Association for a Better New York
Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association
Permanent Citizens' Advisory Committee to the MTA
Straphangers Campaign
Murray Hill Association
Manhattan East Community Association