

Minutes CB 10 Traffic and Transportation Committee Meetings
on April 19, 2007 and May 17, 2007

The Committee met in quorum on both occasions and in attendance were members of the public and representatives from the 68th Precinct, NYS DOT, Councilmember Gentile's office, Senator Golden's office, Congressman Fosella's office and members of the press.

On April 19, 2007 DOT officials presented the details of the proposed project to rebuild lanes on the lower roadway of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge(VNB). The plan, VN-17A, is a 58 million dollar project to rebuild the VNB lower level right-hand lanes on the elevated viaducts leading to the bridge on the Staten Island and Brooklyn sides of the bridge. The inbound and outbound lower level right hand lanes will be closed for 22 months, beginning July 2007, while the decking, underpinnings, pier caps and roadbeds are replaced. The parapet walls and shoulders will be replaced as well. The construction should conclude in May 2009. The disruption to traffic will involve a hard lane closure, a soft lane closure (intermittent closing) and one lane active at all times. There will be no soft closures during daytime hours. One lane will be open at all times on the lower level. All of the Belt Parkway connector ramps to the bridge will be closed at various times for a total of 4-5 weeks during the construction.

The plan was described as necessary maintenance which will increase noise abatement and increase shoulder room for traffic. The lanes will end up wider than they are at present. It is part of NYC's master plan for thoroughfare and traffic improvement.

The contract was awarded competitively and there are penalties for failing to complete the construction timely. The construction budget includes funding for traffic enforcement personnel. Work will be conducted 24 hours a day in order to be completed more quickly. No street parking will be affected by the work or by the workers. The improvements should last approximately 50 years,

The VNB manager, Jim Ferrara, was present and gave details of how the increased congestion will be mitigated by the additional traffic agents and informed the Committee that there are contingency plans in effect to coordinate TBTA staff, TBTA law enforcement, MTA, and NYPD personnel. There will be additional tow trucks assigned to the VNB during construction in order to take care of emergency breakdowns. The VNB was described as being used at a level slightly under capacity however 500 commuter buses, commercial and passenger vehicle traffic which travel this vital artery eastbound every workday morning will be effected. Mr. Ferrara assured the Committee that he is available and shall remain available during construction to assist the community and minimize the disruption that it will cause.

Members Kassenbrock and Cassara asked about the possibility of a bicycle path addition to the VNB but the construction plan did not include it and the cost to add it was prohibitive. Mary Nielson expressed concern about the overflow of traffic congestion on residential streets near the VNB. Larry Stelter shared information about noise abatement. The winning contractor will keep the worker's vehicles and construction equipment in off street locations under the bridge.

The Committee distributed subway station survey forms to members who volunteered to survey the N and R line Subway Stations in CB 10. It was agreed that there have been some improvements in our Subway Stations but they are not in the condition that is needed by our vibrant and vital community. Responding to an inquiry from Congressman Fosella's office, members of the Committee: Nielson, Stelter, Cassara, Cruz, Kassenbrock and Kieran took the forms and assessed the physical condition of the stations.

On May 17, 2007 the diligent work of these members produced reports which revealed that our subway stations are less than satisfactory. There are structural and equipment deficiencies such as uneven platform and mezzanine pavement, uneven and worn stair treads, loose stair handrails, peeling paint, mold, flooding (Bayridge Ave. Station), damaged platform canopies and no access for the disabled or handicapped commuters. Aesthetically the stations were grimy and dirty especially the 86th St. Station. Although litter was picked up and a cleaning schedule followed by the MTA staff it did not make the discolored, dirty and defaced surfaces of every station acceptably clean. A common complaint was missing, broken and cracked wall tiles. There was a suggestion to remove the new tile and expose and repair the old mosaic tile beneath it. The members returned the survey forms with photographs and comments to the Committee on May 17, 2007. The Committee voted to ask the entire Board to support a motion for a letter to be addressed to Eliot Sanders and all elected officials which would request increased funding for and a new initiative to overhaul all the stations in the CB 10. It would formally request that all of our stations be made handicapped accessible since Bayridge is a NORC where our older citizens need easier access to mass transit as much as our disabled citizens. It would demand work to begin in the current budget cycle to address the substandard condition of our stations including handicapped access to all stations by elevator. The survey forms were delivered to Robert Capano for Congressman Fosella to seek increased mass transit funding for the district. A copy of the forms was delivered to Councilmember Gentile's office as well.

The Committee members submitted a proposal that each thought would most benefit CB10's transportation issues and those issues were recorded. The issues included increasing parking, implementing safe, angled parking, and a survey of the bus service in the district. The Committee will vote to adopt three of these issues at our next meeting in order to develop a strategy to develop and implement a plan to secure these improvements. The issue of improper enforcement of VTL rules for Stop signs, Stop lines and crosswalks on Gelston Ave was discussed. James Koutsavlis suggested that the Committee revisit the issue of bus traffic on Bayridge Avenue. The Committee voted to address these issues at our next meeting.

Chair Kieran received a call from Harold Fink from NYS DOT in the District Office on May 16, 2007 regarding the 65th St. Interchange Plan. He informed me that the plan for the construction at the 65th St. Interchange as presented to the T&T Committee in March is currently on hold due to increased cost estimates for the construction. The Plan will go forward with a reconstruction of the 6th Ave exit ramp. The DOT wants to double the size of the ramp and envisions doubling the ramp will get the exiting cars off the Gowanus Expressway before backing up on the highway. The Committee expressed disappointment that the interchange is not receiving a complete overhaul.

On May 17, 2007 the Committee discussed the new information concerning the 65th St. Interchange plan. It was a major concern to the members that the project plan as meticulously described by the NYS DOT and its consultants was now on hold due to budget problems. The Committee agreed that this is a confusing and dangerous intersection but it is feared that if the 6th Ave off ramp was widened it would move the danger and congestion of the highway down unto 6th Avenue and 65th Street. Larry Stelter pointed out that this plan to reconfigure the interchange had been proposed and cancelled before. The Committee agreed and voted to ask the entire Board to draft a letter to NYS DOT and our elected officials expressing our unhappiness the Community Board and public have been ignored in the planning process by DOT officials. The NYS DOT presented a plan to the Committee as a *fait accompli* and stated that they could not change engineered plans already put in place. As it turns out the plans have enough flexibility to be radically altered for budget reasons. Now that the most of the plan is on hold again, is the time for NYS DOT to get the input from the public. The Committee members had grave reservations about aspects of this proposed plan.

It seems that the NYS DOT presents fully formed plans for projects without input and comment from the public in the early planning stage when the community's input would be most valuable. We want a full and comprehensive solution for the safety and congestion problems at the 65th St. Interchange. We want the NYS DOT to return to the Committee and explain the effect of the 6th Ave off ramp widening. The Committee felt that moving the congestion and danger from the highway roadway unto the street level on 6th Ave would not really be an improvement. We want to be part of the process to reconfigure this vital intersection since there is now time to have the community's concerns for safety addressed. The Committee voted to invite Harold Fink back to the Committee and demand a comprehensive 65th Street Interchange Construction Plan.

This information shall be submitted at the CB 10 meeting on May 21, 2007.

Respectfully submitted,
Brian Kieran