

Regional Rail Working Group Meeting of September 15, 2004

Attendees: George Haikalis, Joe Clift, Al Papp, Herb Landow, Greg Bender, Paul DiMaria, Jeff Chase, Robert Toth, Herbert Gormley, James O'Shea, David Peter Alan, Jeff Gerlach, Richard Gualtieri

Upcoming meetings:

1. Jack Kanarek, Senior Director, Project Development, NJ Transit, will be the guest at the next meeting, October 20.
2. Rockaway cut-off subcommittee: next meeting is October 4.

Topics discussed:

1. Lower Manhattan-Kennedy Airport. Scoping meetings are to be held for this project, although I wonder if the outcome is predetermined. We may have a subcommittee for this issue.

The group discussed the possibility that a PATH extension to Newark Airport as an alternative to a JFK connection that would probably require a new East River tunnel. Greg mentioned that half the Lower Manhattan work force lives in New Jersey.

[Assessment: We should aim to have any plans for an East River tunnel developed with the wider needs of Brooklyn and Queens in mind; we already know that airport traffic alone can't justify that kind of investment. Most airport rail routes in North America — including the proposed Apple Corridor — serve “neighborhood” markets as well as air travelers.]

2. Metro-Hub progress report: a. George mentioned that we haven't gotten any traction on this yet. He has asked the Queens borough president's planning office to see a Metro-Hub presentation.

b. Equipment: The main issue here is that NJ Transit and the MTA are drifting away from compatibility. Metro-North and the LIRR are emphasizing a new generation of MU's; NJ Transit has been purchasing locomotive-hauled coaches for two decades. New Jersey members of the group reported that NJ-ARP is in favor of a new MU's.

The group might establish an equipment subcommittee.

3. PATH/Lex progress report: Al and George wrote a response to the Port Authority's Anthony Cracchiolo (Director of Priority Capital Programs). The letter restated our position that the project is technically feasible; there was also a pitch for Alignment 4.2, the option that allows for direct passenger transfers rather than immediate through-running.

The group's view seems to be that there has to be another attempt to persuade elected officials if there is any chance left for the connection.

[Assessment: The Port Authority may be the most insular public body in the New York area, and the Regional Rail Group was pretty much unknown to them when we made our presentations. (Maybe NJ-ARP has had more positive results with them; can anyone comment?) We noted that merely one of the two state governors could issue directions the PA — as long as the other

remained neutral. Possibly the departure of Jim McGreevy opens up an opportunity.]

4. Amtrak / Intercity: a: Amtrak has announced that they are leaving the mail/express business; one of the results will be the cutback of two routes (Three Rivers and Palmetto) originally extended for this purpose. [Five years ago Amtrak had expected that the express business would help it reach self-sufficiency, at least for operations if not capital expenses.]

The consensus of the group seemed to be that Amtrak managed its express business poorly and that it may be better for the company to move out of it for the time being. One option we suggested is that Amtrak could “rent the rear coupler”; i.e., offer to haul cars for another company that has expertise in the material handling business.

b: New York State and Amtrak have been unable to come to an agreement for an upstate improvement program, and Amtrak has offered \$20 million to settle a lawsuit. One of the deferred projects is the Turboliner refurbishment program, and all of those units are presently out of service. [The recent ESPA newsletter states that Amtrak is trying to standardize its fleet, and the Turbos do not fit into that strategy.]

We discussed the possibility that motor vehicle revenue, probably from the Thruway authority, could be used for rail projects. Thruway money is used to support the New York Barge Canal, even though that facility does little if anything to relieve road congestion.

5. Harbor freight tunnel: EIS comments are due September 30. We would like to add some comments of our own; it might also be possible to ask for an extension of the comments period.

Herb discussed a plan, originally developed for the NYS DOT in 1978, for a new type of car-float operation. A self-propelled vessel was proposed, and it would be larger than the barges traditionally used. It would be 800 feet long and contain ten tracks.

The group questioned whether the market could support a new tunnel. (That also seems to be the opinion of CSX.) We also wondered if the portals would have to be so far in-land that the tunnel could not easily serve waterfront areas.

We thought that the Sunset Park area would be a good location for port development, because the harbor at that location can handle deep-water ships. The Port Authority prefers the New Jersey side of the bay, and hasn't expressed any interest in funding the tunnel.

6. ARC / East Side Access: a. An environmental assessment is needed for the ventilation building to be built in East Midtown. This may lead to a full supplementary EIS.

Opponents of the ventilation building — nearby property owners — have hired engineers to research the project.

b. Upper level loops at Grand Central could handle speeds of at least 12 mph, and perhaps more. About nine trains per hour now use it. Metro-North would have to give up about five tracks to accommodate the LIRR on that level. Probably there would be less impact on MN if the lower level were used. (It was noted that the upper level was designed to handle long-distance trains.) At the moment MN runs a lot of short trains in the rush hour in order to provide a zone express service. They may be able to handle future growth by simply lengthening trains without

demanding more slots.

Final comment about East Side Access: Greg asked how the LIRR ““dividend”” — the extra capacity opened up for Penn Station — is to be used. The LIRR has stated that it intends to keep the slots for itself and run shorter trains.

Additional comment about intercity: Amtrak long distance service is caught up in the problems of the rail freight industry. The freight lines are doing a lot of business, but are not generating enough revenue for capital improvements. The result is congestion on some routes, while other routes are downgraded or abandoned.