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The City of New York Manhattan Community Board 8

Transportation Committee

Wednesday, October 1, 2014

MSK-Rockefeller Research Laboratories

430 East 67th Street, Auditorium

6:30 PM

Minutes

Present: Lowell Barton, Michele Birnbaum, James Clynes, A. Scott Falk, Lawrence Hockert, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Rebecca Seawright, Teri Slater, Elaine Walsh, Charles Warren; Michael Dillon, David Menegon (Public Members)

Absent (Excused): Jonathan Horn, Timothy Yeo

Absent (Unexcused): Lori Bores, Jared Stone, Hedi White

The Meeting was called to order at 6:37 PM.

Prior to the start of the agenda, Sarah Anders from Councilmember Ben Kallos' office spoke about a couple of transportation issues, in particular service on the M31 bus route. She reported that the future installation of bus countdown clocks may be helpful for M31 riders.

1. Presentation on the East 86th Street Safety and Streetscape Improvements.

The East 86th Street Streetscape Improvement Project was most recently before the Committee in October 2012, when NYC's Dept. of Transportation (DOT) presented an update on this project, which DOT had already been working on for several years with the East 86th Street Association. Here is a brief summary from the Oct. 2012 minutes:

The basic elements of this project as presented in 2012 included replacing the curbs on 86th Street between Park and Second Avenues with granite curbs and expanding the size of tree pits and installing a few additional tree pits where possible (to be maintained by the E. 86th St. Assoc.), with additional improvements to include benches, bus racks, and trash receptacles.

To reduce the cost of these improvements, this project was to incorporate some elements from other existing programs that are already funded:

- *Safety improvements for routes to priority schools and bus improvements will allow the installation of "neckdowns" that increase space and reduce distances for pedestrians waiting to cross streets.*
- *New "bus bulb" sidewalk extensions will extend the sidewalk into the curbside no-standing lane at certain locations on East 86th Street to provide more space for pedestrians waiting at bus stops, and allow buses to stop without needing to pull over. These bus bulbs can also serve as neckdowns at some locations.*

The Committee passed a resolution requesting “Select Bus Service–style off-board fare collection” on the M86 route, which the full board also passed. The Committee also requested the DOT present information on the Wayfinding System Signage program at a future date, for possible inclusion in this area.

There were two presentations under this agenda item:

- A. New York City Transit (NYCT) and DOT jointly presented on Select Bus Service (SBS) on East 86th Street.
- B. Design consultants to the Dept. of Design & Construction (DDC) presented the capital construction project.

The Committee was unaware that there would be a full SBS presentation and had not properly posted this topic as an agenda item for this meeting. As a result, the Committee co-chairs stated that there would not be a vote this month on the M86-SBS plan.

1A. M86-SBS Presentation:

First, NYCT and DOT jointly presented on Select Bus Service on East 86th Street. In 2009, DOT and NYCT identified the M86 as a potential phase II candidate for Select Bus Service. Some of the specifics of the M86 include:

- It is a heavily-used route with slow trips.
- The M86 has the highest number of passengers per mile of any NYCT bus route.
- The M86 is the second busiest crosstown route, with more than 25,000 passengers per day.
- It provides crucial connections to 6 subway lines and 12 bus routes.

NYCT noted that they have no plans to change the route of the M86.

DOT presented a preliminary timeline for the proposed SBS project:

1. Fall 2014: Data collection & analysis
2. Fall/Winter 2014: Conceptual design (includes CB input)
3. Early 2015: Develop corridor plan (includes refining detail with CBs)
4. Mid 2015: Implementation

1B. East 86th Street Capital Construction Project:

DDC’s project design consultants then presented the E. 86th St. capital construction project, which includes the following sub-projects:

1. Select Bus Service bus bulbs & neckdowns
2. School safety neckdowns
3. Streetscape improvements
4. Water main replacement

The capital project includes the following bus bulbs and neckdowns:

- Bus bulbs:
 - NW corner of E. 86th St. & Lexington Ave.
 - SE corner of E. 86th St. & Lexington Ave.
 - NW corner of E. 86th St. & Third Ave.
 - SE corner of E. 86th St. & Third Ave.

- Neckdowns (SBS project):
 - NE corner of E. 86th St. & Lexington Ave.
 - SW corner of E. 86th St. & Third Ave.
 - NW corner of E. 86th St. & Third Ave. (currently a “painted” neckdown)
- Neckdowns (school safety project):
 - NW corner of E. 86th St. & Park Ave.
 - SE corner of E. 86th St. & Park Ave.
 - SW corner of E. 85th St. & Madison Ave.
 - NW corner of E. 84th St. & Madison Ave.
 - SW corner of E. 84th St. & Madison Ave.

The streetscape improvements project includes the following:

- Sidewalk & curb replacement
- NYC standard tree guards (three-sided)
- Expanded tree pits with granite pavers
- New trees, shrubs, and bulbs
- NYC standard waste receptacles
- CityRack bicycle racks
- CityBench benches

Construction is scheduled for June 2015 to June 2016, at an estimated cost of \$7.5 million.

There were many questions, comments, and concerns raised by both members of the public and CB8 members. One particular concern was in reaction to a discrepancy between the two presentations regarding the intersection of 86th Street and Park Avenue: The DDC presentation accurately showed neckdowns planned for two corners of that intersection, but the SBS presentation incorrectly showed bus bulbs instead (although there is no M86 bus stop at Park).

A few people asked for a real traffic study of East 86th Street, mentioning both the planned 91st Street Marine Transfer Station and the potential effects of the bus bulbs and neckdowns; the presenters noted that they will be including the MTS in their traffic analysis for the SBS project. Several people were concerned about the bus bulbs leading to traffic delays because the buses would not be pulling over to a parking lane for loading, although the loading itself should be faster. One person noted that buses currently can take two full traffic-light cycles to load at certain hours.

Some residents expressed concerns that Select Bus Service could mean eliminated stops. NYCT indicated that they had no plans to change the existing route nor any stops currently proposed for elimination, and noted that this route would not have limited vs. local stops. However, they did note that it would be possible that they could propose to combine two stops if there were two stops very close to each other and/or a lack of space for installing the fare machines at one location.

Some CB8 board members who are also active in the East 86th Street Association noted that the streetscape beautification project had originated with the Association, but that other elements were folded into and perhaps given precedence over the beautification project. The East 86th Street Association fully endorses the beautification elements of the capital project, but there are elements they do not endorse, particularly in relation to the traffic flow. Two items of the beautification project about which they did raise concerns are the color of the sidewalk and ensuring that all street lights remain in the Bishop’s Crook style.

Some other comments and questions from the public and the Committee included:

- A Committee member noted that there is always a learning curve associated with SBS.
- There were some concerns about difficulty stepping on and off the buses at the middle and rear doors. NYCT noted that the bus bulbs should allow for level or near-level boarding, and that all M86-SBS buses would be “low-floor” buses.
- There were examples given of M15-SBS bus stops and/or bus bulbs where the fare machines were not situated well, or where the new expanded tree pits interfered with the flow of pedestrians.
- Several people expressed concern about replacing the blinking SBS lights that were eliminated in 2012. An NYCT liaison said he would convey the Committee’s request to see an example of the blinking signage proposed as a replacement for these lights.
- Because the Lexington Avenue subway entrances near the NW and SW corners of 86th Street are both north of the corner, a resident suggested that it might be helpful to widen the crosswalk between those two entrances to improve pedestrian access and eliminate conflicts between cars and pedestrians.
- After a Committee member said that DOT was imposing this on the community, a Committee co-chair noted that CB8 passed a resolution in October 2012 asking for “Select Bus Service–Style off-board fare collection,” and CB7 passed a compatible resolution in September 2013. *(Note: At the 10/1 committee meeting, it was incorrectly stated that the CB8 resolution regarding off-board fare collection had passed unanimously. Further research revealed that the correct tally was 32 yes, 6 no, and 2 abstentions.)*
- NYCT could not provide specific figures about the results of launching Select Bus Service on 34th St, but they were able to increase the number of daily bus trips due to speed improvements. *(Per a follow-up report posted on their website 9 months after the 34th Street SBS launch, overall travel time decreased by 10% and dwell time by 35%, ridership increased, customer satisfaction polled at 95%, and they were able to add roughly 150 additional trips per week with the same number of buses and drivers.)*

In 2013, CB7 passed a resolution requesting “off-board payment technology” on the M86 route similar to the Oct. 2012 CB8 resolution.

The Committee passed unanimously the following resolution regarding the streetscape improvements:

WHEREAS the East 86th Street Association several years ago initiated a project to beautify the streetscape of East 86th Street; and

WHEREAS the NYC Dept. of Transportation and Dept. of Design & Construction have presented a project that includes the following elements to beautify the streetscape:

- Granite sidewalk & curb replacement
- NYC standard tree guards (three-sided)
- Expanded tree pits with granite pavers
- New trees, shrubs, and bulbs
- NYC standard waste receptacles
- CityRack bicycle racks
- CityBench benches; and

WHEREAS several city and state elected officials have provided funding for this project over the years;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8 Manhattan approves the streetscape beautification project, namely:

- Granite sidewalk & curb replacement
- NYC standard tree guards (three-sided)
- Expanded tree pits with granite pavers
- New trees, shrubs, and bulbs
- NYC standard waste receptacles
- CityRack bicycle racks
- CityBench benches

Approved: 12 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain, 0 not voting for cause, plus 2 Public Member Yes votes.

Yes: Barton, Birnbaum, Clynes, Falk, Hockert, Lader, Popper, Price, Seawright, Slater, Walsh, Warren

Yes (Public Members): Dillon, Menegon

We will come back to the SBS project at a future date, when this item can be properly posted. Some CB8 members suggest that we should discuss the current state of the M86 route at that time, and that this future meeting should be held closer to 86th Street.

2. A request for low-floor buses on the M66 bus route.

In May 2014, CB8 successfully requested that New York City Transit replace the older buses on the M31 bus route with new low-floor equipment that is easier to board. It was subsequently suggested that the Committee should consider a similar request for the M66 bus, which also serves many of the same “hospital corridor” institutions as the M31 bus. In addition, a few people mentioned that the M66 is sometimes very overcrowded, particularly when the hospital shift changes happen. The NYCT liaison said he will carry these comments back to the agency.

3. Continued discussion about reducing M31 wait times by having some buses travel a shorter route.

At the May 2014 Transportation Committee meeting, during a discussion of M31 service, staff from NYCT’s Bus Operations noted that problems on 57th Street can cause delays in service on York Avenue. There was brief conversation about whether having some buses on the M31 travel only a portion of the route (primarily along York Avenue, but connecting with the M57 for customers wishing to continue across 57th Street) could allow for some resilience. At the September Committee meeting, this topic was raised once again, so it was added to the agenda for public input and further discussion.

Betty Cooper Wallerstein of the East 79th Street Neighborhood Association strongly opposed this suggestion, saying that what is needed and desired is additional service. Another resident mentioned that when she rides the route at some hours, the M31 terminates at Eighth Avenue (not at the Clinton terminal for the route); a Committee member noted that this is consistent with the suggestion for a new partial route option.

4. A request for a new Revocable Consent to install a fenced-in area at 117 East 83rd Street.

The petitioner did not show up at the Transportation Committee meeting, but some neighbors from the adjacent building at 983 Park Avenue did attend the meeting with concerns about this application. The neighbors were concerned about this item, although their concerns seemed to relate to the rooftop, rather than the specifics of the revocable consent application for “a fenced-in area to be used as an entrance feature to the residence.” The neighbors indicated that they did not expect to have an objection to a fence at the entryway.

5. A request for a new Revocable Consent for fenced-in planted areas and cellar stairs at 218 East 84th Street.

Architect David Turner appeared to present the request for a two-part revocable consent. First, the petitioner seeks to provide legal egress from the cellar laundry room, currently underneath a sidewalk hatch; second, the petitioner is seeking to beautify the entryway with a fenced-in planted area on either side of the entryway, aligned with a neighboring building’s fence. In addition, the petitioner has a non-complying tree pit that is to be expanded and covered with cobblestone pavers.

The Committee expressed concern about the amount of clearance in front of the tree pit, particularly in regards to the proposed fenced-in areas. The architect said he had no objection to losing the fence, as long as they got approval of the open staircase for the laundry egress.

The Committee unanimously passed the following Resolution to approve the application, without the fence:

WHEREAS Lite View LLC has petitioned for a new revocable consent at 218 East 84th Street to construct, maintain, and use a proposed open stair and proposed fenced-in planted areas; and

WHEREAS the open stair is for legal egress from a laundry room, currently accessible from beneath a sidewalk hatch; and

WHEREAS the petitioner intends to expand a tree pit in front of their property; and

WHEREAS there is limited space in front of this property given the expanded tree pit; and

WHEREAS the petitioner is willing to proceed with the open stair without the proposed fence;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8 Manhattan approves Lite View LLC’s petition for a new revocable consent at 218 East 84th Street to construct, maintain, and use a proposed open stair, **without** the proposed fence.

*Approved: 10 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain, 0 not voting for cause, plus 2 Public Member Yes votes.
Yes: Barton, Birnbaum, Clynes, Falk, Hockert, Lader, Popper, Slater, Walsh, Warren
Yes (Public Members): Dillon, Menegon*

6. Continued discussion of a request for a neckdown at the intersection of Third Avenue and East 62nd Street to prevent illegal truck traffic.

In February 2014, CB8 passed the following resolution by a vote of 39 Yes & 1 No:

WHEREAS the block of East 62nd Street between Second & Third Avenues is located within the Treadwell Farms Historic District, one of the oldest historic districts in New York City; and

WHEREAS trucks are prohibited from this block unless making a local delivery; and

WHEREAS there is a chronic problems of trucks illegally using this block as a through route; and

WHEREAS a concrete neckdown at the southeast corner of East 62nd Street & Third Avenue would discourage trucks from turning onto 62nd Street;

THEREFORE be it resolved that Community Board 8 Manhattan urges NYC DOT to install a concrete neckdown at the southeast corner of East 62nd Street & Third Avenue.

On July 1, DOT provided the following response:

“DOT will not be approving the installation of a neckdown at this location because we do not install neckdowns for the purpose as stated in the resolution. Neckdowns are considered when there is a need to enhance pedestrian safety.”

Several residents of East 62nd Street attended this meeting to discuss the next steps. A resident provided photos showing that some of the signage indicating the truck prohibition is up at the level of the third floor of the corner building, and partially obscured by trees.

The Committee will start by requesting a site visit with DOT to look at the signage and to discuss the problems at this location. It was noted that multiple vehicles have driven onto the sidewalk at the northeast corner of this intersection.

7. A review of parking regulations in front of 346 and 348 East 62nd Street.

Following the September Committee meeting, DOT confirmed that the parking regulations in front of 346 & 348 East 62nd Street (“No Standing Except Authorized Vehicles – Doctors Vehicles Only”) was no longer appropriate, because there are no medical facilities at that location. DOT will be removing those signs and installing signs for new curb regulations there. The Committee will revisit this if we have any concerns once the new regulations are posted.

8. A request to review the application for Mario’s Transportation, Inc. van service to the financial district. Current stops on the Upper East Side are: 93rd Street and First Avenue, 85th Street and York Avenue (main location), 73rd Street and York Avenue, 74th Street and First Avenue, 72nd Street and Second Avenue.

Mario Lopez of Mario’s Transportation appeared before the Committee and confirmed that there are no changes proposed from his current permit.

The Committee passed the following Resolution to approve the application by a unanimous vote:

WHEREAS Mario’s Transportation provides commuter van service from Yorkville and Lenox Hill to the Financial District; and

WHEREAS Mario’s Transportation is providing a valuable service to an area underserved by other transportation options;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8 Manhattan approves the application for Mario's Transportation to renew their commuter van permit to operate for six more years.

*Approved: 10 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain, 0 not voting for cause, plus 2 Public Member Yes votes.
Yes: Barton, Birnbaum, Clynes, Falk, Hockert, Lader, Popper, Slater, Walsh, Warren
Yes (Public Members): Dillon, Menegon*

9. Old Business.

There was no old business.

10. New Business.

There was no new business.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
A. Scott Falk and Charles Warren, Co-Chairs