

## Regional Rail Working Group, Meeting of December 15, 2004

Attendees: George Haikalis, Bill Guild, Phil Strong, Bill Hine, Paul DiMaria, Herb Landow, John West, Richard Makse, Al Papp, Greg Bender, Jim O'Shea

Topics discussed:

1. Mission statement. A reworked version was included in the agenda. Group members should read it and send in comments. We have generally agreed that our focus should be on regional issues, not local ones such as conditions at specific stations, etc. [The Straphangers Campaign deals with such issues, although rarely outside the city limits.]

a. Reform of operating agencies. We have discussed the necessity to integrate the agencies into a regional entity. It might be theoretically desirable to have an actual "merger" of institutions, but that might not be politically possible soon. Some members thought it is up to the agencies to work out governmental issues; it is our job to advocate for the needs of the riders.

b. We are considering whether ferry service should be included in our mission, partially because of the possible shutdown of New York Waterways. Other modes might be included, such as buses, which have a large regional impact in regards to Northern New Jersey.

c. The geographic scope of our coverage has generally included areas in New York State and New Jersey, mostly involving access into the city. We might like to include Connecticut, although we don't have a member from that state. The activities of the group are dependent on the interests of the members and the time they can provide. The group's mission is going to vary at times because of these constraints.

d. We would like to know more about the "missions" of the various agencies in the region. For example, the Port Authority should have certain activities defined by the original legislation that created it in the 1920s.

Our New Jersey members pointed out that New Jersey Transit, a rare example of a statewide transit authority, has not yet fully integrated its rail and bus systems regarding schedules and fares. [I find it notable that NJ Transit has never published bus maps of the type the MTA provides to the public - the only ones available in New Jersey are for individual routes.]

2. RRWG website. Group members can take a look and send suggestions or content to Bill at [webmaster@rrwg.org](mailto:webmaster@rrwg.org).

We also discussed setting up an e-mail discussion group (on Yahoo?), which would probably be "closed", i.e., members would apply and be approved in order to log in and submit messages. A moderator would be appointed to have authority over the group.

3. MTA budget.

a. Bloomberg instructed his four board representatives to vote against the latest package of fare increases, although it passed anyway. The MTA has left the base fare at \$2.00, which may account for the muted reaction to the new fares.

[Peter Kalikow signaled again in late December that system expansion projects - the Second Avenue subway and LIRR East Side Access - might be dropped from the 2005-09 capital plan.]

b. The guidelines for bus service are being changed, although it is unclear how and when these will be phased in.

c. We discussed various service guideline plans for rapid transit and regional rail— ridership, standees, frequency, and fare recovery ratio. These could be "corporate-wide" with flexibility for different lines.

NJ Transit may also be poised to for fare hikes in 2005. The RRWG will have to operate in an uncertain future where fighting for new revenue becomes as important as proposing new projects.

4. Metro-Hub. We considered possible revisions to the plan. Herb mentioned that the six tracks we allocated for Hudson Line (Amtrak and Metro-North) may be too many. [The Hudson Division may not be crucial for the plan, and we are not sure how much ridership would be generated.]

Al mentioned that the eight-track station (four over four) proposed under 34th Street adds a great deal of cost to the ARC project. [In addition, 34th is difficult is future expansion because the 6th Avenue IND crosses at a great depth there. I think the earlier idea for a 31st Street storage tunnel was more promising for eastward extension.]

Jim O'Shea asked if there could be an additional Metro-Hub service, the Bronx (Hell Gate Route) to Jamaica, Queens and beyond. This would require building a new connection in central Queens. The proposed Sunnyside station could also provide a transfer for riders who wish to make such trips.

5. Lower Manhattan access. New Jersey members mentioned the PATH Newark-WTC service as a successful model for a Jamaica-Lower Manhattan service. [I wonder if the existing Flatbush Avenue LIRR service is actually pretty good as is. The problem is more in the capacity of the #4 and #5 trains into Manhattan. I remember that the MTA's Jack Dean (Lower Manhattan Study) said that capacity could be increased by improvements deeper in Brooklyn - at the Rogers Avenue junction, and at two turnaround stations: Utica Avenue and Brooklyn College.]

6. Additional passenger rail issues.

a. We would like to compile databases providing "in-house" sources of information for the group. (Jack Kanarek has been unwilling to provide certain data from NJ Transit.) Herb will be able to compile some information for us, such as fares and service levels, platform lengths, etc., at various stations in the region. We would like to know more about equipment issues, such as the performance of MUs versus locomotive-hauled trains.

b. Operations of agencies. The previous question brought up the opinion that the operators have tended to favor their own convenience over efficiency or benefits for the riders. An example is the Morris and Essex Division, where NJ Transit uses three different kinds of equipment, resulting in service slower than provided twenty years ago. To the east, the LIRR intends to hold onto all its slots into Penn Station even if ESA is built.

7. Linear yards: Plans for these were printed in the meeting agenda. These would provide extra flexibility for midday storage and possibly would allow for removal of the West Side Yards; the land could then be redeveloped without an expensive deck. Potentially LIRR trains could be stored in the Riverside Park tunnel (which I think has room for two more tracks) and in Rego Park (where there is extra space along the right-of-way).

Metro-North might be able to develop more storage space above High Bridge Yard, where there is unused space for a couple of miles along the Hudson Line.

8. Harbor freight tunnel. There has been opposition to the proposed yard from the community of Maspeth, Queens. We brought up the idea of electrifying the freight line for a quieter, cleaner operation. However, the problem of increased truck traffic from the yard - possibly the main complaint from Maspeth - would still be there.

[I wonder if our proposed freight train ferry could use the Bay Ridge 65th Street yard, which has been severely underutilized. Also, train-truck loading points could be dispersed around the region instead of being concentrated in Maspeth.]

9. Rockaway cutoff. There have been press reports that at least two of the community boards in Queens are pushing for a linear park on the route, with the High Line project as model. Some Queens residents favor a park to foreclose restoration of train service. [We should pursue the goal of having the MTA gain ownership/control of the right-of-way. LIRR service ended several years before the MTA was created.]

10. Bus rapid transit. I attended a MTA workshop January 5 regarding BRT in Brooklyn; meetings have also been held in other boroughs. If the MTA is to be believed, five demonstration routes will be implemented within two years. [Will the MTA be able to move on this project if it is also cutting the budget for local buses?]