

Borough Board Atlantic Yards Committee
Summary of the December 5, 2005 Meeting on Transportation

Borough Board Atlantic Yards Committee Members in Attendance:

Borough President Marty Markowitz
Council Member David Yassky
Assembly Member Joan Millman
Assembly Member Roger Green
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
Jon Benguiat, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Al Goodman, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Michael Rossmly, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Ellen Oettinger, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Kate Suisman, Office of Council Member Letitia James
Mary Lou Bradley, Office of Council Member David Yassky
Sam Cooper, Office of Assembly Member Joan Millman
Khari Prescod, Assembly Member Roger Green
Robert Perris, District Manager, Community Board 2
Craig Hammerman, District Manager, Community Board 6
Doris Alexander, District Manager, Community Board 8

Guests & Panelists

Ryan Russo, NYC Department of Transportation
Samuel I. Schwartz, Sam Schwartz PLLC
Michael Horodniceanu, UrbiTran
Gerry Bogacz, NYMTC
Marty Taub, Eng-Wong Taub & Associates
Brian Ketcham, Community Consulting Services

I. Discussion with the Panel

See below questions and topics covered during the panels covering Transportation

a. Discussion with NYC Department of Transportation's Ryan Russo, Downtown Brooklyn's Transportation coordinator.

Introductory remarks

I work at DOT as the Downtown Brooklyn Transportation coordinator. Unlike any other district in the City, Downtown Brooklyn has one full time person. Right now, we are implementing Traffic Calming and conducting the Downtown Brooklyn Blueprint study. The Blueprint came out of the rezoning of Downtown Brooklyn.

How is DOT involved in the EIS?

DOT will review the EIS as an interested agency, not as an implementer. We are also always evaluating resident recommendations that come into the office.

What role does DOT have in mitigating the impacts of the Atlantic Yards project?

Our operating units will implement new strategies as a development comes. For example, with large rezonings, we monitor traffic over time. Also, the impacts predicted in an EIS don't always materialize over time.

What does the Blueprint study cover?

It is a large study and covers a large timeline. The Atlantic Yards project is in the picture of the study. The main issues are not to look at the impacts of the EIS, but looking at the broader goals for the area as far as growth and how to manage that growth.

What goals, strategies or policies [in the Blueprint study] in reference to Atlantic Yards could be used by the State legislature as recommendations for policies?

There won't be any specific strategies for Atlantic Yards in the study. It will be for broader issues, but those broader solutions will hopefully help address some specific concerns.

Will residential permit parking be looked at in the EIS?

I did not see it in the scope of work.

The administration should step up responsibility for running this and ensure that ESDC studies residential permit parking and other solutions such as modal event ticketing and incentives for mass transit. We cannot let this project be approved without a real traffic plan. Does the administration support residential parking?

I couldn't say today, but I will check on that and let you know.

The Downtown Brooklyn Council is currently studying Downtown residential parking.

What is the solution for the Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues intersection?

DOT has just completed the widening of Atlantic. We've eliminated left turns. We do not have specific plans for further mitigation right now, but we will evaluate plans as they come in.

There is a merchants issue on Atlantic Avenue – there is no metered parking from 4 to 7pm, so people don't go into the stores.

We restrict parking in order to free a lane during rush hour. So while I'm hearing how the traffic is bad, I am also hearing that you want parking at those hours.

In DOT's role as an interested agency, did DOT put an emphasis on a transportation model for Downtown in their response to the scope? Can we get a copy of DOT's response to the scope?

I'm not sure if it was in the response, but modeling can be a tool during the planning stage or the mitigation stage. I don't know about getting a copy, but I will check on that.

How does the Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming plan and the Atlantic Yards project affect each other? And how do the street closures affect traffic?

The Atlantic Yards project does not impact the Traffic Calming because most of it has been implemented as a change in DOT methodology. The possibility of Atlantic Yards does not change our intent.

We will analyze the street closures in the EIS. Pacific Street does not carry a lot of traffic; 5th Avenue is a different story.

b. Discussion with transportation experts Samuel I. Schwartz, PhD, PE, Principal of Sam Schwartz PLLC; Michael Horodniceanu, PhD, PE, Principal of UrbiTran; Gerry Bogacz, New York Metropolitan Transportation Council; Marty Taub, PE, Principal of Eng-Wong Taub & Associates

General comments from Gerry Bogacz:

NYMTC analyzes transportation projects for air quality using a regional traffic simulation model. We have to account for regionally significant development projects. There are three levels of requirements at the project level – federal, state and city.

SEQR overview from Marty Taub:

The SEQR analysis focuses on the local street network, but sometimes does require highway study. The study area is one of the most important data in the analysis, along with trip generation and the hours designated as “rush hours.” The study will analyze the volume of cars, primary routes and problem locations within the area.

Overview of traffic engineering from Michael Horodniceanu:

Traffic engineering is a social science to which you apply engineering. No one solution is a panacea to all existing problems. Trip generation analysis is one building block of traffic engineering. How many trips occur? When? What creates the maximum impact? After this step, you determine the mode of travel used for these trips. Then, you analyze destinations and origins. People will use the route that takes the least amount of time.

Overview from Sam Schwartz:

I was not involved in the project when I was asked to be at this meeting, but I might be involved with the developer in the future.

I want to talk about the planning process. There’s a lot of frustration right now, and you should keep up the pressure. All too often the EIS becomes a lawyer’s document. I can’t guarantee that the EIS will be a planning document, but a few things to look for: the modal splits should be realistic and the occupancy should be realistic. See if the proposed mitigation is realistic – for example, an EIS could cite a tunnel approach to the Brooklyn Bridge as a mitigation, but the funding might not exist to build that kind of mitigation.

From a consultant’s perspective, you must satisfy your client, but you must maintain your objectivity. The significant impacts must be disclosed in the EIS. We all learned a lesson from West Way; even if it’s bad, it should be disclosed.

Phase I of the project is expected to be complete in 2009, and Phase II in 2016. Is there a possibility of getting an analysis done further into the future?

M. Horodniceanu: The EIS and planning processes are not always one and the same. An EIS analyzes the end year of a project, but in traffic planning, we analyze for ten, twenty and thirty years out.

How will this project affect air quality of the area?

G. Bogacz: This is a regionally significant project that will generate more than local travel. We conduct analysis on a large, regional level, and this project would not have any more than a marginal effect on the region’s overall air quality.

Would a traffic model be appropriate for this project? How do traffic models work?

M. Horodniceanu: You can develop an operation model – trying to manage traffic and simulating traffic changes. They are doing this right now in Lower Manhattan. OR, you can take existing traffic to try to predict traffic. A model should be developed by the operating entity – the Department of Transportation or another organization in Downtown Brooklyn. The model has to be monitored and kept alive.

Should the traffic study area include all of Community Districts 2, 6 & 8 to include development proposals further than 1/2 mile from the project?

S. Schwartz: Fourth Avenue, Flatbush and Atlantic all serve the area. The traffic gets there from Grand Army Plaza, the BQE, the bridges. The study area should reflect those major nodes. You do need to go to the Brooklyn Bridge, to Bedford Avenue.

Is it the best practice to make it harder for people to drive to the arena or easier? Should they build more parking to mitigate traffic or less parking to encourage taking mass transit?

S. Schwartz: We have to study the best model we have. It's Madison Square Garden, and its on top of so many lines of public transit. 35-48% take a car, half take transit with as many as 10% walking. That's the best an arena can do. You should not assume much better modal splits. You want to keep that 50% as much as possible on subways and transit, divert some to off-site parking.

But Madison Square Garden is not totally comparable, because the transit here is not as available as it is in Manhattan.

I read that the NASCAR raceway – an 80,000 seat facility – is talking about tying the price of a ticket to public transit.

M. Horodniceanu: That idea is not part of an EIS analysis, but may be mentioned as a mitigating measure.

How do we contextualize this information for policy? Are there best practices that we can draw from other parts of the city to help make decisions?

G. Bogacz: If we did research across the country, we could find large developments as examples – the Palisades Mall in Rockland County, for example, and the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan.

I'm looking for solutions to levels of service to give us guidance for State authorization. Our major duty is to address the infrastructure – traffic and environmental concerns.

S. Schwartz: There should be a canvas of cities in the EIS with other types of development.

For trip generations, how do you come up with numbers for business commuters, arena-goers and residents?

M. Horodniceanu: You segment it. Start with the residents – how many during the peak time, and develop the modal split. There is good documentation about business work trips. And for the arena – for the sold seats, how will they get there? You have to determine the modal splits for them, too. It won't be the same as the people going to the Meadowlands.

M. Taub: The residential number is the easiest to project. In general, it generates the fewest number of trips. The arena is the hardest to predict.

Are there any cities with similar density to New York that have been able to maintain a traffic modeling system?

M. Horodniceanu: Paris and Montreal, but I'm not sure in the US.

How will the projected 48,000 subway trips and 20,000 cars be accommodated? Will the community have a chance to see this in the EIS?

S. Schwartz: We aren't doing the EIS, but you as the community should demand that opportunity. You should have the information to understand the modal splits and trip assumptions.

What are the different methodologies to calculate trip generation?

M. Horodniceanu: There are many different sources for trip generation – past EIS's, for example. One should not reinvent the wheel. There is a manual for trip generation rates, and you pick the situation that best describes the area. When the numbers aren't available, then you can do surveys.

I'm told the City is considering a toll to reduce traffic. Should this be considered?

S. Schwartz: You should look at London and Singapore who have done this for their Central Business Districts, even if it's not part of this project. It's a sophisticated system, and Downtown Brooklyn could truly benefit from it.

M. Horodniceanu: There has been a 20% drop in traffic in London.

M. Taub: This is a mitigation measure that has to be something that the community, the city or the developer decides on later.

c. Discussion with Brian Ketcham, Vice President of Konheim and Ketcham, representing Community Consulting Services

Overview from Brian Ketcham:

Community Consulting Services provides services to community organizations. I am not here in support or opposition to the project. The challenge is whether this document will address all of the development already approved for Downtown Brooklyn and the traffic it will generate. The draft scope excludes a lot of “choke points”, and don’t be fooled by the represented 65 intersections. If they use the city’s CEQR procedure, it doesn’t show the impact on the other streets, only intersection by intersection.

It is imperative to use a simulation model and that there be included a documentation of assumptions about trip generation.

Clearly, Forest City Ratner is not responsible for all the traffic in Downtown Brooklyn. How would a transportation management organization [(TMO)] work?

I certainly support a TMO, but it is the developer’s responsibility to prove that they can fit in. A traffic master plan for Community Districts 2, 6, and 8 would be great.

What percentage of the traffic in Downtown Brooklyn at peak hours are traveling through to Manhattan?

About half. I don’t think anybody’s done a detailed analysis.

The new housing on 4th Avenue should be factored into the analysis, as well.

Yes, they should update their database and surveys.

Since we have to work within the parameters of SEQRA and CEQR and not on this larger scale of analysis, how can we work with the analysis we’re going to get from this EIS?

We have to think outside the box. Among the \$15 billion of development in Downtown Brooklyn, there has to be \$10-\$15 million for a traffic model. We could stop it dead in its tracks until we know what is happening in Downtown Brooklyn. Congestion pricing, for example, is working in other places.

Who could put together the master plan for Downtown Brooklyn that you mentioned? Your firm, the City, or others?

It would be a huge project. My firm’s not big enough. The Blueprint study that DOT is doing is a step in that direction. The project would span many years and cost \$10 million.