



EXISTING STATIONS

# WILLIAMS BRIDGE

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COMPLETING CONNECTIONS



## INTRODUCTION

### SYNOPSIS

The Williamsbridge Metro-North station is located near the intersection of Webster Avenue and Gun Hill Road. It has moderate ridership, due to a high number of reverse commuters, with a total of more than 530 outbound daily weekday boardings. The station lies a quarter mile from the Gun Hill Road 2/5 subway line and a half mile from the Montefiore Medical Center, the flagship hospital of the largest private employer in the Bronx<sup>1</sup>. The Department of City Planning has recently rezoned much of the area to strengthen surrounding neighborhoods and retail corridors. Parts of the Gun Hill Road, Webster Avenue, and the White Plains Road corridors maintain high levels of pedestrian activity, but in the area immediately leading up to the Metro-North station, this is not the case. Networks of open space and recreation surround the area, but lack sufficient access from the station and to each other. Its location, assets and proximity to additional mass transit provide an opportunity to increase usage; however pedestrian and intermodal connections from the immediate station area to area assets and retail corridors are not made. This section examines challenges and identifies recommendations that complete connections around the Williamsbridge station area.

### AREA CHARACTERISTICS

The study area consists of the half mile radius around the Metro-North station with the primary focus area roughly bounded by Jerome Avenue to the west, Woodlawn Cemetery to the north, White Plains Road to the east, and 207th Street to the south. Area demographics in this area closely resemble Bronx-wide demographics. Much of the housing stock predates 1939 (1,176 units of 1,644 total units; or 71.5%), older than the Bronx average. A significant portion of area residents rent are renters. Racial and ethnic demographics are in line with Bronx averages. Unemployment in the area is lower than both the city and the Bronx, at 7%. The majority of Williamsbridge households do not have access to a vehicle and residents take public transportation or walk to work at a higher percentage than the average for the borough. 64% of housing units do not have access to a vehicle and 28% have access to just one vehicle, (Bronx is 59% and 30%), and 69% of workers take public transit or walk to work (Bronx overall is 64%).

### KEY FEATURES

The Montefiore Medical Center. Montefiore Medical Center is located a half mile from the Metro-North station. It is a teaching hospital and one of the fifty largest employers in New York State with more than

“ Together, we envision Webster Avenue as a place where people live, work, shop, and enjoy unique cultural experiences – and a hub for entrepreneurs, researchers, and students to foster new businesses and academic collaborations. ”

| Webster Avenue Vision Plan, NYC Economic Development Corporation, April 2013 |



**FIGURE 1** | Entrance to Williamsbridge station on East Gun Hill Road.

## COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS | Williamsbridge Study Area

### Metro-North Station Weekday Ridership (2011)



167 inbound passengers  
536 outbound passengers

### NYC Subway Station Daily Ridership (2012)\*

- 2 Gun Hill Road: 7,212 weekday | 7,899 weekend
- 4 Mosholu Parkway: 9,596 weekday | 9,261 weekend

- The majority of local residents either walk or take public transportation to work.
- The low unemployment rate reflects the stability of the surrounding community and significant employment opportunity in the area.

	STUDY AREA <sup>1,2</sup>	THE BRONX	NEW YORK CITY
Hispanic	47%	53%	29%
African-American	40.2	35%	22.8%
Renter Occupied Units	87.5%	79%	68%
Housing Units with No Access to a Vehicle	64%	59%	56%
With Access to One Vehicle	28%	30%	31%
Take Public Transit or Walk to Work	69%	64%	67%
Population Density (per square mile)	12,359	32,356	26,953
Unemployment Rate (2010)	7%	12%	11%
<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>77,660</b>	<b>1,365,725</b>	<b>8,336,697</b>

<sup>1</sup> The study area is based on select Census tracts within a 1/2 mile radius of the Williamsbridge station

<sup>2</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, 2006-2010 American community Survey 5-Year Estimates

\* MTA Subway Ridership, 2012. [http://www.mta.info/nycct/facts/ridership/#chart\\_s](http://www.mta.info/nycct/facts/ridership/#chart_s)

17,000 employees at this location. The grade of Gun Hill Road increases significantly as one travels west from Webster Avenue and large tracts of land offering recreation and open space. The Gun Hill Road Corridor from Webster Avenue to Jerome Avenue is served by the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District. Webster Avenue runs adjacent to the Metro-North Rail line and connects to the busy Fordham Road Corridor further south.

## LAND USE AND ZONING

The neighborhoods that surround the station area are primarily comprised of a mix of single and two family residential and multi-family residential buildings. Mixed-use buildings and commercial buildings are concentrated primarily along Gun Hill and White Plains Road. Large institutional uses like Montefiore Hospital occupy a large section of Gun Hill Road west of the station area, while the Gun Hill Houses NYCHA complex, the Immaculate Conception Church and its parochial school, and the Evander Childs Educational Campus occupy a large stretch of the corridor east of the Metro-North and 2/5 stations. Webster Avenue is currently characterized by a mix of commercial, low-intensity manufacturing, auto-related uses and vacant lots, especially on the portion of the street adjacent to the rail corridor. Several parks and open spaces are located throughout the area.

The Norwood neighborhood is almost triangular and is surrounded by Woodlawn Cemetery to the north, Van Cortlandt Park to the northwest, Moshulu Parkway to the west where it meets the New Botanical Gardens, and the Bronx River Parkway to the east. In the center of the neighborhood is the Williamsbridge Oval.

The Williams Bridge station is surrounded primarily by medium to higher density residential districts, with commercial districts concentrated along Webster Avenue, White Plains and Gun Hill Road. The highest density commercial district is located around the intersection of Webster Ave and

Gun Hill Road. A semi-industrial commercial district (that does not permit residential uses) is located on

Webster Avenue, south of the station area.

Two rezonings have recently been completed by DCP within close proximity of the station area. The Williamsbridge / Baychester Rezoning, adopted in October of 2011, and the Webster Avenue / BedfordPark / Norwood Rezoning, adopted in March of 2011, contextually up-zoned and added commercial overlays to major corridors (including Webster Ave-

nue, Gun Hill and White Plains Road), east and south of the station area; and contextualized or preserved lower-scale portions of the surrounding residential neighborhood.

## TRANSPORTATION

The Metro-North station is located on East Gun Hill Road between Webster Avenue and the Bronx River Parkway. It has two short platforms which allow ingress and egress from four passenger cars. Northbound and southbound access to the station are only available from the north and south side of Gun Hill Road respectively.

The Gun Hill Road subway station began operating on March 3, 1917 and is served by the 2 and 5 trains. The 5 train runs only during peak service. Formerly served by the 3rd Avenue Elevated Rail on a lower platform, the platform was removed as part of improvement begun in 2004. Additional station enhancements included a new station house with an entranceway at Gun Hill Road, aesthetic improvements and elevator/escalator access.

Seven bus routes—the Bx41, Bx55, Bx38, Bx30, Bx28, Bx39, and BxM11—all lie within the Williamsbridge neighborhood; the first five being within a three minute walk from the Metro-North station and the other two within a seven minute walk. The Bx41 Select Bus Service route which runs along Webster Avenue commenced operation on June 30, 2013. There is a stop at the intersection of Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue.

Webster Avenue is one of the longest north-south thoroughfares in the Bronx; the stretch of it near Williamsbridge follows closely alongside of the Bronx River Parkway and the Metro-North Harlem line.

The Bronx River Parkway runs between the Kensico Circle in North Castle, Westchester County and Story Avenue in the Neighborhood of Soundview in the south Bronx. There is an exit from the Bronx River Parkway onto Gun Hill Road very close to the Metro-North station entrance.

Regional bike paths run along the Moshulu Parkway and within Bronx Park along the Bronx River. There are no on-street bike routes that connect these to the surrounding neighborhoods or to Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue.



FIGURE 2 | Zoning in the Williamsbridge neighborhood.

## EXISTING PLANS

In addition to the recent rezonings, several recent planning initiatives have been completed in the area which includes:

### WEBSTER AVENUE VISION PLAN (EDC)

The New York City Economic Development Corporation released a vision plan in April 2013 for the Webster Avenue Corridor from Fordham Road to Gun Hill

Road. The plan was done in collaboration with community stakeholders and area institutions including The New York Botanical Garden, Fordham University, Montefiore Medical Center and the Bronx Zoo. The process facilitated a targeted planning process to re-ignite Webster Avenue as a neighborhood “main street,” capitalizing on its proximity to the anchor institutions and a 2011 rezoning that projects 430,000 square feet of new commercial development and more than 950 additional residential units<sup>2</sup>. 204th Street and Gun Hill Road were both identified as neighborhood centers along Webster Avenue.



**Land Uses**

- One and Two Family Homes
- Multi-Family Walkups
- Multi-family Elevator buildings
- Mixed Com/Residential Buildings
- Commercial Buildings
- Institutional Buildings
- Manufacturing Buildings
- Transportation/Utility Buildings
- Park/Open Space
- Parking Lots
- Vacant Land

**Transportation**

- Metro North Harlem Line
- D Subway Lines
- Bus Routes
- 2/5 Subway Line

**Notable Land Uses Features:**

- ① Medical around Montefiore Hospital and large areas of openspace with parks along the north-south corridor and Woodlawn cemetery north of Gun-Hill Road.
- ② Commercial corridors on Gun Hill Road west of Webster Avenue, along 204th Street in Norwood, and along White Plains Road.
- ③ Low to mid-density residential uses west of Webster Avenue and south of Gun Hill Road.



**FIGURE 3** | Renovated East Gun Hill Road subway station.

### BX41 SELECT BUS SERVICE (NYCTTRANSIT)

A study of select bus service along the 5.3 mile long Webster Avenue Corridor was initiated in 2012 and service began in June of 2013. The service connects from the 2/5 Gun Hill Road Station to the Hub at 149th Street and 3rd Avenue in the South Bronx, with stops at stops at 204th, Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue, and the Gun Hill Road 2/5. The project includes pedestrian safety improvements along sections of Webster Avenue.

### GUN HILL ROAD CONGESTED CORRIDORS

As part of the Citywide Congested Corridors Project New York City DOT is studying the East Gun Hill Road Corridor from Jerome Avenue to White Plains Road. The goals of the program are improving mobility, air quality, safety, and the quality of life for all of the street's users, as described in PlaNYC<sup>3</sup>. The city held several community meetings to discuss the corridor and project throughout 2013. Ideas to alleviate congestion have included removing on-street parking

to allow for an extra traffic lane during peak hours; implementing left or right only turn signals; pedestrian safety enhancements; altering stoplight timing; and changing bus routes and stops. Implementation will begin in 2014.

## CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Located near a busy intersection between a major employment center and the recently renovated 2/5 subway station at White Plains Road, the Williamsbridge Metro-North Station has potential for additional ridership. While strong pedestrian retail corridors are located along Gun Hill Road to the west; White Plains Road to the east; and a growing Webster Avenue as it approach Fordham Road to the south, none of these corridors extend to the immediate station area itself. Many of the deficiencies seen around the Williamsbridge station area are typical of those seen around other Bronx Metro-North stations, which include a lack of visibility and discon-



**FIGURE 5 |** Webster Avenue, between East 205th and 207th Streets.

nection from surrounding neighborhoods and inter-modal transit. Thus, similar strategies to enhance walkability, visibility, and activity along the Gun Hill Road Corridor and Webster Avenue Corridor will help integrate the Metro-Station into the surrounding neighborhoods and grow the area according to the vision set forth by the community.

For the purpose of this Section, the challenges and recommendations are discussed in two focus areas: (1) the Gun Hill Road Corridor, primarily between Webster Avenue and White Plains Road, (2) and the Webster Avenue Corridor, generally north of 204th Street to Gun Hill Road. The recommendations take a look at both short-term and long-term ideas that will connect and grow the Webster Avenue and Gun Hill Road corridors.

## WEBSTER AVENUE CORRIDOR

As part of a recent rezoning and EDC's Webster Avenue Vision Plan the Webster Avenue Corridor is envisioned as a vibrant mixed use corridor which acts as a neighborhood main street and provides resources for the surrounding community and area

institutions. The results of these efforts and the new Bx41 Select Bus Service can already be seen through recent developments and pedestrian enhancements along the corridor. However major gaps between active uses and pedestrian amenities remain in the area north of the Moshulu Parkway. There is no bus shelter built on the east side of Webster Avenue at Gun Hill Road for the new Bx 41 SBS. This stop is located on the same block as the southbound Metro-North station entrance, but there is no signage or coordination between them.

While the New York Botanical Gardens is a major tourist attraction and active community stakeholder, it does not have a presence north of its station and entranceway at Bedford Park Boulevard. Walkability along Webster Avenue becomes increasingly difficult continuing north to Gun Hill Road as sidewalks narrow and pedestrian activity dissipates. Along the west side of Webster Avenue, Parkside Place branches up into the Norwood neighborhood and runs parallel to Webster along a ridge descending back down before Gun Hill Road, show in Figure 5. In doing so, a sliver of land is created which is fenced off on the Norwood side and presents a steep and



**FIGURE 6 |** Norwood neighborhood.

overgrown rock face along Webster Avenue. There are no sidewalks along the west side of Webster Avenue during this stretch. On this same section on the east side of Webster Avenue, narrow sidewalks run alongside lots located adjacent to the rail line which are difficult to develop as active uses. This combination creates a pedestrian dead zone between 204th Street and Gun Hill Road.

Several underutilized lots are located along Webster Avenue, just south of Gun Hill Road. At the intersection of Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue are located the Metro-North station and new Select Bus Stop; the Montefiore Medical Center and Gun Hill Road-Jerome Corridor to the west; and the and White Plains Road Corridor to the east. The intersection should be a prominent pedestrian gateway to these features. It is zoned as C4-4 which is intended for regional commercial and permits mid-density residential uses, but currently is characterized by low density uses which do not support transit. Significant additional floor area is permitted for community facility uses in this commercial district.

Since the adoption of the Webster Avenue/Bedford

Park/Norwood Rezoning, in 2011, the corridor has already seen development activity. This is an emerging corridor and some of the early development consists of supportive housing or community facilities with inactive ground floor uses. The community has expressed concern that if this development pattern grows and it would not support the long term vision of the corridor as a “neighborhood main street”. The recommendations below are intended to help the community achieve their vision which includes active ground floor retail and a range of affordable housing options.

*Recommendations:*

- Guide the development of the Webster Avenue Corridor to reflect the vision of the community and strengthen the rezoning area:
  - o Coordinate local stakeholders, businesses, institutions, and city agencies to ensure best resources are available as development opportunities arise. This could be coordinated through the community board or a merchant’s organization, such as the recently formed 204th Street Merchants Association.

- o Create a set of consistent guidelines for development which meets the communities vision and work closely with developers to share these guidelines
- Encourage the development of the vacant lots adjacent to the station and along Webster Avenue. Apply the principles of Rail Adjacent lots, as outlined in Section 1 Strategies, where these difficult lots exist.
- Identify opportunities to provide access to the Metro North station from Webster Avenue. This could be done as part of the development of rail adjacent lot sites. This would provide enhanced access the to the upland Norwood neighborhood and create additional pedestrian activity on Webster Avenue.
- Widen the sidewalks to allow for pedestrians; leverage the Bx41 SBS project to include additional improvements.
- Improve sight lines from Webster Avenue to the Norwood neighborhood along Parkside Place to decrease the sense of isolation for pedestrians and connect the neighborhood to the corridor. This includes removal of the unsightly chain-link fence along Parkside Place and landscaping

improvements to the overgrown area between Webster and Parkside.

- Identify opportunities for improved or additional pedestrian access points to the Norwood neighborhood from Webster Avenue.
- The bus stop for the SBS Bx41 at Gun Hill Road is in close proximity the southbound Metro-North entrance. A shelter would enhance visibility and serve as an amenity for the SBS and Metro-North station. This would create a more seamless transfer for commuters.
- Eliminate gaps in bike paths to create connections to the regional bike network at Bronx Park and Mosholu Parkway.

## GUN HILL ROAD CORRIDOR

The area west of Gun Hill Road leading up to Montefiore is generally a strong retail corridor with pedestrian amenities. Much of this can be attributed to the Jerome Gun-Hill BID and the presence of Montefiore itself. However the area east of the station leading up to White Plains Road faces some challenges.

East of Webster Avenue the entrances to the Metro-North Station for the northbound and south-



FIGURE 4 | East Gun Hill Road.

bound platforms lack of visibility and signage which hinders station utilization. East of the station towards the 2/5 subway stop pedestrians must cross consecutively over the rail line, the Bronx River Parkway, and the Bronx River. The Bronx River Park below is a regional recreation space, however there is no signage and poor access from the north side of Gun Hill Road although several well worn paths can be seen.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Explore ways to increase ridership for employees of Montefiore Hospital Center by increasing the speed and frequency of transit between the Jerome Avenue 4 and the 2/5 and White Plains Road. This could include a private shuttle coordinated through Montefiore or a partnership with Metro-North similar to the Metro-North Rail Link<sup>4</sup> at Riverdale station.
- Increase accessibility to and visibility of the Bronx River through signage, paths and activities in coordination with the Bronx River Alliance.
- Enhance the aesthetics of the portion of Gun Hill Road that spans the Metro-North tracks and the Bronx River Parkway through the use of improved screening, murals, or lamp post banners.
- Improve station visibility by placing signage with the name of the station at the station entrance.
- Provide consistent neighborhood way-finding signage that provides directional and contextual information, e.g. signage that depicts current location in relation to key area destinations and transportation options.
- Provide way-finding signage at the 2/5 train station including information on how to get to the Metro-North station and Montefiore.
- Explore additional platform access to eliminate unnecessary crossings of Gun Hill Road. A North-

bound platform access ramp from the south side of Gun Hill Road is partly constructed.

- Explore the feasibility of developing the sites located between the rail line and Bronx River Parkway, just south of Gun Hill Road. The current zoning on these sites permits residential uses. A review of the access needs and feasibility of residential uses on these sites should be completed.

## CONCLUSION

The Williams Bridge Metro-North station sits along a busy corridor, has convenient intermodal connections, and is near a major medical facility and one of the Bronx's largest employers. A recent rezoning and community vision plan has spurred interest and development activity along the Webster Avenue Corridor. The continued development of Webster Avenue will create an important connection to Gun Hill Road, Montefiore Medical Center and regional amenities in the surrounding area such as the Fordham Road Commercial Corridor and the New York Botanical Gardens. A consistent coordinated approach that includes the community, city agencies, local stakeholders and institutions to guide the development Webster Avenue and continued pedestrian enhancements along Gun Hill Road will create a well connected retail corridor which serves the community and increases station usage.

## SOURCES

- <http://www.montefiore.org/communitydevelopment>
- <http://www.nycdc.com/project/webster-avenue-vision-plan>
- <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/corridorintro.shtml>
- <http://web.mta.info/mnr/html/raillink/raillinkpage.htm>

## PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

- Complete pedestrian connections from station area to Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue retail corridors, area employers, and recreational amenities
- Support the goals of the recent rezoning for Webster Avenue as a neighborhood main street through close coordination with community stakeholders and agencies