

34th Street Transitway Community Advisory Committee Meeting #2 Summary

Tuesday, September 21, 2010, 6-8 pm
Hotel Pennsylvania
330 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY

I. INTRODUCTIONS

Arnie Bloch of Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates (HSH) opened the meeting by welcoming the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Members. Bruce Schaller, Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) then thanked the CAC members for their attendance and their participation to date. Kristen Ellis of the Manhattan Borough President's Office also welcomed attendees, and expressed support for the outreach process to date.

II. PRESENTATIONS

Eric Beaton, Project Manager of the 34th Street Transitway at DOT, and Ted Orosz, the director of Long-Range Bus Planning for New York City Transit (NYCT) gave a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation included an overview of the CAC membership, roles, and feedback; a review of the project needs; an overview of Bus Rapid Transit/Select Bus Service efforts in New York City; 34th Street Transitway benefits and features; project timeline; and the Transitway design process. Following this presentation, attendees were asked to move to different tables for discussions about Transitway concepts. (See Section III below.) After the roundtable discussions, Eric continued the presentation, highlighting upcoming traffic analyses, project funding, and the environmental review process. Eric concluded the presentation by reviewing the next steps of the project process, including the Community Forums scheduled for October 2010, distribution of project materials to businesses and residents along the corridor, as well as future CAC meetings. (See Section IV below for comments received from CAC attendees about next steps.)

III. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Attendees were asked to break into groups of eight to discuss three general topics that could affect the overall Transitway design: 1) *transit operations*, 2) *traffic operations*, and 3) *curbside access/deliveries*. Each group was assigned a facilitator and note taker from the project team. Participants were issued information packets that contained illustrations of the three Transitway options, express bus travel patterns, general traffic patterns, and existing land use maps. They were asked to discuss their concerns and the issues that affected them and their constituents pertaining to these topics. Following the discussion, there was a brief report back from each group on key topics discussed.

The following is a summary of all points that were raised and discussed, as recorded by note takers and by Arnie Bloch at the report back session.

1. Transit Operations

CAC members wanted to understand how the various buses which operate along 34th Street would be affected by the Transitway, including:

- The frequency of proposed SBS service.
- Express bus services, including the location of their bus stops (and the possibility of consolidating these stops with SBS stops), the routes they would take north from 34th Street, and their layover activities on nearby streets.
- Tour bus operations.

- Charter bus operations.
- Mega and Bolt Bus operations, including their stops along 34th and 33rd Streets.

It was noted that the Transitway design option that restricted non-bus traffic to outbound flow (i.e., eastbound east of 5th Avenue and westbound west of 6th Avenue) would offer the most opportunity for buses to pass other buses waiting at stops, though there was a concern whether this would require narrowing of sidewalks, affecting pedestrian mobility. There was a question as to how necessary passing lanes would be on the Transitway.

2. Traffic Operations

For all three options of how the proposed Transitway would accommodate non-bus traffic flow – eastbound only, westbound only, or outbound only – CAC members voiced concern about potential traffic congestion and safety conditions on streets north and south of 34th Street. With regards to congestion, CAC members wanted a careful review of these locations, among others:

- 30th Street/Eighth Avenue,
- 40th Street at Eighth and Ninth avenues,
- 35th Street /Tenth Avenue;
- 36th Street at First, Second, and Third avenues;
- 38th St. at every intersection east of Lexington Avenue;
- 41st Street at Madison, Lexington, and Third Avenues;
- All traffic circulating between 1st Avenue/FDR Drive and east and westbound streets.

CAC members said that the analysis of traffic impacts should take into account the number of school buses operating at various time of the day along nearby streets. CAC members voiced concern about safety implications of traffic diversions from 34th Street, including possible impacts on the number of crashes among vehicles, as well as between vehicles and both bicycles and pedestrians. One concern voiced was whether traffic diversions would affect the nearby Port Authority Bus Terminal entrances. Another concern raised was that 34th Street is being used today by at least some motorists less familiar with other means of street access across town and that its restricted use in the future would cause confusion among these travelers. Another concern raised was the effect of Transitway design and operations on the disabled community, particularly the blind when crossing at intersections and wheelchair bound riders who need to access center island bus stops.

Some CAC members offered suggested variations to the three options for dealing with non-bus traffic flow, including:

- Retaining two-way non-bus traffic operations at the far ends of 34th Street.
- Making non-bus traffic lanes reversible by time of day.

3. Curbside Access and Deliveries

CAC members had both general and specific comments concerning curbside access and deliveries. General comments were as follows:

- Locating the Transitway on the south side of 34th Street would be good for businesses west of Sixth Avenue, as it would impact curb access the least.
- Emergency vehicles of all types need access to curbs and all lanes at all times of day. There was concern that a central island might restrict emergency vehicle access to curbs.
- Trade shows along 34th Street could be negatively affected by restricted curb access to taxis and private shuttles.

- Concerning deliveries:
 - There was uncertainty about how truck loading zones would operate next to bus lanes.
 - Suggested 4-hour delivery windows for curb delivery activity, like on First and Second Avenues.
 - Large stores can better dictate off-hour delivery times than smaller stores.
 - There is so much business turnover on 34th Street it is difficult to plan for future curb usage based on current delivery needs and patterns.
 - Curb usage for residential loading/unloading activity is important.
 - Curb usage for oil deliveries is important.

Specific comments offered were:

- Reassess taxi stand operations on either side of Penn Station as a result of Transitway impact on taxi access.
- Trade show access at 7 West 34th Street would be negatively affected by taxi access restrictions.
- Concerned about ambulance and patient drop-off/pickup access at medical facilities along 34th Street, particularly small medical offices on 34th Street near 2nd Avenue, NYU Medical Center, Rusk Institute, and proposed expansion of NYU Medical Center on Rusk site.
- Empire State Building loading dock on 33rd Street is not available to retail enterprises in the building fronting 34th Street.
- Other larger businesses on 34th Street have access to loading docks on 33rd and 35th Streets, but not smaller businesses.
- NYPD Traffic Agents park illegally in bus lane at various locations, especially between 8th and 9th avenues.
- Concerned about parking garage access along 34th Street.
- Concerned about loading access for Manhattan Center (between Eighth and Ninth avenues) and Otis Elevator (between Tenth and Eleventh avenues).

4. Other issues

CAC members wanted to know more background information about the Transitway concept, including:

- Extending the #7 subway line east under 34th Street as an alternative to the Transitway.
- The effect of NJ TRANSIT's Access to the Region's Core project on the Transitway.
- Choice of buses vs. light rail along on the Transitway.
- Advantages of the Transitway vs. current bus curbs lanes.
- Using Transportation Systems Management techniques vs. Transitway.
- Lessons learned from similar transitways in other cities, especially those with similar conditions to New York City.
- Restriction against any non-bus vehicles between Fifth and Sixth Avenues under the outbound Transitway option.

Other information that the CAC wanted to know was:

- Transitway impacts on Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.
- Potential Transitway impact on residential property values along 34th Street.
- CAC should be informed about details of traffic study, as well as receive historical information about crashes along the corridor.

IV. OUTREACH ISSUES

Following the second half of Eric Beaton's presentation, there was a concern raised by some CAC members that the outreach effort to obtain information about curb usage along 34th Street was not going to be enough. As a result, DOT has scheduled four community forums, each allowing block-by-block discussions of curb usage needs. Two meetings were scheduled to be held at Norman Thomas High School (111 E 33rd Street) on **October 19** and **November 4** and at the New Yorker Hotel (481 8th Avenue) on **October 21** and **November 9**, all from 6—9 pm.

Other outreach efforts were suggested, including building-by-building visits, reaching out to parallel streets and neighborhoods, and working with a special working group among the three relevant Community Boards.

CAC members also wanted to know how comments they have and will offer will be reflected in developing Transitway plans.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The CAC Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.