

NEW YORK METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL



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Hudson River Valley Greenway Link

**Task #5
Workshop #2
Final Report**

November 3, 2010

Submitted By:



with:



On **October 20, 2010** a public meeting for the Hudson River Valley Greenway Link was held at the **Church of the Mediator in the Bronx**. The purpose of the meeting was to **present the findings of the Task 7 Alternatives Analysis**, including the alternatives that ranked the highest, and document comments and questions from the Technical Advisory Committee and public regarding the findings. Comments received at the meeting will inform the selection of the preferred alternative.

Attendees: Marciella Allina
Susan Baldwin
Bob Bender, Bronx Community Board 8
John Benfatti
Steve Byrns
Tony Cassino
Maggie Clarke
Ted Conover
Ross Diamond, Riverdale Riverfest
Jeffrey Dinowitz, Assemblyman
Nikki Dowling, Riverdale Press
Paul Elston, Friends of the Hudson River Valley Greenway
Brian Fineman
Rich Gans, Transportation Alternatives
Alfred Garren, NYCC-SBBC
Anne Grand
Sarah Gund, Hudson River Greenway
Mike Heller, HRGC
Daniel Johnson, Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz's Office
Vivian Kasen
Betty Klein
Jack Lehnert, Riverdale Riverfront
Yael Levy, Riverfest
Paula Luria Caplan
Tony Mahler
Steven Mathews
John Mattera, NYC Parks
Brendan McHugh, Riverdale Review
Damian McShane, Bronx Community Board 8
Jessica Noon, Bronx Borough President's Office
Joe O'Brien

Franz Paasche, Riverdale Nature Preservancy
AJ Pietrantone, Friends of the Hudson River Park
James Rather
Andrew Sandler, Councilman Koppell's Office
Sandy Shallech, Riverdale Nature Preservancy
Jeffrey Stone
Courtney White, Wave Hill
Gerry Bogacz, NYMTC
Lisa Daglian, NYMTC
Howie Mann, NYMTC
Amy Ford-Wagner, PB (Project Team)
Mark Walker, PB (Project Team)
Ryan Walsh, Howard/Stein-Hudson (Project Team)
Jackson Wandres, RBA Group (Project Team)
Janice Yuvan, RBA Group (Project Team)

Presentation

As meeting attendees arrived at the Church of the Mediator, they signed-in and were given several handouts including an agenda, comment sheet, two study area maps from the Task 7 Alternatives Analysis, a one-page project description and a one-page description of the sponsoring agency, NYMTC.

Gerry Bogacz (NYMTC) opened the meeting by welcoming those in attendance. He provided a brief description of NYMTC, its member agencies, and its role in the region. He then introduced Howie Mann, Project Manager for NYMTC. Mr. Mann delivered a brief history of the project and provided background information regarding the project. Janice Yuvan (RBA Group) continued the presentation with a review of the study's progress and the Task 7 work including a discussion of the setting of route evaluation criteria, weighting of those criteria, and rating and ranking the alternatives. She then discussed the two highest-ranking alternatives and the critical constraints and fatal flaws of those alternatives as identified by the Steering Committee.

Ms. Yuvan concluded the presentation with a description of the possible Preferred Alternatives. She then opened the meeting up to questions from the audience.

Questions and Answers

Mike Heller asked if it would be possible to combine the potential preferred alternatives. He described a route that would go over the Henry Hudson Bridge, to the

waterfront in the Bronx, north to Yonkers. He suggested that Yonkers would best be able to determine the route from there. He also suggested Kappock Street for accessing the waterfront. Ms. Yuvan indicated that the study team has looked at options but getting from the Henry Hudson Bridge down to the waterfront in the Bronx is difficult. She added that in order to create a facility that is ADA compliant, the ramp would have to be very long and there is limited space for such a facility.

Paul Elston noted that the most important component of the project is physical access to the waterfront. He explained that after reviewing the Task 7 document and Amtrak's plans for Higher Speed Rail, the limits placed on access to the Spuyten Duyvil Bridge must be respected. However, he continued, Amtrak should be compelled to include a greenway element in the designs for any future improvements to the bridge or track facilities north of the bridge.

Mr. Elston went on to explain that the treatment of the path approaching the south side of the Henry Hudson Bridge is inadequate; he and his group, the Friends of the Hudson River Valley Greenway in the Bronx feel that the approach is too steep. Mr. Elston recommends a path that begins at Dyckman Street and parallels the western side of the southbound lanes of the Henry Hudson Parkway up to the bridge (between the parkway and rail line) and suggested that this route would provide a more gradual climb.

Mr. Elston also noted that the path constructed on the south side of the lower level of the Henry Hudson Bridge is too narrow. The path should be broadened to "standard" width by shifting the Jersey barriers and reducing the width provided for vehicular traffic lanes.

Mr. Elston also suggested that the greenway should not use Palisade Avenue north of 254th Street, as the street is too narrow beyond that point; instead the Greenway route should turn down 254th Street to the waterfront.

In reference to one of the Alternatives described by Ms. Yuvan, Mr. Elston noted that the 2B Alternative is attractive but it should not be merely a spur, the route should continue along the waterfront, north to Yonkers where there is a wide berth that would allow passage beyond the sewage treatment plant to the Ludlow Bridge. He felt that construction of a new overpass at Valentine Lane would be prohibitively expensive and could put implementation of the Greenway in jeopardy.

Mr. Elston suggested that the project should recommend several phases. The first phase should focus on a three-year plan that should develop a route over the Henry Hudson Bridge to Palisade Avenue, down to the waterfront from 254th Street, then north along the waterfront past the sewage treatment plant in Yonkers. The second phase should be

a more long-term goal that includes greenway improvements to the Spuyten Duyvil Swing Bridge when/if it is improved or replaced by Amtrak and the remaining portion of the waterfront route between the bridge and 254th Street. He also noted that the East-West connections from Van Cortlandt Park, the Putnam Trail, and other facilities or assets are important.

Jeffrey Stone asked if the study had produced any estimates of users for the facility. He suggested that the facility could be well used. He wondered how the Greenway could impact property values. Howie Mann responded that there are no good models or methods for forecasting recreational demand. Paul Elston responded that facilities such as the Greenway have been linked to increases in property values, not declines.

Maggie Clark submitted a petition in support of safer biking and walking in Washington Heights and Inwood (see Appendix). She noted that the petition has over 1,200 signatures. She indicated that there should not be a single route but a network of routes through the study area. Ms. Clarke said that the original scope for the project called for a network. She went on to mention that four years ago, she had talked to Amtrak about a path across the Spuyten Duyvil Bridge and they said that it would be possible. She believes that it has been dismissed inappropriately in the Task 7 report.

Ms. Clarke indicated that she had requested information about the agencies comments on the alternatives and had been told by NYMTC that she would have to invoke the Freedom of Information Law to obtain the information. She continued that she does not want the waterfront route to be discarded due to challenges with crossing the Spuyten Duyvil Bridge. Ms. Clarke also noted that the pathway on the Henry Hudson Bridge is narrow even for existing traffic, but would become even more problematic if increases in non-motorized traffic occur, as desired and that Palisade Avenue is too narrow, winding, and steep.

Paula Caplan noted that as a Palisade Avenue resident, she had some specific concerns about roadway space. She suggested that south of Riverdale Park, there does not appear to be room for a greenway facility while preserving the on-street parking and two lanes of traffic. She also noted that Palisade Avenue already functions as a bikeway, as many riders already use the route. Janice Yuvan replied that the next task would be to design the Preferred Alternative to a level where those kinds of constraints would be addressed. One possibility is the use of shared lane markings, also called "sharrows", to direct cyclists and cars.

An unidentified attendee asked if the study team considered routing the bike lane through Riverdale Park. Ms. Yuvan explained that the Forever Wild designation restricts construction of any paved facilities. Paul Elston responded that the path should not be taken through the park except between Spaulding Lane and 254th Street, where the Department of Transportation (DOT) owns the right-of-way. Franz Paasche (Riverdale Nature Preservancy) continued that he agreed with Paul Elston's vision and

reiterated that the Forever Wild designation is significant and special and should be respected. He expressed that the local community desires access to the waterfront. Mr. Paasche noted that special care should be taken in designing the transitions of the path at 254th Street and from Spaulding Lane into the park. He also expressed a desire for the Greenway to be used only by non-motorized modes.

Yael Levy (Bronx Community Board 8) suggested that Alternative 2 has no value for the local community. She noted that the neighborhood has no waterfront access and suggested that the path should be as close to the water as possible. Ms. Levy also felt that Alternative 2B is viable and reasonable. Howie Mann replied that the study team recognizes that access to the waterfront is a driving force for the project. An unidentified attendee added that the Borough of the Bronx deserves the quality of amenity that Manhattan has in the Westside Greenway.

Rich Gans (Transportation Alternatives) suggested that Alternative 2 is ride-able today; that the route already exists. He continued that Alternatives 2 and 2B can only be thought of as interim measures. He posited that the study team has a responsibility to bring both the Palisade Avenue and the waterfront routes forward as an interim route and long-term goal. He continued that both are valuable. Mr. Gans reiterated earlier comments that the pathway on the Henry Hudson Bridge is inadequate and must be expanded and that the Greenway should be incorporated into any plans to redesign the Spuyten Duyvil Swing Bridge for higher-speed-rail purposes.

Ross Diamond (Riverfest) asked about the remnant of a bridge at 231st Street. He suggested that it could be cheaper to use that structure than build a new one. Janice Yuvan explained that use of that structure is unlikely as it is on private property.

Bob Bender (Bronx Community Board 8, Transportation Committee) noted that CB8 passed a resolution supporting a waterfront path in 1996, 14 years ago. He stated that he does not want to be waiting for the greenway 14 years from now and suggested that the project team produce something doable in the short term. He continued that the Study Team should plan for an “ideal” greenway as well as an interim solution and that the two are not antithetical, they support each other. Mr. Bender suggested that interim improvements would grow the constituency for longer-term “ideal” improvements. He added that the project team should start by building some segments that access part of the waterfront, and then add to those pieces later. Gerry Bogacz responded that the goal of the project is to produce a plan for a project that will be implementable.

Andrew Sandler (Councilman Oliver Koppell’s Office) stated that Councilman Koppell supports waterfront access. He followed that statement by asking if the Henry Hudson Bridge path is physically wide enough for bicycle access. Janice Yuvan replied that the path is not suitably wide for two riders to pass each other, and MTA prohibits cyclists from riding across the bridge. Cyclists must dismount and walk. Paul Elston suggested that it would be relatively easy to move the existing jersey barriers and make room for

cyclists. An unidentified attendee noted that tickets are being issued to cyclists that do not dismount to cross the bridge. He also asked if the study team had considered using the upper level of the bridge on the east side path. Janice Yuvan explained that the team had looked at that path but access to the Manhattan side landing has been blocked since the toll plaza was redesigned.

Sandy Shallech (Riverdale Nature Preservancy) asked what was meant by a “spur,” across the bridge at 254th Street. She asked if it meant widening the bridge. The Study Team responded that no changes to the bridge are indicated. Ms. Shallech noted that bridge belongs to MetroNorth and the roadway to the west belongs to Yacht Club with easement to MetroNorth. She asked whether the path at the west end would be through Yacht Club property. Paul Elston and others indicated that they envision a link to the north side of the bridge approach and that they do not think this entails Yacht Club property. Ms. Shallech asked how long attendees had to submit comments on the Task 7 report. Howie Mann responded that comments would be accepted through the end of the week of October 25.

Maggie Clarke noted that in Inwood Hill Park, trees have recently fallen and that the Parks Department has been slow to clean them up. She added that if the Greenway is routed through any parks, these maintenance issues must be considered.

Courtney White (Wave Hill) asked if the project would recommend a single route or a spine with intersecting routes. Howie Mann indicated that it will recommend a single route. Paul Elston added that just because the study will bring a single route forward, it does not preclude the study from making other recommendations.

Paul Elston noted that even though the current study is only scoped to identify and develop a single alignment, he encouraged NYMTC to use other funds to further study or develop a concept for a route along the waterfront to be implemented in conjunction with rail improvements. This would help ensure further momentum by Amtrak as they develop higher speed rail plans. Rather than simply stating that the ultimate objective is a waterfront route in the final report, NYMTC should further develop concepts for the waterfront, including a crossing at Spuyten Duyvil, to establish the direction and feasibility for such improvements.

Adjournment

Mr. Mann then described the Preferred Alternative selection process and the next steps for the project. He thanked all participants for coming and adjourned the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8:00 pm.

APPENDIX

COMMENTS AND MATERIALS RECEIVED FROM TAC MEMBERS IN RESPONSE TO THE PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Materials Include:

- **Comments Received from Individuals Transcribed from Comment Form**
- **Petition from Residents of Washington Heights and Inwood**
- **Friends of the Hudson River Greenway Statement**
- **Friends of the Hudson River Greenway Map**

Comments Submitted by Individuals Transcribed Verbatim from Comment Form

Comment #1

- I live on Palisade Avenue, so the alternative approaches could have a direct impact on me and my family.
- I strongly support the Waterway alternative if it is feasible for all the reasons discussed at the meeting. If, however, the decision is made to pursue the Palisade Avenue alternative, I would recommend:
 1. Use Palisade Avenue as a shared resource for bicycles and cars. Using the mapped street widths to create a separate bike path would have a major negative impact on the single-family homes on both sides of the street and on Riverdale Park.
 2. Improve the existing path for pedestrians only. It is not wide enough in many areas to allow it to be shared with bikes.
 3. If possible, consider Paul Elston's recommendation to go over the Yacht Club bridge and use the waterway north of 254th Street. Palisade Avenue north of 254th is too narrow and dangerous to consider for the Greenway, and I doubt that it can be widened without major expense and significant neighborhood opposition.

Comment #2

- There is a way to pass under the southbound ramp of the Henry Hudson Bridge at Dyckman Street to arrive at the green area between the railroad and the Henry Hudson Parkway – this avoids the overpass.
- The upper part of Inwood area is too steep. It will need another switchback.
- I support a dirt trail from Riverdale Park.
- I support Paul Elston's proposal along the river north of 254th Street.
- It seems that the Henry Hudson Bridge is eliminating one lane of traffic?

Comment #3

- Usage projections for the Waterfront and Palisade Avenue routes would be helpful.
- Also a description of where users are from (i.e., from Manhattan or the north or from the surrounding communities).

Comment #4

- To put the Greenway down Kappock Street onto Palisade Avenue will disrupt that neighborhood and necessitate using eminent domain.
- Apartment renters and homeowners will not only be inconvenienced but traffic accidents will increase.

PETITION FOR SAFER BIKING AND WALKING IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS AND INWOOD

As residents of, or travelers through, the neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Inwood, we believe that encouraging safe walking and biking in New York City is good for the health of its residents and visitors, as it reduces air and noise pollution, saves energy, calms and reduces automobile traffic, reduces obesity, and promotes a more sustainable, greener, livable and enjoyable urban environment;

Presently, although there are Greenways on the Westside and Eastside of Manhattan, the Greenways are incomplete and inaccessible to many residents in Washington Heights and Inwood. The Westside Greenway ends at Dyckman St. and is inaccessible by bike from 183rd St. to 130th St. The Eastside Greenway ends at Dyckman St. and is inaccessible by bike from Dyckman St. to 155th St. Presently there is no safe bike access over the Amtrak Bridge, Henry Hudson Bridge, 217th St. Bridge and the High Bridge, and limited access over the George Washington Bridge. This impedes safe biking not only for our residents, but for all Manhattan residents who wish to bike or walk safely around the northern tip of Manhattan, or to New Jersey, Riverdale, the Bronx and beyond;

WE, THEREFORE, HEREBY PETITION Community Board 12 to urge both the New York City Parks Department (“Parks”) and Department of Transportation (“DOT”) to extend New York City’s network of protected bike lanes into Washington Heights and Inwood, specifically, to:

1. Construct a Class One protected bike lane along Dyckman St., connecting the Westside and Eastside Greenways, as proposed by DOT;
2. Extend the Westside Greenway protected bike lane along the Hudson River from 181st St. to 217th St., over the Amtrak Bridge, and over the Henry Hudson Bridge, as planned by the Parks;
3. Extend the current Croton Aqueduct Trail bike and pedestrian path running from 164th St. to 172 St. in High Bridge Park, so that it runs continuously from 155th St to Dykman, and over the High Bridge to the Bronx, as planned by the Parks;
4. Construct an alternate bike and pedestrian route to the George Washington Bridge from the Westside Greenway over the existing Amtrak pedestrian overpass at 168th St., and under the existing Henry Hudson underpass connecting both to 165th St. and to the 9A ramp off the GW Bridge;
5. Upgrade the existing Class 3 bike lanes from 155th St. to the 217th St. Bridge, by painting the lanes green and by connecting them where they are discontinuous along Saint Nicholas, Broadway, Bennett, and Seaman.

Statement of the Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in the Bronx (10/20/10)

The Board of the Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in the Bronx has considered the NYMTC proposals and believes that the interests of the local community require:

- Direct public physical access to the Hudson River in a setting that is safe and secure
- A bike and walking trail with strong connections to the north and south that will allow people to stay on their bikes (not have to dismount because the hills are too steep or because of government regulation)
- Strong east-west connections that will invite community members from Van Cortlandt Park to the Hudson River waterfront Greenway

The two alternatives proposed for consideration by NYMTC are the waterfront route and the Palisades route. The waterfront route received the highest rating by the study when considered against the evaluation criteria, and is the route supported by the FHRG. However, the railroads have objected to the route claiming that it cannot be done safely, and in any case, they plan to use the area along the waterfront for a new high-speed train. The information provided by the study does not allow consideration of the compatibility of a greenway route along the waterfront and a new high-speed rail. Therefore, the FHRG recommends a two part approach:

Stage 1 – The detailed study during Task 8 should focus on a preferred alternative greenway route that can be implemented within three years – a route that utilizes the Henry Hudson Bridge (HHB) and provides waterfront access between the Riverdale and the Ludlow Stations.

Stage 2 – Evaluation of incorporating a waterfront greenway on the west side of the railroad tracks within the design of the high-speed rail extending from the George Washington Bridge to the Tappan Zee Bridge. The report has identified examples of active railroad tracks immediate adjacent to a bike and walking trail and we believe this can be done safely and at relatively minor cost if incorporated in the improvements required for the high-speed rail.

In order to achieve the interests of the local community, the preferred alternative (Stage 1) that will be the subject of a detailed study during Task 8 should include:

- Waterfront access between the Riverdale Station and the Westchester Waste Treatment plant on an easement from Metro-North that will connect the Riverside Park (at the Riverdale Station) to College Point, and connect to Ludlow Bridge through property owned by Westchester County at the edge of the Waste Treatment Plant. We recognize the legitimate concerns of Westchester officials about security at the Waste Treatment Plant, but we believe those concerns can be address during the study of the preferred alternative. The alternative Yonkers-Bronx Connection does not work because
 - Palisades Avenue (254th to 261st Street) is a narrow winding route, and would have to be widened to accommodate bikes. We are opposed to widening Palisades Avenue.

- Riverdale Avenue (261st Street to Valentine Ave.) is busy with a lot of buses and a hill that obstructs the visions of both drivers and bikers and creates a serious safety issue.
- Improvement in the connection between existing Manhattan Greenway and the HHB. Both proposed alternatives do nothing to improve the connection which requires bikers and walkers to climb over the railroad bridge and up a very steep hill to the bridge. The hill is so steep that it is impossible to get up it without dismounting from your bike. The detailed study should evaluate two alternative connections:
 - Descend directly to Dyckman Street from the existing Manhattan Greenway on a new ramp immediate east of the old powerhouse (that is under renovation and build a new greenway connection from Dyckman to the HHB that hugs the west side of southbound lane – and has a gradual grade that is manageable by bikers.
 - Cantilever over Dyckman on the western edge of the northbound highway lane, cross over to the west side of the southbound lane and build a new ramp that hugs the southbound lane to HHB and connects to the HHB.
- Creating a standard size walking and biking route over the HHB by eliminating the most western lane of car traffic and dedicating that space to a bike and walking lane.
- Design of the connections with other Greenways – East Coast Greenway and Putnam Trails
- Improving Spuyten Duyvil Triangle. The study concludes that no public access should be provided to the Triangle. Metro-North should consider creating a visual amenity for the local community and the HHB users, e.g., install plants or changing artwork with a solar panel.

