

On Oct. 29, 2010, the NYC DOT responded to Murray Hill Questions -- many of which were raised in the MHNA's Transit Town Hall Meeting of Sept. 23, 2010 -- with a 5150-word report from Kate Mikuliak, BRT Outreach Coordinator. It is pasted below. A summary of the Town Hall meeting will appear/appears in the WINTER 2011 issue of *Murray Hill Life*. MHNA members will receive that newsletter in early January.

Dear Community Advisory Committee Member,

We would like to share with you a list of questions and answers regarding the Transitway project (attached and soon available on our website at www.nyc.gov/34transitway). This list of questions is a compilation of those submitted by the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association for the Transit Town Hall on 9/23, from Congress Member Carolyn Maloney, and from other CAC participants and members of the public.

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34th Street Transitway Frequently Asked Questions

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General Questions

1) What needs does the 34th Street project intend to address?

The 34th Street project will address three major issues facing the corridor: slow bus speeds, pedestrian congestion and safety, and projected population growth.

34th Street is a key east-west transit corridor, but experiences some of the slowest bus speeds in the city. Buses average 4.5 miles per hour, barely faster than the speed of a typical pedestrian. Despite slow speeds, over 33,000 bus riders travel on the corridor each day (17,000 local riders and 16,000 express bus riders). Over 500 tourist and charter buses also use the corridor daily, carrying an additional 10,000 passengers a day. Slow bus speeds and bus bunching lengthen travel times and limit mobility for all bus riders on the corridor.

34th Street is a major pedestrian corridor and experiences significant pedestrian congestion and overflow. Over 5,000 pedestrians per hour pass through Herald Square during the day. Due to crowded sidewalks, pedestrians frequently walk in the street.

The area surrounding 34th Street is expected to undergo significant new development that will put more stress on the bus systems and on sidewalk capacity. Several new large projects will bring more residents, workers and business to 34th Street: Moynihan Station, the West Side Rail Yards and First Avenue Properties (Con Ed site).

2) What are the benefits of the 34th Street Transitway?

The 34th Street Transitway proposal would:

- Improve crosstown bus speeds. Crosstown buses are currently used by 17,000 people daily, but they are among the slowest in the city
- Improve service on express commuter buses from Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and New Jersey – currently used by 16,000 people daily
- Improve pedestrian safety with curb extensions and median refuges
- Accommodate expected growth along the corridor from Hudson Yards, development of the Con Ed properties and other projects
- Provide curb access for deliveries and other curb uses

3) What potential issues does the DOT study need to address in the development process of the Transitway?

While the Transitway would have a large number of benefits, it also raises a number of issues that the project will examine. These issues include:

- The effect on traffic, both on 34th Street and on other neighborhood streets
 - How to accommodate residential and commercial curb use activity
 - The impacts on air quality, visual and aesthetic resources, noise and other quality of life and community
- DOT is studying these issues, with significant input from the public and from the Community Advisory Committee. We agree that these issues need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner before the project could be implemented.

4) What is the timeline of the Transitway project?

During the fall of 2010 DOT will:

- convene community forums(1) on curb access (Oct. 19 & 21, Nov. 4 & 9)
- reach out(1) to businesses, building managers, institutions and residents on curb access and loading
- develop a comprehensive traffic model to analyze potential traffic impacts
- study truck route issues
- begin environmental review and traffic analysis

During the winter and spring of 2011, DOT will:

- develop a preliminary corridor design based on feedback on curb access and loading
- present the preliminary corridor design and results of preliminary traffic analysis to the community
- convene the Community Advisory Committee and community forums to gather feedback on preliminary design

During the Summer and Fall of 2011, DOT will:

- develop a detailed corridor design based on feedback from the Community Advisory Committee and Community Forums
- continue community outreach through the Community Advisory Committee and community forums
- complete environmental review and final traffic analysis

After the traffic analysis and environmental review demonstrate this project is feasible, and DOT has a final design that reasonably accommodates curb access needs on 34th St.,

DOT will then present a final project plan to the public, including plans for construction and implementation.

5) How does the Transitway proposal compare to other Bus Rapid Transit systems around the United States and world?

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a term used to describe a wide range of different types of bus priority treatments. Within New York City, bus lanes range from being in effect for three hours a day on weekdays (such as Sixth

Avenue in Manhattan), to streets where only bus traffic is allowed (such as Fulton St. in Brooklyn) balancing the transit mobility need with other street uses. On New York City's first generation of BRT, the Bx12 and M15 Select Bus Service (SBS) routes, the design of the bus lanes incorporated loading and traffic needs specific to where those lines run.

Around the world, there are a variety of BRT system designs, ranging from busways running on a dedicated right of way, to bus-only streets, to bus-only lanes, to simpler treatments. DOT recognizes that New York City cannot take designs directly from other locations, and that the planning of bus improvement projects needs to reflect each corridor's physical dimensions and community needs. Understanding the unique conditions to every corridor allows DOT to both improve transit and make further corridor improvements, such as improving pedestrian safety or traffic flow.

Loading Questions

6) How will curbside access change as part of the proposed project?

Currently, the majority of 34th Street has very restrictive curb regulations, with no standing allowed 7 am-7 pm on weekdays. This regulation allows only for quick pick-up and drop-off of passengers during the hours the bus lane is in effect.

Part of the goal of this project is to increase daytime curb access where possible, while at the same time improving crosstown mobility. On some blocks, loading will be allowed throughout the day; other blocks may see little change from the existing regulation; and others may have direct curb access more restricted. In some parts of the corridor, a loading lane will be created along the curb to allow 24-hour access along both curbs for loading and delivery activity, a significant increase in curb access from the existing condition.

7) How will DOT develop curb access solutions as part of the project study?

As part of this project, DOT is conducting a significant amount of outreach aimed specifically at understanding curb access needs along the corridor. These include:

- Reaching out to the management of every building along 34th Street
- Holding four community forums open to the public, where residents and business owners can discuss how they currently park and load along the street
- Receiving feedback from the Community Advisory Committee and other area stakeholders

This process is not fixed, and DOT will take additional efforts if the design requires more detailed information on curb access on a specific block or in front of a specific building.

DOT will summarize this information, and present it to the Community Advisory Committee to ensure that no curb use needs were missed in the outreach process. The information collected will then form the base for what needs to be accommodated in the Transitway design. DOT will not propose a design that does not reasonably accommodate the curb use needs of residents, building owners, businesses and employees of the corridor.

Based on this outreach, DOT will present a draft of the Transitway plan, including delivery accommodations, at a series of community forums to be held in early 2011.

7) How will people be able to be dropped off from taxis or private vehicles?

This will depend on the overall plan for loading, deliveries and the Transitway itself. On some blocks, DOT will create loading lanes along the curb of the Transitway that will allow taxis and other vehicles to pick-up and drop-off passengers without blocking bus service. On other blocks, pick-ups and drop-offs from for-hire or private vehicles may need to occur across the street or at the corner. As noted previously, the curb use plans will be presented to the Community Advisory Committee and to the public for feedback.

8) How will frequent deliveries (such as US Mail, UPS/Fed Ex or Fresh Direct) be made along the Transitway?

This will depend on the overall plan for loading, deliveries and the Transitway itself. On some blocks, DOT will create loading lanes along the curb of the Transitway that will allow deliveries to be made from the curb. On other blocks, these delivery vehicles would need to find appropriate locations to stand or park on the opposite side of the street or may need to find space on intersecting or parallel streets to make deliveries. This is no

different from the existing conditions on most blocks of 34th Street and is a situation that frequently occurs in Manhattan.

9) How will Access-a-Ride pick-ups and drop-offs be accommodated?

Access-a-Ride vehicles will be allowed to make pick-ups and drop-offs in the bus lanes. However, vehicles will not be permitted to wait for passengers in the bus lanes.

10) How will deliveries that need to occur directly in front of a building (i.e. oil deliveries) be handled?

Deliveries that must have direct access to the front of a building in order to occur will continue to be allowed on 34th Street. Depending on the location, these deliveries may be restricted to outside of rush hours or outside of 7 am-7 pm (as is the case today).

11) How will major loading and unloading activities (such as moving trucks or major appliance deliveries) be handled?

In locations where a loading lane is provided as part of the Transitway, loading and unloading is expected to be allowed with few restrictions. As part of the project design process, regulations will be developed for other parts of the corridor, but these deliveries may be restricted to off-peak times (such as outside of 7 am-7 pm). DOT recognizes that many buildings choose to allow move-ins and move-outs only during normal business hours on weekdays. Under current regulations, moving trucks are not allowed to stand on 34th Street at those times, so for these buildings, trucks would continue to load from other locations, such as intersecting avenues.

12) How will major deliveries (i.e. boiler replacements) be handled?

The process will be essentially the same as the existing process for these types of deliveries. A contractor will work with the DOT Office of Construction Mitigation and Coordination to develop a plan to provide a safe and efficient route for pedestrians, buses and other traffic around the work site based on the street space needed to accommodate the major work. These plans often call for parking restrictions and lane shifts in the area of the delivery. One advantage to a bus-based project (unlike a light rail project) is that buses can be rerouted in the event of an obstruction in the Transitway. In all cases, deliveries of these types would be accommodated.

13) How will trash collection work?

DOT is working with the Department of Sanitation to develop a trash collection plan for the corridor. It is likely that a sanitation vehicle may pick-up trash from the bus lanes outside of rush hour. All designated refuse collection locations will be reasonable – a building may be asked to place garbage outside of a bus stop (as is the case today), but building will not be required to carry their trash to a different block. Commercial carting would likely be similarly regulated.

14) If someone has a mobility impairment, will they need to be in an ambulance to be dropped off in front of their building?

No. Access-a-Ride vehicles will always be allowed in the Transitway, and along much of the corridor all vehicles will be allowed to pick-up and drop-off along loading lanes.

DOT does recognize that there may be someone with a temporary or permanent impairment who needs to be dropped off on a block without a loading lane, and we are working to develop rules to allow those actions. However, it is important to note that there are many locations throughout the city where pick-ups and drop-offs of any person are not allowed.

15) Will the Transitway have any benefits for persons with mobility impairments?

Yes – people with mobility impairments use the 34th Street crosstown bus more than any other crosstown route in the city. About 1 in 200 M16 or M34 riders require a wheelchair lift, a rate about double that of other routes. Most New Yorkers do not own cars, and so improved public transportation on 34th Street will have major benefits for people trying to travel to the medical facilities along the street, or otherwise travel along the corridor.

Additionally, the project will improve curb ramps and add crosswalks along the street, which will benefit all pedestrians, including those with mobility impairments.

16) Will the city require advance notice for curb access inside the Transitway?

There are no plans to require advance notice for most allowed curb access activities. For major deliveries or construction, permits from DOT Office of Construction Mitigation and Coordination will be required, as is the case today.

17) Will the change in curbside access affect property values?

Property values in New York City are driven by a range of factors, including “location, location and location”, as well as access to public transportation, parks, schools, restaurants and a plethora of other issues. The city regularly changes rules regarding curbside access around the city, and does not expect that property values will change as a result of those changes.

18) If a building is only accessible to persons with disabilities via an entrance on 34th Street, will that building still be accessible?

All building entrances will still be accessible from the sidewalk as they are today; therefore any building that is currently handicap-accessible will remain so.

19) Does this project create any issues in relation to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

It is not expected that this project would cause any issues related to ADA. Mobility would be improved for patrons of transit with disabilities; all buildings along the corridor would remain accessible; while not an ADA requirement, Access-a-Ride will still be able to pick-up or drop-off customers directly in front of their destination.

20) How many parking spaces will be eliminated as a result of this proposal?

Currently, on weekdays during the day, parking is not allowed along 34th Street, so no parking will be removed. The proposal would in fact increase daytime loading and parking along the corridor. The exact number of parking spaces to be added or removed will be calculated when a plan is developed based on community feedback; it is expected that a draft of this plan will be presented in early 2011.

Traffic Questions

21) What traffic analysis will be performed as part of the project study?

The Transitway’s effect on traffic will require careful analysis before the project can be finalized or implemented. DOT believes that the Transitway project only makes sense if it does not cause major traffic issues elsewhere in the neighborhood or city.

DOT has begun a comprehensive traffic study to assess these issues. The agency is building a state-of-the-art traffic simulation model. The model covers every street from 14th Street to 60th Street, for the full width of Manhattan, and major regional roads in an area comprised of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge to the south, the New Jersey Turnpike to the west, the George Washington Bridge to the north and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway to the east.

DOT collected traffic data over the past year and is currently constructing this state-of-the-art traffic model. Based on community feedback, we will develop an initial layout for the corridor, and will test that layout using the model. Using those results and the results of continuing outreach, the plan may need to be changed and modeled again. We expect to have initial results to present to the Community Advisory Committee and at public open houses in spring 2011.

22) How would traffic on 34th Street be affected by this project proposal?

Traffic on 34th Street would be restricted to one-way movement, to allow for the Transitway, as well as for loading zones, left turn lanes and other improvements. Access to and from both the Lincoln and Queens-Midtown Tunnels would still be provided.

These changes should result in a reduced traffic on 34th Street.

23) What will be the effect on traffic on parallel side streets (i.e. 36th or 37th Street)?

As part of the traffic study described above, DOT will look closely at the effects on these streets. As part of the project, we may look at ways to improve traffic flow on these streets, such as by changing signal timings or adding turn lanes. We expect to have initial results from the traffic study to present to the Community Advisory Committee and at public open houses in Spring 2011.

24) What will happen to traffic coming out of the Midtown Tunnel or Lincoln Tunnel?

Both of these tunnels have multiple exit points, with a minority of traffic currently exiting onto 34th Street. Some traffic patterns will change; this will be looked at in the traffic study. We expect to have initial results from the traffic study to present to the Community Advisory Committee and at public open houses in spring 2011.

25) As part of the study, would DOT consider improvements to other streets that might be affected by the project? Absolutely. Part of the benefit of this comprehensive traffic analysis is that we can look at improvements to other streets in the network at the same time. If there are opportunities to improve other streets, those can be implemented as part of the project.

26) Will 33rd Street be reopened to through traffic at Park Avenue and/or Broadway?

During the outreach for this project, we have received numerous requests to allow through movements on 33rd Street at Park Avenue and at Broadway. We will consider these requests throughout the project study and design period, and would consider implementing them as part of the Transitway project. Changes like these would be presented to the Community Advisory Committee and to community boards if requested.

27) How would truck traffic be affected by this project proposal?

34th Street is currently a “through truck” route 6 pm-11 am, and a local truck route only 11 am-6 pm. 34th Street would continue to be a local truck route, however its utility as a through truck route would be changed. DOT is currently collecting data on how many trucks are correctly using 34th Street as a through truck route. DOT will present this data to the Community Advisory Committee and will discuss options for other through truck routes through midtown, or whether the through truck route is needed at all. DOT is also reaching out to the trucking industry to discuss potential changes with the industry stakeholders.

Transitway Operations Questions

28) What would happen if a bus or other vehicle is stalled in the bus lane?

If a vehicle is blocking the bus lane and is unable to move, then the bus will need to safely pull around the vehicle using the other bus lane. If there is a long term disruption (such as a construction project that needs to use the curb lane), then a more formal solution would be put in place, such as shifting the bus lanes around the location, or using a flag person at the location. The design of the Transitway will take into account the need for buses and emergency vehicles to maneuver around such obstacles.

29) Would other local transit buses be allowed to use the bus lanes?

Other local transit buses (such as the M4 or the NY Waterway buses) will be allowed to use the bus lanes. However, all services will be regulated in terms of where they may stop, and no service will be allowed to collect fares on the bus within the Transitway, in order to keep all buses in the Transitway moving.

30) Would inter-city buses (e.g. Bolt Bus) be allowed to use the Transitway?

DOT is currently evaluating whether inter-city buses would be allowed to drive in the bus lanes. However, an inter-city bus would not be allowed to stop along the Transitway, since inter-city buses take a long time to load and unload and would block the crosstown bus service.

31) What would happen to buses if a fire truck or other emergency vehicle were stopped in the Transitway?

As elsewhere in the city, vehicles responding to an emergency have priority over all other traffic along 34th Street. While hopefully a rare occurrence, emergency vehicles could block one or both bus lanes at some points. One advantage to buses (opposed to light rail) is that they can be flexible in their use of the street, and can pull around an obstruction if necessary.

Emergency Access

32) How would emergency vehicles (i.e. police, fire or ambulances) access buildings along the Transitway?

The Transitway would be designed so that an emergency vehicle could cross into it or out of it at any point, allowing for full access to all buildings along the corridor. In many cases, emergency vehicles may choose to travel in the bus lanes, since bus lanes are often less congested than the rest of the street. Additionally, the bus lanes will continue to let emergency vehicles travel in both directions along 34th Street.

33) Does DOT consult NYPD, FDNY and other public safety agencies for input to the project design?

DOT regularly works with NYPD and FDNY, among other agencies, regarding proper street design to accommodate emergency vehicles.

34) Would DOT ever implement a project that NYPD or FDNY showed to be a safety problem?

DOT would not make any street design changes that were shown to be a public safety problem. Based on street standards discussed with NYPD and FDNY, DOT does not believe that the Transitway would pose any safety issues. As the study progresses, DOT will continue to review plans with public safety agencies to ensure that this is the case.

35) Would the project have any benefits for emergency vehicles?

Since emergency vehicles could use the bus lanes— and the protected bus lanes would not be congested— emergency vehicles would likely be able to move much faster along 34th Street than they can today.

Funding

36) How much does this project cost?

The total cost of the project is expected to be about \$36 million, including all studies, environmental review and construction.

37) Where is the money coming from?

The planning and environmental review for the project is being funded by a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant, administered through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The construction of the project would be funded through a FTA Bus Livability grant – although this money could only be used once design and environmental review are complete.

New York City DOT and New York State DOT will each provide a 10% funding match for these grants, and MTA NYCT will fund some elements of the project not eligible for federal aid from funds reserved in the 2005-2009 MTA capital plan.

38) DOT has already received funding for construction of the Transitway. Does that mean that the project is happening no matter what?

With many projects, DOT applies for funding before a project's study is complete so that the project could be implemented if the study turns out favorable. DOT won this competitive grant program because the Transitway

has large potential benefits; however, if upon completing the traffic and other analyses DOT decides that the project is not worth implementing, DOT is not obligated to use these funds, and they would be returned to FTA.

39) Could the \$18M bus livability grant be used to restore MTA NYCT bus service cuts?

No. The Bus Livability grant program can only be used to construct bus-related facilities; it cannot be used for bus operations, and so it could not restore service cuts. Had this project not been selected for this grant, the money would have been spent in a different city. Learn more about the Bus Livability grant program on the NYC DOT website.

Environmental Review

40) What type of environmental review will be performed for the Transitway project?

Based on direction from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), DOT will be preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for this project. An EA is a study of whether the project would have any significant impacts and requires an in-depth analysis conforming to federal regulations.

41) What subjects will be covered in the environmental review?

The subjects to be covered in the environmental review are set forth in guidelines in NEPA as well as other federal regulations. These will include:

- Social Conditions
- Cultural Resources
- Parklands
- Visual and Aesthetic Resources
- Transportation
- Air Quality
- Energy and Greenhouse Gases
- Noise and Vibration
- Natural Resources
- Hazardous Materials
- Safety and Security
- Construction Impacts
- Indirect and Cumulative Impacts
- Environmental Justice

42) Will the public be involved with scoping the environmental review?

As a formal term, "scoping" is only a part of an Environmental Impact Statement.

However, DOT has committed to sharing the proposed work plan for the Environmental Assessment publicly online and with the Community Advisory Committee to provide an opportunity for input into what will be studied in the EA. While the EA will need to conform to FTA requirements and standards, DOT will work to incorporate public feedback into the EA work plan where appropriate.

43) What standards will be used in the environmental analysis?

Where FTA or other federal requirements exist (such as for noise and vibration), DOT will use the federal standards. Where there is no federal standard, DOT will use standards outlined in the City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual, which is the basis for all local environmental reviews in the city.

Project Evaluation

44) Is DOT going to implement this project no matter what the environmental review shows?

No. DOT believes that the Transitway project would have large benefits, and would not have any major negative effects on the community. However, if the environmental review shows that the project would cause major problems, DOT would reevaluate or stop the project.

45) How will DOT evaluate whether the project should be implemented?

DOT will look at the results of the environmental review and traffic analysis, at feedback from the public, and at other analyses of benefits to determine if the project makes sense to implement. There is no formula for making this decision, but as with all projects, we will evaluate if the benefits of the project outweigh any potential issues with the project.

46) How will DOT evaluate the effects of the project once implemented?

As with all major projects, DOT would collect a significant amount of data for an evaluation program. This program would include bus travel times, measurements of traffic both on 34th Street and on other neighborhood streets and feedback from the community.

47) If some elements are implemented before the full project (i.e. prepayment fare collection), how would those changes be evaluated?

When possible, DOT would evaluate any early implementation items individually and discuss these results with the Community Advisory Committee and the public.

Other Questions on the Transitway

48) What kinds of growth are expected along 34th Street?

The 34th Street corridor is expected to experience a large amount of growth in upcoming years, both from the natural growth of the city, and from large development projects.

These include the growth of the Hudson Yards district and the development of the western rail yards, development related to Moynihan Station and 15 Penn Plaza, and the build-out of the former Con Ed properties on the east side. Each of these projects are expected to generate significant transit ridership (as shown in the table below), and this project would help accommodate this projected ridership without slowing the existing bus service down.

49) Would DOT be removing trees as part of the Transitway project?

DOT does not expect to remove any trees as part of the Transitway project. The City of New York places a very high value on trees, and wherever possible would look to increase the number of trees along the street.

Questions Regarding Existing Conditions on 34th Street

While not related to the 34th Street Transitway project, a number of questions have been asked about the existing conditions on 34th Street. Basic answers are below. For more detail, please contact the DOT Manhattan Borough Commissioner's Office at 212-839-6210.

50) Why are left turns currently prohibited along 34th Street at the following locations?

First Avenue/Second Avenue:

To improve the flow of traffic and safety on First and Second Avenues as part of Select Bus Service on the M15, DOT eliminated the dedicated left-turn phase at four critical intersections, including 34th Street.

Lexington Avenue/Park Avenue:

As part of street design changes made in 2008, 34th Street was striped for one moving lane and one bus lane in each direction 7 am-7 pm. Since during this time a left turning vehicle would block the through travel lane, these turns were prohibited.

Madison-Eighth Avenue:

In the core of Midtown, left turns have long been prohibited to help protect pedestrian safety. In DOT's recent Pedestrian Safety Study we found that three times as many pedestrians were killed or seriously injured in left turn crashes than right turn crashes.

51) Could parking be allowed mid-day in the existing bus lanes?

In most locations along the corridor, the existing bus lanes are in effect from 7 am to 7 pm. Bus volumes and traffic volumes are relatively consistent all day; therefore DOT has no plans to consider reducing the hours that the bus lane is in operation.

52) What analysis was done before installing the existing bus lanes?

DOT conducted traffic studies along the length of 34th Street to evaluate the safety and traffic issues related to the bus lanes. The project was presented to all three community boards along the corridor, and DOT held a public open house about the project. DOT also studied traffic patterns following implementation, and found that there were minimal changes to neighborhood traffic patterns.