



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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Myron Maurer
Senior Vice President
Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc.
Suite 470 The Merchandise Mart
Chicago, IL 60654

Ernesto Padron, Senior Project Manager
NYC Economic Development Corporation
110 William Street
New York, NY 10038

Re: Plan for Pier 92/94 – Follow up

Dear Mr. Maurer and Mr. Padron:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) thanks you for presenting your updated traffic plan for Pier 92/94 to the Transportation Planning Committee, on January 21, 2009. We are pleased with the responses to suggestions we had made in our two previous letters regarding Pier 92/94 (in italics below) and have made further comments below.

We are pleased that the EIS analysis will take the new developments in account in its traffic analysis. As we have written before, *the use of Pier 92 and 94 as a newly expanded convention center, with the attendant increase in truck, car, taxi and black car traffic, will only exacerbate a traffic problem that is already intolerable on many streets in the area, as it is throughout Community District 4. It will be extremely important that the developers of Pier 92/94 employ every measure possible to mitigate traffic impacts as this project is developed.*

Pedestrian Safety: revised traffic flow and signals and pedestrian bridge

The revised traffic plan for both trucks and passenger vehicles does, indeed, improve the existing condition where, currently, all incoming and outgoing vehicles tend to converge at a single point in a cross-over pattern – creating a busy and dangerous situation for users of the bike path at that point. The new plan, with vehicles entering at the north end and exiting at the south, is clearly better.

The proposed speed table at the north entrance is a good solution to ensure that turning vehicles slow down at the intersection where they have poor visibility of approaching bicycles and pedestrians traveling south on the greenway. We suggest that “speed bump” signs be placed ahead of the turn on the road and on the greenway as well.

We request again that an “airport like” protected pedestrian crossing (push button, stop or speed table) be installed on the plaza in front of the main entrances. When 7,000 attendees arrive for large shows, it will be an area as wide and busy as an airport terminal.

Further, the construction of a pedestrian bridge between the facility and the adjacent DeWitt Clinton Park would be an important factor toward that same goal, as well as providing a safe and easy way for pedestrians to navigate what is currently a dangerous and busy crossing. Such a bridge would also greatly benefit the convention operation.

We appreciate that the Merchandise Mart has designed a possible landing for the pedestrian walkway within the project's footprint, complete with elevator. We urge the Merchandise Mart to help the community in its efforts with NYC and NYS officials to fund this bridge.

In the short term, we continue to ask that Merchandise Mart work with the DOT to change signal timings on Tenth Avenue to allow a much longer crossing time for pedestrians.

Truck traffic and on site empty box storage

You illustrated how the storage on-site in Pier 92 of empty crates would reduce convention-related truck round-trips by 50% since it would no longer be necessary for trucks to haul away and, later, return empty crates. This is an important feature of your plan, given that overall traffic to and from the facility will increase over time as the now larger convention center begins to operate. But we need to be assured that this plan will not be abandoned in the future as pressures to use this area on Pier 92 for additional convention exhibit space increases.

We still request that a Memorandum of Understanding between Merchandise Mart, EDC and Community Board 4 be written to memorialize this commitment.

One advantage you cited from the new traffic plan, which has traffic entering at the north end of the site and departing at the south end, is that it will allow northbound exiting traffic to make a left turn northbound on Route 9A, vs. having to enter the side streets to circle around in order to continue north, as is the current situation. We agree, as far as passenger vehicles are concerned – but the fact is that trucks are currently precluded from traveling north of 57th Street on 9A, so this advantage does not apply to trucks. There is some discussion from the Upper West Side Streets Renaissance, located in Manhattan Community Board 7 to the north, to permit trucks on 9A north of 57th Street.

If this solution becomes viable, we continue to urge Merchandise Mart to help in whatever way possible to achieve it, as it will, in fact, help reduce truck traffic on West 57th Street and throughout the residential upland streets as well as provide additional benefits to the Pier 92/94 project.

Until then, we ask that you direct all incoming truck traffic to use the Lincoln Tunnel, 34th Street and 42nd Street and route 9A; and outgoing truck traffic to use route 9A, 42nd Street and the 41st Street plaza to access the Lincoln Tunnel truck entrance.

Shuttle and MTA buses

A suggestion from our previous letter was to consider the use of shuttle buses to help reduce the passenger traffic to and from the facility.

Shuttle: We appreciate that the Merchandise Mart has committed to operate a shuttle bus service with a frequency of approximately four per hour during the shows on each loop: a northern loop serving Columbus Circle and a southern loop serving Grand Central Terminal.

We are asking that you revise the routes to avoid using already saturated streets and consider additional stops to offer a true “taxi-less” alternative for travelers.

The chosen routes for the south loop use 42nd Street, already overburdened by Lincoln Tunnel commuter traffic, commuter buses and trucks on a large portion of the loop. Using alternate routes, like 40th Street or 38th Street, Park Avenue, Madison Avenue Bus lanes and 55th Street would reach the same hotels and greatly benefit your customer by offering a faster trip.

A stop between Penn Station and the Path station on Sixth Avenue would help travelers coming from JFK and Newark to connect directly to the shows.

The shuttle buses should be equipped with audible signals for vision-impaired riders. We further ask that you give preference to low-emission vehicles, as traffic emissions already negatively affect our neighborhood.

MTA buses

In reviewing the northern loop serving Columbus Circle, it appears that a small extension of the bus #31 route could avoid the need for a shuttle during the shows and – for the rest of the time – provide the community with a much better access to Clinton Cove Park and the new indoor community space included in your development.

The bus currently drives south on Eleventh Avenue. Instead of turning east on 54th Street, the bus would turn west on 55th Street, then turn south on Twelfth Avenue, enter the Pier at 54th Street, exit the Pier and travel east on 52nd Street and loop back north on Tenth Avenue to 57th Street.

The layover area could be relocated from the southeast corner of 54th Street at Eleventh Avenue, which is and will remain a construction zone for the next two years, to the northeast corner of 55th Street, at Twelfth Avenue or the southwest corner of 52nd Street at Eleventh Avenue.

In conclusion, we again thank the Pier 92/94 team for responding to our requests and for continuing to work with us to improve the transportation plan. As you know, traffic is one of the major issues CD4. As a new developer within our neighborhood, CB4 looks forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland, Chair Manhattan Community Board 4



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Transportation Planning Committee



Jay Marcus, Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee



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Waterfronts & Parks Committee



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Waterfront & Parks Committee

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