



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JOHN WEIS
Chair

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District Manager

July 21, 2010

Margaret Forgione
Manhattan Borough Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation
40 Worth Street
New York, NY 10013

Dear Commissioner Forgione:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) applauds the Department of Transportation (DOT) for engaging the community early on in a consultation process for the long-term design of the 34th Street Transitway. CB4 agrees with the goals of the project, namely to improve cross-town mass transit travel time and reliability; to better the pedestrian experience including safety, ambiance and mobility; to more efficiently organize traffic; and to accommodate local loading/deliveries for both businesses and residents. West 34th Street includes some of the premier locations in New York City and country - Penn Station, Madison Square Garden, the flagship Macy's store, Manhattan Center/Hammerstein Ballroom, the Farley Post Office, the Javits Convention Center, and the Empire State Building. It is an ideal location for creating an enhanced experience for both mass transit and pedestrians.

While we support the project's goals and the community consultation process, we recommend a more comprehensive project planning process and more consideration of existing community concerns.

We applaud the implementation of a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) as well as Block-by-Block community outreach sessions and public open houses throughout the project timeline as these will help provide opportunities for design input by the community and will keep all stakeholders informed.

34th Street is a major transportation route serving 17,000 passengers per day on the M16 and M34 buses, and over 16,000 and 10,000 passengers per day on commuter buses and on the over 500 tourist/charter buses, respectively. Within a quarter mile on 34th Street there are 50,000 residents and 300,000 workers, over 80% of which commute by transit or walking (both residents and workers). In fact, 82% of households along 34th Street do

not own a car¹. Thus improving the pedestrian and transit infrastructure is paramount especially since there will be substantially more residents and commuters in the next decade with the ARC tunnel, the Moynihan Station, and the Western Rail Yards development coming to fruition.

The M34 bus is unfortunately one of the slowest buses in the city even after the recently implemented bus lanes, traveling 4.5 miles per hour (an increase from 4 miles per hour prior to the bus lanes). This is in comparison to the 5.5 miles per hour for the average Manhattan bus speed¹. Therefore, creating right-of-way bus lanes, as is proposed, should improve speed and reliability of these bus routes (estimated at 20-35% reduction in travel time). We do have concerns about the potential impacts on our community and offer the following actions to help mitigate them.

- **Comprehensive traffic study:** We fully support your proposal for a comprehensive three level traffic analysis; A) local detailed simulation of 34th Street and the nearby street network (14th to 59th Streets, river to river), including how the 34th Street truck route will be diverted; B) citywide analysis such as diversions from the George Washington and the Verrazano Narrows Bridges; and C) regional traffic impacts including mode shifts. We encourage DOT to share the proposed scope of the traffic study with the Community Advisory Committee and community in advance of beginning the study. Specifically we have heard concerns from area residents and businesses both about the existing difficulties and the potential difficulties in any changes that need to be studied and quantified.
- **EIS-like study and curb access;** Even though a formal environmental impact statement (EIS) procedure per se may not be required, depending on what the federal government mandates in order to provide funding, we urge you to comply with all the requirements of the City Environmental Quality Review (“CEQR”) process and the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”), once a more defined plan is proposed. An EIS-like analysis should still be performed in order to understand the impacts of the proposed Transitway on our community. Any of the proposals being considered would have severe impacts on pedestrian safety; subway, bus, and regional transit ingress and egress; Lincoln Tunnel and local traffic; building deliveries and loading; and air and noise pollution. Both the residential and economic development potential of the area will be changed. The effects of any proposals (and examining alternatives to those proposals) should be thoroughly studied and vetted.
- **Accelerated implementation of Select-Bus-Service (SBS) functionality:** CB4 urges you to accelerate the implementation of low floor buses’ prepayment fare collection systems, transit signal priority, and real time information displays on the current bus routes on 34th Street. The potential impacts of these improvements on the travel times and reliability of the current bus routes should be evaluated and reported before undertaking any larger changes.

- **Individual Meetings with area Neighborhood, Block and Tenants/Owners Associations:** We are pleased that DOT has outlined a process that includes meetings with neighborhood and block association and owners and tenants of major buildings. Their input is necessary and valuable. We would request that these meetings be summarized for presentation and discussion by the CAC.
- **Addressing the specific concerns of West 34th Street businesses and residents:** Manhattan Community Board #4 feels that DOT must commit to providing measures that will address the concerns of the residents and businesses along West 34th Street. These concerns, which include reasonable ability to have car and truck loading and unloading, taxi pick-up and drop off space, curbside pick-up and drop-off (particularly for elderly and disabled), and the extra travel difficulties created by the possibility of converting the street to one-way, should be fully vetted with the residents and CAC with the goal of reaching acceptable solutions.
- **Goals of the project;** CB4 reiterates the goals of improving 34th Street: A) safety for all users, B) transportation improvements, and C) quality of life for residents and businesses. Major changes to 34th Street should not be made simply to increase the speed of buses if users of this street as a whole will not benefit (pedestrians, residents, businesses).
- **Pedestrian access and safety:** Currently over 5,000 pedestrians per hour per block go through Herald Square during rush hour resulting in many people being forced to walk in the street in the “bus-only” lanes. In fact, even though there are approximately 6 times more pedestrians than auto/taxi riders on 34th Street (58% vs. 10%, respectively¹), the *same* amount of street space is allocated to each (37%)!

Thus we agree with you that implementing improved pedestrian access needs to be considered in any redesign; ideas such as curb extensions near transit entryways, crosswalk median refuges, pedestrian neckdowns, sidewalk widening, and creating pedestrian/bus only blocks should be considered. In addition, concepts for increasing pedestrian crossing times – Barnes Dances or Leading Pedestrian Intervals, for example - particularly at heavily crossed intersections such as 7th and 8th Avenues, should be considered.

- **ADA compliance and visually-impaired crossing signals;** CB4 urges you to make all crossings ADA compliant and install crossing signals for the visually impaired.
- **Bicycle access;** Ideas for improved bicycle access needs to be studied, including whether bicycle lanes should be installed on West 34th Street or nearby streets.

- **Tour, commuter, and jitney buses:** The future of 34th Street cannot be considered without a long-term plan and solution for the issues associated with tour, commuter and jitney buses. While the number of these buses has exploded in the last couple of years, city policies addressing their pick up/drop off locations and access routes have been lacking, creating major impacts on the West 34th Street area.

We look forward to continued interaction with the 34th Street Transitway team at the DOT.

Thank you,

Sincerely,



John Weis
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee



Jay Marcus
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee

¹ 34th Street Transitway presentation at the June 14th 2010 CAC meeting
(http://www.nyc.gov/html/brt/downloads/pdf/20100614_34th_transitway_cac.pdf)