



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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District Manager

January 11, 2010

Ms. Margaret Forgione  
Manhattan Commissioner  
Department of Transportation  
59 Maiden Lane, 37<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, New York 10038

**Re: 34<sup>th</sup> Street Transit Corridor**

Dear Commissioner Forgione:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) applauds the Department of Transportation (DOT) for engaging the community early on in a consultation process for the long-term design of the 34<sup>th</sup> Street transit Corridor.

CB4 recommends that five goals be given the highest priority: speedy and reliable local and express transit services; residential and business deliveries; pedestrian safety and reduced congestion; integration in a system to accommodate truck routes and expandability; and enhancement of neighborhood character.

A single alternative may not be sufficient to satisfy all the objectives. CB4 encourages DOT to explore a combination of surface and subsurface solutions that may be more effective to satisfy the goals within the constraints.

**Goals**

1. Local and Express Transit service:
  - a. Any express transit must be separated from other vehicular traffic. As we learned with the current bus lanes on 34<sup>th</sup> Street, without physical protection the operational cost of enforcement is excessive and non-sustainable. Today, no one respects the painted bus lanes.
  - b. Fifty percent of the corridor's transit riders are using express bus services. Improving service to these users is particularly important since bus express transit services are critical to reducing the number of commuter cars entering Manhattan. Improving the express service reduces traffic congestion not just locally but at all the river crossing points.
2. Residential and business deliveries: the major objection to the current system is the lack of loading and unloading space for deliveries, moving, emergency repair trucks, etc. The new infrastructure will have to either provide loading spaces along the protected lanes, as is the case in bike lanes, or be

located on the median of the corridor. Such an accommodation is a prerequisite to the success of this effort.

3. Pedestrian safety, access and congestion: the numbers of pedestrians projected for the Access to the Region Core (ARC), and for the Eastern and Western Rail Yards Environmental Impact Statements are staggering.
  - a. The first priority should be to improve pedestrian safety by reducing conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians
  - b. Reducing pedestrian congestion requires not only allocation of more space, but also allocation of more time at crossings. Installing Barnes Dances at major transit intersections would reduce the need for expanded sidewalks at pedestrian crossings.
  - c. The pedestrian infrastructure of “feeder avenues” like Eighth and Ninth Avenues that currently have narrow sidewalks will also need to be included in the system and improved to absorb the load.
  - d. Accessibility to all users: the current configuration prevents curbside access from bringing disabled persons to ADA-compliant entrances to the subway. The new configuration must address this issue for the new transit as well as for existing facilities.
  
4. The proposed solution requires the planning of a system to address trucks, Lincoln Tunnel vehicle overflow, and connectivity, rather than just selecting a technology for a point-to-point corridor.
  - a. Every weekday there are 11,000 truck trips in and out of the Lincoln Tunnel. 34<sup>th</sup> Street is a Through Truck Route for trucks with destinations other than Manhattan. The system redesign will have to include new truck routes to avoid the residential neighborhood to the south from being inundated with trucks.
  - b. The plan must also address the relocation of long distance commercial bus stops and NYPD vehicles, which currently collectively often occupy two lanes on a block.
  - c. As there is not enough real-estate space in the street to accommodate a new transit system that includes dedicated space, more space for pedestrians, space for deliveries, and space for the current volume of private cars and taxis and trucks, the redesign of the system must show where these users will be directed.
  - d. While new technologies are attractive for transit on W. 34<sup>th</sup> Street, the routes served should be able to reach further locations, and/or absorb more users without commuters making multiple mode switches for a given trip. For example, a light rail system on 34<sup>th</sup> Street would offer various possibilities for extension to other streets or even to a connection with the existing Hudson-Bergen Light Rail on the New Jersey side of the Lincoln Tunnel. This would enable replacing thousands of car trips through the tunnel with an environmentally friendly mass transit option.
  
5. Neighborhood character requires that the solution avoid encroachment on views; while automated guideway transit systems (like Air Train) are effective in certain contexts, an elevated concrete platform would be a detriment to historic destinations such as Macy’s and the Empire State Building.

### **Multiple alternatives**

Of the alternatives the DOT listed the options of “no or minor bus improvements” are not acceptable. The current bus lanes have resulted in bus speed barely faster than walking. This is insufficient to justify the inconvenience the present configuration causes to the majority of local businesses and residents. At the same time, improving local and express transit services remains a top priority for our community (bus, ferry, subway, bicycle, etc).

The options of a bus rapid transit and light rail, located in physically protected lanes in the center of the street, seem to best satisfy the objectives and the constraints. However, DOT should also explore alternative or complementary solutions.

In its comments on the Western Rail Yards CB4 recommended that existing underground LIRR trains could continue from Penn Station, their current terminal, to the Western Rail yards, using two tracks close to 33<sup>rd</sup> Street currently reserved for storage as a new terminal. One or two adjoining storage tracks could be converted to platforms. This would provide much needed connectivity from the Eastern and Western Rail Yards, the extended No. 7, and the Jacob Javits Convention Center to Penn Station--and even to the airports via Air Train--and could thus potentially reduce the expected pedestrian overcrowding at 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and West 34<sup>th</sup> Street as well as complementing any above-surface transit systems.

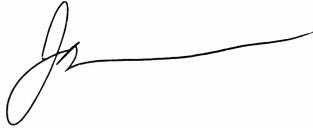
Sincerely,



John Weis  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Christine Berthet  
Co-Chair  
Transportation Planning Committee



Jay Marcus  
Co-Chair  
Transportation Planning Committee

CC: CB5 (Vikki Barbero, Thomas Miller)  
CB6  
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Howard H. Roberts, Jr., MTA NYC Transit