

NEW JERSEY



NJ Transit Opens Newark Light Rail

After four years and \$207 million, New Jersey Transit has completed a new light rail line in Newark connecting the city's Pennsylvania and Broad Street Stations. This new light rail provides thousands of Newark commuters with a faster and more convenient mode for reaching their destinations within the central business district. The trains serve five stations and provide better access to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Riverfront Stadium and Washington Park.

Although the trains operate much of the time at street level, the new light rail makes use of a tunnel that was part of the vast network of trolleys that converged in Newark in 1929. At that time, the tunnel ran to the trolley terminal, a hub for lines that once served two million people with about 2,400 cars.

NJ Transit expects the Newark light rail to attract 4,000 riders a day in its first year of operation. Trains will leave every 10 minutes during rush hours and every 15 minutes at other times.

Njtransit.com and nytimes.com

NEW YORK

NYC Rapid Bus Planning on an M-34 Pace

Bus rapid transit (BRT) will not be coming to New York City streets until 2008 at best, NYC Transit and New York City officials announced at recent public meetings, and may not be very rapid after all, according to press statements by NYC Transit.

If service actually begins in 2008, it will be four years after the project began, and seven years after Mayor Bloomberg promised "surface subways" along 1st and 2nd Avenues as part of his first campaign platform.

The big BRT question is: what are they doing? An advantage of BRT is that it is relatively easy to implement, compared to other types of rapid transit. While the recent round of meetings presented more detail about what rapid bus service would look like on selected routes, the agencies have taken the route selection process to an extreme level of bureaucratic delay.

At this point, it may be that the agencies are extending the implementation date beyond the span of Mayor Bloomberg's term of office, so that current leadership will not have to deal with implementation. That is a sad contrast to Los Angeles, for example, where the mayor had BRT up and running in 18 months.

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THE BRONX



Study Suggests Sheridan Elimination is Feasible

On June 29th the NYS DOT released results of a new study of four alternatives for the future the Bruckner/Sheridan Interchange project to back-to-back packed public meetings in the South Bronx.

The Sheridan Expressway is a 1.25-mile highway that carries relatively little traffic but blights the Bronx River and severs South Bronx neighborhoods from each and the riverfront. The Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance (southbronxvision.org) developed the idea of de-mapping the largely redundant Sheridan Expressway to free its land area for other types of development, likely including affordable housing, open space, retail and community facilities. The Tri-State Campaign is a member of the Alliance. The Alliance's concept emerged as Alternative 1A in the current study.

The results appear to show fairly small differences among the alternatives when viewed across both the entire study area, which roughly encompasses the Bronx south of the Cross-Bronx Expressway (and a swath of varying width north of that highway), and in the primary study area, which is more narrowly focused on the corridor running along the

Bruckner Expressway from the Tri-Borough Bridge to the Bronx River Parkway and the length of the Sheridan Expressway.

Modeling for the DEIS is intended to predict traffic and other conditions for the year 2030 and compare each of the four alternatives to a hypothetical "no-build" alternative.

The four options studied would approach today's problematic intersection of the Bruckner and Sheridan expressways in different ways.

Alternative 1A would eliminate the Sheridan Expressway, and build a new Hunts Point access interchange on the Bruckner Expressway. Alternative 1B would also eliminate the Sheridan, and split Hunts Point access between two interchanges on the Bruckner.

Alternative 2C would reorganize and beef up Bruckner-Sheridan connecting structures and develop new Hunts Point access options from each highway, while Alternative 2D is similar, but omits one set of Bruckner ramps (at Leggett Avenue).

Each of the alternatives shows a reduction in vehicle hours traveled for the broad study area in the morning and evening (6-10 AM and 3-7 PM) rush periods compared to the no-build alternative.

Each option also shows a reduction in truck hours traveled for the study area in the morning and evening compared to no-build, again within a relatively tight range, especially when considering these truck hours are spread over two four-hour peak periods.

Additionally, the build alternatives show reductions in truck miles traveled for the primary study area on non-expressway roads in the morning and evening.

Given these relatively small variations, together with significant uncertainties around the demographic and transportation forecasts developed by transportation agencies for a point in time 25 years hence, and similar issues with transportation modeling, the decision seems to come down to one of how stakeholders and officials want the area to look and function in the future.

Despite this, the NYS DOT's presentation was heavily devoted to a subjective ranking of the options in favor of those that retain the Sheridan Expressway. DOT's ranking placed the preponderance of weight on a few measures such as small variations in truck speeds while not even considering the economic and other value of land freed for other uses in the Sheridan removal scenarios.

The results also show that the project selected will have little impact on emissions of air pollutants, as the study expects engine technology change will dramatically outweigh any reconfiguration of area highways in that regard. □