



East Tremont Avenue and Unionport Road

PROPOSED STATIONS

PARKCHESTER/VAN NEST



PARKCHESTER/ VAN NEST

Proposed

OVERCOMING DIVIDERS



INTRODUCTION

SYNOPSIS

The proposed Parkchester/Van Nest Metro-North station would be located on East Tremont Avenue just east of Unionport Road. Amtrak's Hell Gate rail line, the rail corridor of the proposed service, runs along East Tremont Avenue and currently serves as a major barrier between the neighborhoods of Parkchester and Van Nest. The station would provide commuter rail access that would link these neighborhoods to important regional job centers, including midtown Manhattan to the south and Westchester County and southwest Connecticut to the north. This service would dramatically improve access for residents and public feedback to the proposed station and rail service has been overwhelmingly positive.

While East Tremont Avenue is a key east/west corridor in the many parts of the Bronx, and bustling with vibrant commercial activity in many areas, this stretch is home to auto intensive low scale uses, parking lots, vacant land and vacant buildings. There is also a lack pedestrian infrastructure that, when combined with the low-intensity quasi-industrial uses, all contributes to a harsh streetscape that is largely un-walkable. This is understandable in its current state as the edge of two communities, but with a new station on the horizon, this corridor will be transformed into the gateway for the two communities, and walkability will be paramount. The proposed Metro-North station is an opportunity to transform East Tremont Avenue into a medium density mixed-use commercial corridor. Improvements to key areas along the East Tremont corridor could facilitate cohesion between the Parkchester and Van Nest neighborhoods around a new transit asset.

PARKCHESTER AREA

Parkchester is largely comprised of the planned residential community that was built in 1942 by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. The neighborhood is bounded by the following: East Tremont Avenue to the north, Castle Hill Avenue to the east, the Cross-Bronx Expressway-Westchester Avenue to the south, and White Plains Road to the west. The Parkchester complex is situated on 121 acres and is composed of over 160 multi-story buildings, 12,200 apartments with more than 35,000 residents and various retailers. The complex is divided into two separate entities, the Parkchester North Condominiums and the Parkchester South Condominiums, which are not-for-profit corporations that work cooperatively to manage the complex.¹

The Parkchester complex was originally constructed as part of an effort to provide high quality housing that would be affordable for middle-income New Yorkers. It was constructed concurrently with Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan following Le Corbusier's 'tower in a park' model. Combining large parcels of land into a superblock, and constructing large towers in the open space provided residents with generous landscaping, playspace and access to light and air. Two through streets cut across the complex, Metropolitan Avenue and Unionport Road, which are lined with commercial uses. 'Metropolitan Oval,' a large water fountain surrounded by landscaping sits at the center of the complex. About one-third of the Parkchester complex was converted to condominiums in 1974, with the rest converted in 1986.^{2,3}

Zoning within the Parkchester complex is largely comprised of an R6 Residential district, with Commercial Overlays mapped intermittently along



FIGURE 1 | Proposed location of Parkchester station.
Source: © 2011 Pictometry International Corp.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS | Parkchester Study Area

NYC Subway Station Daily Ridership (2012)*

- 6 Parkchester: 15,190 weekday | 16,260 weekend
- 2 Bronx Park East: 2,811 weekday | 2,880 weekend
- 6 Castle Hill Avenue: 7,567 weekday | 7,956 weekend
- 2 East 180th Street: 6,832 weekday | 7,154 weekend

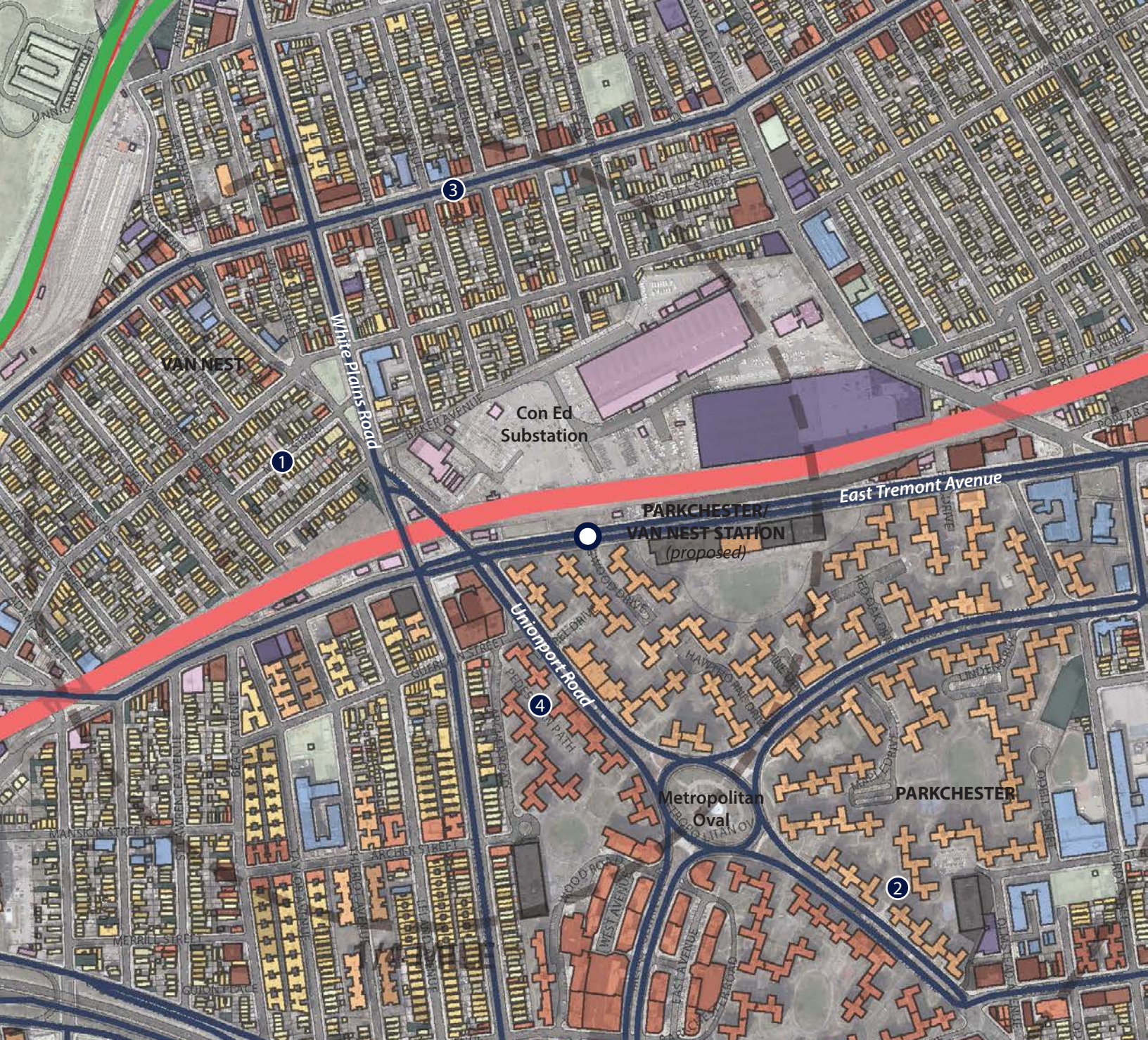
- The neighborhood is largely dependent on public transportation, particularly the nearby subway lines
- Parkchester is highly diverse; the area has one of the highest concentration of Bangladeshi population in the city, approximately 2,600 people
- The relatively low unemployment rate of the area and presence of the large Parkchester condominium complex (home to approximately 40,000 residents) underscores the stability of the community

	STUDY AREA ^{1,2}	THE BRONX	NEW YORK CITY
Hispanic	48%	53%	29%
African-American	35%	35%	27.3%
Renter Occupied Units	76%	79%	68%
Housing Units with No Access to a Vehicle	56%	59%	56%
With Access to One Vehicle	34%	30%	31%
Take Public Transit or Walk to Work	62%	64%	67%
Population Density (per square mile)	24,859	32,536	26,953
Unemployment Rate (2010)	7%	12%	11%
TOTAL POPULATION	58,305	1,365,725	8,336,697

¹ The study area is based on select Census tracts within a 1/2 mile radius of the proposed Parkchester/Van Nest station

² United States Bureau of the Census, 1006-1010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

* MTA Subway Ridership, 2012. http://www.mta.info/nyct/facts/ridership/#chart_s



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

- Amtrak's Hell Gate Line
- B/D Subway Lines
- 4 Subway Line
- Bus Routes

Notable Land Uses Features:

- ① Lower density housing west of White Plains Road, and north of Baker Avenue.
- ② Multi-family elevator buildings south East Tremont Avenue, east of Unionport Road.
- ③ Commercial buildings along Morris Park Ave.
- ④ Mixed commercial/residential buildings south of the station, west of Unionport Road.



FIGURE 2 | The Metropolitan Oval, located at the center of the Parkchester complex. The 121-acre complex has over 160 multi-story buildings, 12,200 apartments and various retailers.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Unionport and Metropolitan Avenues, as well as along some of the peripheral roads. A C4-2 Commercial District is mapped in the southwest section, which permits higher intensity commercial uses such as department stores. Along East Tremont Avenue, a C8-4 district is mapped over the location of the complex's parking garage. In addition to this underlying zoning, the complex is mapped within a special purpose district, one of the 4 Special Planned Community Preservation Districts (PC) that have been mapped within the City to protect the unique character of communities that have been planned and developed as a unit. Accordingly, a special permit is required from the City Planning Commission in order to make changes to the complex, including any demolition, new development, enlargement, and any alteration of landscaping or topography.

In the area surrounding the Parkchester complex on East Tremont Avenue, zoning designations reflect

the proximity of the railroad and range from C8-1 between St Lawrence Avenue and White Plains Road to M1-1 north of the Parkchester Complex. These districts permit low-intensity industrial and auto-repair uses and are characterized by low development potential and high parking requirements. East of Castle Hill Road, the rail line veers north and East Tremont Ave returns to Residential District designations with continuous commercial overlays on East Tremont.

In the triangular area west of the Parkchester complex between East Tremont Avenue and the Cross Bronx Expressway, the density generally decreases as one moves further from White Plains Road. The area between White Plains Road and Beach Avenue is zone R6 and has a mix of densities ranging from one and two family homes to 6 and 7 story apartment buildings. A commercial overlay is mapped on Archer Avenue, in the middle of the neighborhood, to permit mixed-use, higher-density buildings. West

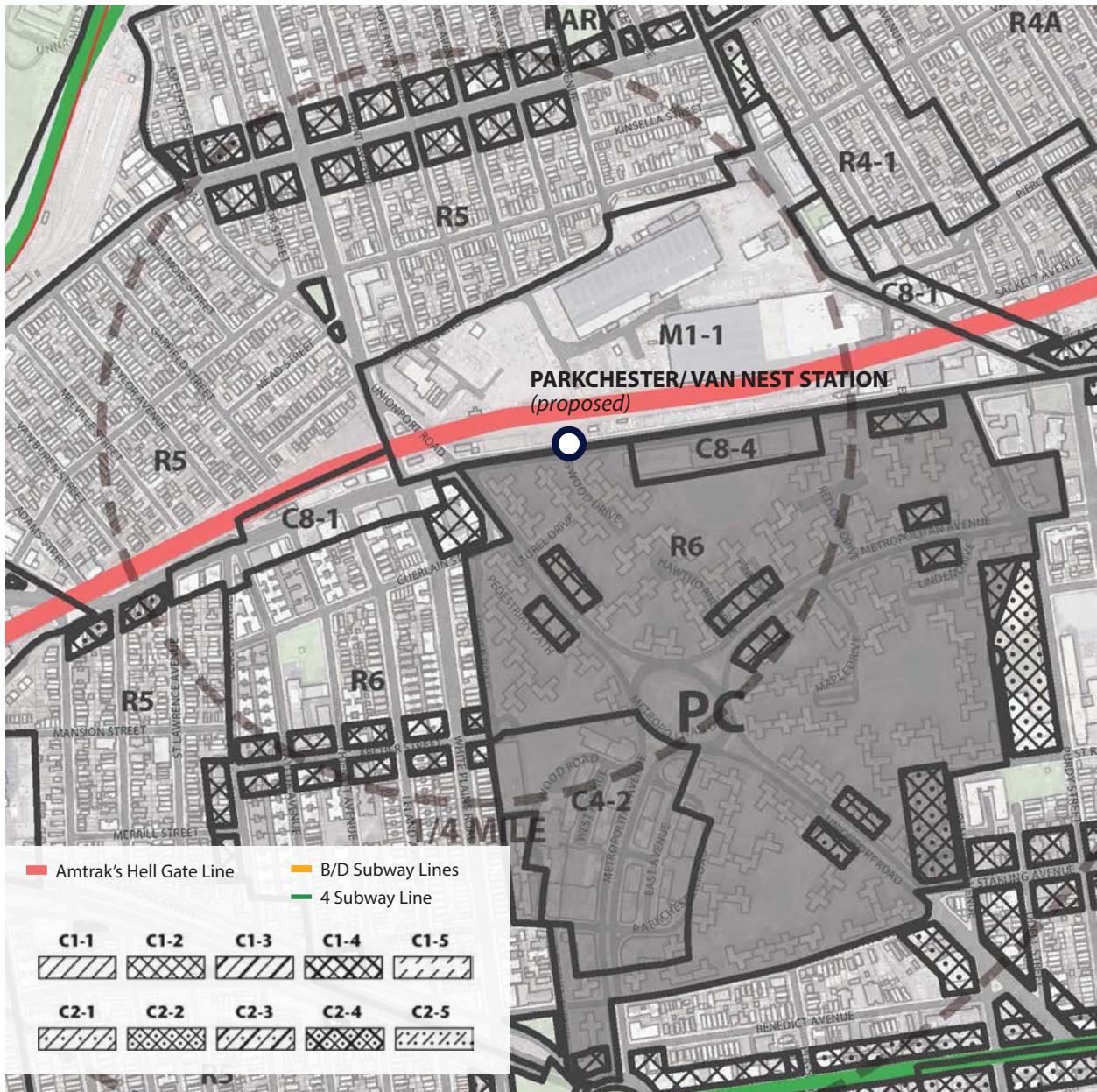


FIGURE 3 | Zoning map of the Parkchester/Van Nest neighborhood.

of Beach Avenue, the neighborhood becomes primarily low-density residential houses. The notable exception to this is the Noble Mansion apartment complex that is roughly 17 stories at the western edge of the neighborhood adjacent to the Bronx River Parkway.

Parkchester is served by the Parkchester, Castle Hill and Zerega Avenue stops on the 6 train, which runs along the southern border of the neighborhood. Additionally, the 2 & 5 trains stop at East 180th Street and the Bronx Park East station along the western border of the study area. Several buses, including

the B11, B21, B22, B39, B40, B42, B21, Q44 local buses and the BxM6, B4A, BxM10, BxM11 express buses serve the area. The Cross Bronx Expressway and the Bronx River Parkway are also easily accessible by automobile.

VAN NEST

The Van Nest neighborhood is located on the north side of East Tremont Avenue and the Amtrak Hellgate rail line. About one square mile in size, the neighborhood is bounded by Bronxdale Avenue to



FIGURE 4 | Low-density development on White Plains Road in the Van Nest neighborhood.

the northeast, the Amtrak train line to the southeast, and the edge of Bronx Park to the west. Van Nest Station on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad which ran from 1872 to 1986 was named after the father of Abraham R. Van Nest, a director of the railroad. It later became the name of the neighborhood.

The community is mapped mostly as an R5 zoning district, which permits lower density residential uses. A C1-2 commercial overlay is mapped along Morris Park Avenue, near the center of the neighborhood, between Unionport Road and the edge of the neighborhood at Bronxdale Avenue. A large M1-1 District is mapped along the rail line between Unionport and Bronxdale Avenue.

This lower density neighborhood is comprised of mostly single family homes with some multi-family units throughout. Morris Park Avenue serves as the main commercial corridor for the neighborhood and is home to more than 300 mostly small scale “mom and pop” type stores. The Morris Park Merchants Alliance was formed in 2007 and has been working to strengthen the corridor. Con Edison’s Van Nest Service Center has been located in the former mainte-

nance buildings for the old railroad line and occupies a large piece of land adjacent to the rail line in the Manufacturing District between Unionport Road and Bronxdale Avenue. Van Nest Park, at the intersection of Van Nest Avenue, Victor Street and Unionport Road, was recently renovated.

Van Nest is served by several local bus routes including the Bx21, Bx22, Bx39, Bx40 and the Bx42, as well as an express service to Midtown Manhattan on the BxM10 line. There is also service to the Bronx Park East station for the 2 & 5 trains.

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Parkchester and Van Nest neighborhoods differ greatly in both retail and residential character, nonetheless, each could benefit greatly from a vibrant East Tremont Avenue that is centered around a regional rail station. In its current state, East Tremont Avenue functions like the backdoor to these neighborhoods, as the neighborhoods are understandably centered on their respective subway stops and neighborhood commercial corridors.



FIGURE 5 | (Top) Sidewalk on East Tremont Avenue, adjacent to the rail line. (Bottom) Curb-cuts and auto-related uses are common throughout East Tremont Avenue. The areas surrounding the rail lines present a challenge to the communities and the future Metro-North station.

The addition of a potential rail station provides an opportunity to re-examine East Tremont Avenue and its role in each of these neighborhoods. In order for a potential rail station to thrive, significant improvements are needed along the pedestrian pathways which connect these community's to East Tremont Avenue and the proposed station area. For the purpose of this section, the challenges and recommendations are discussed in **three focus areas: (1) the Tremont Avenue Corridor, (2) the Parkchester Planned Community, (3) and the Van Nest community.**

(1) TREMONT AVENUE CORRIDOR

The Amtrak Hellgate line rail cut that runs along the northern edge of East Tremont Avenue from roughly East 180th Street to Bronxdale Avenue, creates small, awkward lots that, given their shallow depth, are difficult for large-scale mixed-use development. The majority of these lots fit into the categories discussed in the *Section 1 Strategies: Rail Adjacent Lots*. As indicated in that Section, the difficulty in development often leads to a vacant or underutilized status. This inactivity is not conducive to a walkable mixed use corridor.

The proposed station location is currently located in an M1-1 Manufacturing District. M1-1 districts are the lowest intensity Manufacturing District and are characterized by low scaled development and high parking requirements. Light manufacturing, auto repair, warehousing and storage are common uses in these districts. The south side of East Tremont Avenue generally serves as the back side of the Parkchester Planned Community. Several piecemeal commercial overlays permit commercial at Unionport, Commonwealth and just west of Purdy. These are inconsistent and disconnected. There are two C8 districts: one across from the proposed station area which contains Parkchester's parking garages; and another west of White Plains Road that currently contains a number of vacant retail parcels. C8 zoning districts typically serve as a transition between manufacturing and commercial uses. Similar in character to M1-1 districts, typical uses in C8 districts include auto-oriented uses or storage sites, as seen on the north side of East Tremont and in many lots where surface parking is fronting vacant retail. Most notably for this area, C8 districts do not permit residential uses, and are therefore not ideal zoning districts to support transit-oriented development. This is especially true on the south side of the East Tremont Avenue, where adequate parcel depth could support mixed-use development.

Pedestrian infrastructure along the corridor is severely lacking, to some degree as a result of the conditions described above. Continuous, well-connected and safe pedestrian infrastructure is a critical component to supporting a successful transit station. Since the station is proposed across from the Parkchester complex, additional foot traffic will be generated with increased pedestrian crossings of East Tremont Avenue. Vehicular traffic along East Tremont Avenue can be very fast and there are long stretches in between legal street crossings. As a result, pedestrian crossings along East Tremont Avenue are currently difficult, and exacerbated by poorly marked crosswalks and lack of pedestrian refuge zones, especially at prominent intersections like Unionport and White Plains Road (see *Figure 6*).

Narrow sidewalks along the north of side East Tremont Avenue, especially west of White Plains Road, discourage walking and preclude streetscape amenities. Auto related uses which often spill out onto the adjacent sidewalk create obstacles and can force pedestrians to walk in the street at times. There are several bus stops along the corridor that lack amenities adding to an already difficult environment for riders.

Recommendations:

- Implement comprehensive streetscape improvements along East Tremont Avenue that connects the neighborhoods and both sides of the corridor. Prioritize intersection of White Plains/Unionport Roads (see *Figure 6*).
- Work with the Parkchester Planned Community to re-examine the C8-4 District across from the proposed station and identify appropriate zoning which will generate uses that support a proposed station and the PC.
- Study zoning along East Tremont Avenue that would permit both commercial and residential uses in mixed-use development along the south side of the corridor. Insufficient lot depth and rail adjacency may restrict residential uses on the north side, but inactive manufacturing, repair and storage uses should be prevented given the proximity of the new station.
- Identify opportunities to implement strategies for Rail Adjacent Lots along East Tremont Avenue using proposed station as a catalyst. Try to promote development of active retail wherever possible, even if only 1 or 2 stories are feasible (see *Figure 6*). Development could be interspersed with open space, artwork and other pe-

destrian amenities at regular intervals to break up the super-block effect created by the rail line.

- Study the street design to identify where side-walk widening can occur to provide additional pedestrian amenities.
- Apply the principles for station design and amenities as indicated in *Section 1 Strategies: Inter-modal Connectivity and Commuter Rail Stations* to a proposed station. These include best practices for station access, design, amenities, and integration into the local environment. This will create a station which is a prominent fixture in the community; is accessible and connected to other modes of transit, and seamlessly fits into a vibrant East Tremont corridor.

(2) PARKCHESTER AREA

The Parkchester Planned Community and adjacent communities is a mid to high density population center crucial to the success of a new rail station on East Tremont Avenue. Currently, however, the area feels cutoff from East Tremont Avenue. Parkchester has its own retail and open space, but these are largely oriented away from East Tremont Avenue. The complexes parking garage fronts along East Tremont Avenue, but this is inactive and deters walkability along the corridor. The Parkchester #6 subway stop is currently more than ½ mile from the proposed station and this will likely put some residents outside of the range of what is typically walkable. The area west of White Plains Road is bounded by both the Cross Bronx Expressway and Bronx River Parkway, which, at their intersection, leaves it quite isolated. The current zoning designation does not support some of the unique residential conditions in this area.

Recommendations:

- Re-examine bus routes to connect directly from the subway to proposed station. Study the feasibility of a shuttle connecting the development and proposed station to maximize usage.
- Study zoning in the area immediately west of White Plains Road. West of Beach Avenue this may include contextualizing the current zoning to preserve some of the unique conditions and prevent undesirable building forms that have been seen around other station areas.
- Explore opportunities to create additional mixed use density closer to commercial corridors and transit.

Figure 6 Existing Conditions:

- ① Lack of pedestrian amenities along East Tremont Avenue
- ② Fast moving traffic makes pedestrian crossing area feel unsafe
- ③ Excessive curb cuts make for an unsafe pedestrian environment along East Tremont Avenue
- ④ No place-making or wayfinding signage
- ⑤ Vacant and difficult to develop lots along rail corridor deter walkability

Figure 6 Potential Improvements:

- ① Incorporate street lamps, street trees and benches at regular intervals
- ② Eliminate curb cuts along East Tremont Avenue
- ③ Add vegetated median to slow vehicular traffic
- ④ Enhance crosswalks, add bollards and pedestrian refuge zone for improved pedestrian safety
- ⑤ Where feasible, develop rail adjacent lots with active uses, even if only 1-2 stories is possible
- ⑥ Develop strong street wall with ample amounts of transparency along East Tremont Avenue
- ⑦ Include uses that support an active pedestrian environment throughout the day
- ⑧ Add wayfinding signage to point pedestrians to the station

EXISTING CONDITIONS



POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS



FIGURE 6 | Unionport Road. (Top) Current conditions; (bottom) potential improvements.



FIGURE 7 | R5 zoning in the Van Nest neighborhood.

- Strengthen signage and pedestrian amenities on pedestrian pathways leading into the community from East Tremont Avenue.

(3) VAN NEST

The Van Nest community is currently disconnected from the proposed station area by the rail cut, the large Con Ed facility, and a disjointed East Tremont Corridor. South of Van Nest Avenue, the street grid stops at the rail line. Access over the rail line to Van Nest is available through two adjacent bridges, at Unionport and White Plains Roads. This is an opportunity to enhance access; however, both currently have limited accessibility for pedestrians from the station area. The new station should be as visible and accessible as possible from this side of the tracks. As we have seen in other station areas, this is vital to the success of the station area.

Morris Park Avenue is a neighborhood commercial corridor which could complement existing needs in the area, but becomes isolated on its western edge. Housing stock in the area is aging and residential options in the area are limited.

The area immediately around the Bronx Park East 2/5 elevated subway stop is currently a mix of uses, some of which are not supportive of transit, or of each other. The range of uses immediately surrounding the station include low and mid density residential buildings, sporadic retail stores, surface parking, materials and vehicle storage and auto repair shops. Some of this incongruity can be attributed to the mix of zoning districts that converge around the station, which include: lower density residential (R5 and R4-1), mid density residential (R7-1 and R6), as well as light manufacturing (C8-1 and M1-1). The inconsistent district mapping creates a hodgepodge of unrelated uses directly around the stop.

Recommendations:

- Support the efforts of the Morris Park Merchants alliance to strengthen the corridor and form a Business Improvement District.
- Strengthen the Unionport Road Bridge as a pedestrian gateway in the Van Nest neighborhood from East Tremont Avenue and the proposed station area.
- Identify opportunities for mixed use residential

and commercial uses along commercial corridors and transit stops which will provide a wider variety of housing options.

- Study the zoning around the Bronx Park East 2/5 subway station to identify a district which is supportive of mixed-use residential and commercial uses adjacent to the station while attentive to the nuances of the elevated rail line and surrounding manufacturing needs.

RESOURCES

¹ *New York Times*. "Model of Housing Displayed At Fair." 5 May 1939. (p.47).

² Parkchester Apartments. <http://www.parkchesternyc.com/>

³ McNamara, John (1993). *History in Asphalt: The Origin of Bronx Street and Place Names*. Bronx County Historical Society. (p. 204).

CONCLUSION

The Parkchester and Van Nest communities each have strong commercial and residential assets, but limited access and long commutes to job centers and regional destinations have led to stagnated growth. In its current condition, East Tremont Avenue is currently a barrier between these communities. Comprehensive improvements to the pedestrian infrastructure along East Tremont Avenue and a re-examination of land use policy can create a vibrant commercial corridor which strengthens both communities. A proposed station along East Tremont Avenue is an opportunity to take a proactive approach in implementing long-term improvements which will benefit the entire area and lay the groundwork for a successfully integrated rail station.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

- Re-examine zoning along both sides of East Tremont Avenue to permit a mix of uses which encourages pedestrian activity and re-orient the surrounding communities towards East Tremont and the proposed station.
- Implement comprehensive streetscape improvements to both sides of East Tremont Avenue which focus on pathways from the proposed station area to the surrounding neighborhood centers and their transit assets.
- Maximize the usage of a proposed station through improved intermodal connections between the proposed station area and surrounding neighborhood centers.