Borough Board Atlantic Yards Committee

Summary of the December 12, 2005 Meeting on Transit and Pedestrians

Borough Board Atlantic Yards Committee Members in Attendance:

Borough President Marty Markowitz
Assembly Member Joan Millman
Community Board 2 Chair Shirley McRae
Community Board 6 Chair Jerry Armer
Community Board 8 Chair Robert Matthews

Supporting Staff

Greg Atkins, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Ellen Oettinger, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Mary Lou Bradley, Office of Council Member David Yassky
Kate Suisman, Office of Council Member Letitia James
Sam Cooper, Office of Assembly Member Joan Millman
Robert Perris, District Manager, Community Board 2
Craig Hammerman, District Manager, Community Board 6
Doris Alexander, District Manager, Community Board 8

Guests & Panelists

Tom Schulze, Director, Access to the Region's Core Project, New Jersey Transit and former Executive Director New York Metropolitan Transportation Council
David Sampson, Principal, Urbitran Associates, Inc
Ruby Siegel, Senior Vice President & Director of Planning, SYSTRA; Transit Planning consultant to MTA, MBTA, NJT

I. Introduction

[*Marty* Markowitz] Before we begin, I want to note that my involvement in transportation in Downtown Brooklyn is not recent. I developed my Brooklyn Transportation Priorities for Federal Funding and my Brooklyn Transit Opportunities in 2003, both of which call for improved connections in Downtown Brooklyn subway stations. I have also on many occasions called for the extension of the Second Avenue Subway to Brooklyn, and a Northern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study.

Given the way the subway system is organized to access Manhattan, Brooklyn's subway routes have the most passengers on the train in or near Downtown Brooklyn. Flatbush Terminal is one of the busiest and best served Transit Hubs in New York City. Although this limits what can be done, there are, nevertheless, several corridors where more subway capacity may be available such as was suggested by the Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study. There are also several improvements and studies underway that will affect Downtown Brooklyn and some longer term options. I am sure we will hear many of these today, as well as some new ideas.

An idea that you may have read about in the Post this morning is a game-day MetroCard as part of the ticket to encourage fans to take public transit to events at the arena.

We did request that the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the New York City Transit Authority send a representative, and our requests were declined. This is unfortunate because the MTA is sole player in the implementation of transit improvements for both Atlantic Yards as well as all of Downtown Brooklyn. My colleagues in the State Senate and Assembly and I will continue to reach out to the MTA to get its active involvement in this process.

The MTA did, however, send answers to questions that my office forwarded to that agency that may be helpful for us to review.

["MTA FAQ 12-12-05" can be found at www.brooklyn-usa.org under the Atlantic Yards page "Documents" section.]

II. Discussion with the Panel

See below questions and topics covered during the panels covering Transit.

a. Discussion with Tom Schulze, Director, Access to the Region's Core Project, New Jersey Transit and former Executive Director New York Metropolitan Transportation Council; David Sampson, Principal, Urbitran Associates, Inc; and Ruby Siegel, Senior Vice President & Director of Planning, SYSTRA; Transit Planning consultant to MTA, MBTA, NJT

Overview of an EIS and the draft scope of the Atlantic Yards project from Tom Schulze
The EIS is documenting a process from early on with stakeholders to talk about mitigation. The Transit section asks questions such as how those new trips impacts the transit system. It looks at land use at development and how much development will happen. It also looks at what kind of parking, commuter rail buses, pedestrian movements, level of services on roads and highways will occur, the number of people on subway lines and coming out of subway stations. There are assumptions for transit models: 1 – what is there currently; 2 development assumptions. For instance, how many residential units and people per unit? Adjustments in these numbers, even small adjustments, can greatly affect transit. Ask the applicant to justify their assumptions. There may not be enough information about pedestrian movement and data sets. You should involve yourself throughout the process.

Overview of the parameters and key elements of an E-I-S transit section from Ruby Siegel
First, this is a great process you have. You should get full disclosure and feel you have good and bad sides of aspects of the project. Get comfortable with existing conditions. The data assumptions should be disclosed about platform capacity, stairwell capacity. The proposed new station entrance is an example of avoiding problems, not just creating projects and mitigating the problems. You should comment if you think the study area should go further.

Overview of bus planning and analysis in an EIS from David Sampson
In a lot of EIS's, buses don't get much attention. An EIS should identify bus routes up to 1/2 mile from the project. Peak times should be identified during designated hours, like 7-9am and 4-6pm. EIS analysis includes lines at bus stops and identifying peak load points, not just at the project site. It should discuss no-build conditions; for instance, there will there be a Bus Rapid Transit [BRT[project which will create new capacity. The EIS should disclose any overloads on individual routes and look at mitigations. Also, at the project site, it should discuss the number frontage can accommodate.

At the Traffic session last Monday, it was pointed out that the EIS process is separate from a public agency planning process. In the case of transit, planning for a meaningful increase in subway capacity will require a long lead time given the large service area. Are there any future years that the EIS should consider in the transit section beyond the stated 2009 and 2016 years?
T. Schulze: 2016 is the full build-out year for the project. 2016 is probably adequate to see the impacts, but outside of EIS process, you should be looking at Brooklyn population growth.

Given the way the subway system is organized to access Manhattan, Brooklyn's subway lines have their peak load points in or near Downtown Brooklyn. There are a limited number of routes between Manhattan and Brooklyn, as well as north, south and east of Downtown Brooklyn, where more subway capacity may be available in the near term. Some longer term options that may involve the Second Avenue Subway, JFK Rail Link or reconfiguring the junction between the Nostrand Avenue and Eastern Parkway lines. How would an Atlantic Yards EIS relate to these or other efforts if additional capacity were needed?

R. Siegel: That is a good question. Regarding planning and the EIS, projects like the Eastside Access project, Long Island to Downtown Brooklyn, 2nd Avenue line, the Lower Manhattan Rail Link are all planned at the same time. These could extend beyond the 2016 build-out date of Atlantic Yards. The EIS will have to look at a future no-build scenario. Also, look to see if Atlantic Yards is included in the no-build scenarios of other projects. Look at the whole system; it could have synergy, or it may not.

It has been suggested that light rail and bus transit could provide one remedy to an Atlantic Yards access problem. Each of these transit alternatives have their own requirements which the affected agencies would need to evaluate.

The MTA and State and City Department's of Transportation are currently conducting a bus rapid transit study, which has eliminated the only potential corridor in Downtown Brooklyn – Fulton Street – from further consideration. If light rail transit is considered, an entirely new infrastructure that may go beyond the needs of Atlantic Yards would need to be set up.

Can you please let us know how the use of either of these transit modes to augment the bus system on the street could be implemented?
D. Sampson: BRT study is in the process of winnowing down corridors to focus on a few. Flatbush, Nostrand and Flatlands Avenues, and the Kings Highway corridor are being considered for the study. This would increase the capacity for all neighborhoods south of Downtown.
Light rail could be a mitigating measure, though it is not a slam dunk. It would be driven by the volume of traffic around the Downtown area.

The bus peak load points that you discussed being in the radius of EIS scope – is it necessary to look at peak load points beyond the 1/2 mile study area?
D. Sampson: Yes, it's necessary, regardless of where it's located.

The peak load point could differ at different times of day. Do you analyze just the morning and evening?
D. Sampson: You should use the peak hours specified in the EIS.

Does the MTA use models to project ridership or do they just use turnstile numbers?
D. Sampson: The MTA has a significant modeling process and a very rich database. Their models are very sophisticated.

At Yankee Stadium there are always 2 trains waiting to take away the crowd.
R. Siegel: You should be able to get those. You could also use those to determine where to put articulated bus lines.

The MTA's answer [on the written MTA response handout] says buses are not part of their current service plan for the area, which is a bit disconcerting.
D. Sampson: When the modeling process happens, buses are considered a relatively small amount of service. But in Downtown, there's potential for more people to use buses. They will not be overlooked in the EIS process. You should be sure this is in the EIS in trip distributions.
T. Schulze: New Jersey Transit relies heavily on rail because buses get caught in traffic.

There was an article in the Post about a company called Gameday. I spoke with the consultant last week; they use buses and have offsite parking, but do not use existing bus routes. It makes no stops, just straight to arena from the parking lot. I spoke to Forest City, and they have been talking about linking a ticket to a Metrocard. To be a season ticket holder, you have to select mode of transportation before you get your ticket.
D. Sampson: That's a mitigation technique. Shea Stadium uses charter buses.

Pedestrian traffic will grow on the already crowded intersection at Flatbush, Atlantic and Fourt Avenues. How do you enlarge the pedestrian area of study? My concern is that the current problem of pedestrian traffic crossing the street will be exacerbated.

R. Siegel: The burden of proof is on the sponsors of the EIS, to be sure they're not creating an unaccounted for impact. If you've identified major activity outside the proposed study area, raise it to the city and state level.
T. Schulze: Grand Army Plaza can be an expensive fix and is outside the EIS area, but it could also be part of the planning process.

a. Discussion with Carolyn Konheim of Community Consulting Services, representing Konheim and Ketcham.

Last week we talked about thinking outside the box about Fourth, Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues in the Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming study. Some ideas are using a round about, creating a traffic circle by using Nevins Street to create a diversion around the intersection. Modeling that intersection is important. The scope does not say that they will do it. They should model it. The MTA has a responsibility to make the model available to the community consultant to use it.

Also, the study year of 2016 is not sufficient. This should be extended to at least 2025. A focus that has been missing from the Downtown Brooklyn Rezoning Final EIS is crowding. The EIS should use the MTA guidelines for crowding instead of NYC Transit guidelines which allow for 10% less room. The MTA uses 3.6 ft per passenger, instead of 3.2.

A model is needed to assess ridership. The MTA should provide more capacity on the L line from Canarsie to Downtown. We should look into new sources of funding like congestion pricing tolls.

Within the context of the Atlantic Yards EIS, what other rail transit items should be considered?
The intersection of Junius and Livonia Avenues is crying for commercial development. There should be Metrocard transfers between system – as of now there is no correspondence between lettered and numbered lines except at Borough Hall. The idea that Assembly Member Millman brought up about a discount for tickets – if you discount the ticket $10 instead of the Metrocard, that's a great incentive. The arena is not our biggest traffic or transit problem. It would basically just extend the peak of the problem.

The MTA tells us that they have no spare cars and have no plans to expand the fleet.
Southern Brooklyn is mostly single occupancy vehicles. Bus Rapid Transit could come in there. There is GPS technology used for bus tracking. For example, Paris is the same size, has the same number of people, same bus miles, same number of buses, but they have two times the ridership. And Paris and London have constant customer consultation.

What did your firms' trip generation numbers look like compared to the EIS?
That's Brian Ketcham's field, but I can say that it is essential that every assumption be documented in the EIS.

Can light rail tunnels and old trolley tunnels be used?
Not too easily – the dimensions are wrong. If the unused tracks from Atlantic Terminal to the Transit Museum could be used for Rail Link, it could save probably $1 billion.