

Regional Rail Working Group

Meeting Date: September 21, 2005

Attendees: George Haikalis, Anthony Callender, Greg Bender, Joe Clift, Herb Gormley, Paul DiMaria, Phil Strong, Bill Guild, James P. O'Shea, Robert Toth, Frank Eadie, Jose Luis Pascual

Topics discussed:

- 1) *Access to the Region's Core / Trans-Hudson Express Tunnel: NJ-ARP* issued a statement (August 29) to the North Jersey Transportation Planning authority. The statement supports the construction of an additional two-track tunnel under the Hudson, but disagrees with the proposed deep-level station under 34th Street. The statement includes details about why eliminating Alternative G (connection to Grand Central) is a mistake. (See the chart in the agenda, which shows why Alternative G has the most benefits and the least costs of the three final alternatives).

An interesting detail of the chart is that Penn Station already has provisions, including easements, allowing extension of tracks into a new 31st Street tunnel. Building a station under 34th Street would be a far more complex and expensive proposition. Also, see item 7 below for more information about PSNY regarding the Farley/Moynihan project.

- 2) *Hoboken – Penn Station tunnel.* We examined another version of a Hoboken – Penn Station route; this could be done instead of the Weehawken – PSNY plan that is presently planned for the ARC/Trans-Hudson Express tunnel. After leaving Hoboken terminal, the route would head north under River Street before peeling off near Stevens Institute for the cross-river section. I assume that this plan would be a little cheaper since less of the route is underwater. Also, the grades might be gentler since the tunnel would have an additional half-mile before it had to leave the shoreline. This route would also allow a direct transfer to the existing Hoboken PATH station.
- 3) *New Jersey Transit equipment issues.*
 - i) The new diesel locomotives arriving at NJT cannot fit into the Hudson tunnels. These are not dual-modes, but a future dual-mode could not be based on this design. (LIRR dual-modes and regular diesels share a common design.)
 - ii) Greg reported that NJT's interest in dual-modes now involves a catenary-based design, because the New Jersey system already has extensive sections with overhead wire. In other words, the agency wants a locomotive that can operate anywhere on its side of the river; it is not yet concerned about running into the third-rail territories of the LIRR or Metro-North.

- iii) Apparently NJT's new bi-level cars won't fit into Grand Central, which is a setback for Alternative G. One reason the bi-levels are so expensive is that they have to serve both high and low level stations in New Jersey. There are some stations in the New Jersey system where larger Plate C freight cars have to be pass through, precluding high-level platforms. (However, the new station in Union has gauntlet tracks to solve this problem.)

In any case, this is a compatibility issue that has to be addressed in plans for through-running between the NJT and MTA systems.

- 4) *Lower Manhattan.* We had a slide show about some options to improve service to Lower Manhattan, including plans that involve better access from upper Manhattan and Metro-North territory:
 - i) One option we've discussed before is a short track connection between the former IND and BMT lines at Cortlandt Street (the "E-R Connection"). This could be built in conjunction with a moving walkway under 42nd Street between Grand Central and the 6th Avenue subway. These two relatively inexpensive projects would provide another route for MN riders to reach LM.
 - ii) The E-R connection could also be used to provide a route for the upper part of the Second Avenue subway. Trains could operate from the Upper East Side, down 6th Avenue, and through the connection for a one-seat ride to LM. (West 4th Street station has interlockings allowing trains to flow into any route.)
 - iii) George described the Liberty Links plan, which has Metro-North trains using the Broadway BMT to reach LM and then continuing to Long Island and New Jersey.
 - iv) The "Ronan plan" of 1968 (the first year of the MTA) would have used the south side of the Manhattan Bridge and then the Nassau Street line to bring LIRR trains directly into the Financial District.

- 5) *More on Lower Manhattan – MTA JFK/LIRR proposal.*

George presented an extensive question and answer document from the Port Authority (dated 1996, I think) about the AirTrain structure, which was then being planned. This confirmed that it would be difficult if not impossible for any existing NYCTA or LIRR equipment to operate on the AirTrain system. At the time, the PA was depending on airport landing fees to finance the project, and didn't have an incentive to design provisions for "outside" access.

We think a modified car could be developed for AirTrain access, but I think the group is lukewarm about the effort required if Lower Manhattan rather than Midtown is the main goal. The floor height of a LIRR car is about five or six inches higher than that of NYCTA cars. LIRR cars were temporarily used on the Staten Island Railway in the

1960s, and apparently passengers adjusted to the height difference. (I don't think the ADA was in effect then, which would probably preclude such an operation today.)

- 6) *Freight issues/garbage trains.* It might be possible to remove more garbage from Manhattan by rail if the West Side line (now operated by Amtrak) is used. There are several places where truck to train transfer stations could be built; one of them is at West 125th Street next to the Riverside Drive viaduct.
- 7) *Farley/Moynihan Station.* The possible move of Madison Square Garden to a new site one block to the west provides an opportunity to redesign the existing Penn Station. An office or hotel tower would replace the existing Garden, but during construction it would be feasible to rework the station to make it more attractive and convenient.

We noted that if all present plans are completed, NJ Transit will in effect be operating three distinct facilities in Midtown: its existing space in Penn Station, the new "Macys" station under 34th Street, and the rebuilt portion of the Farley post office. (Amtrak long ago backed-out of any commitment to Farley.) This brings up the problem of confusion for riders, plus higher costs for all that extra infrastructure.

Since the Farley project is really a real estate development instead of a transportation project, perhaps we can argue that no public funds should be used for its reconstruction.

- 8) *Fulton Street and PATH transit hubs.* The Daily News recently ran an editorial questioning the need to for these expensive buildings that serve little or no transportation purpose.

I think that if such hubs were to be built, they shouldn't be freestanding buildings; the air space above them should be developed for some revenue producing function.