



# DOWNTOWN DIALOGUE

## LET'S KEEP LOWER MANHATTAN MOVING

BY LIZ BERGER

In Lower Manhattan, it all starts with transportation. A natural harbor, rivers on three sides, gentle terrain: these qualities made New Amsterdam, and then New York a major trading post, the gateway to America and a world financial capital from the get-go. Excellence and diversity in transportation are the first reasons why Lower Manhattan has been a global model of a live/work district for 400 years.

Transportation is the key to Lower Manhattan's past, present and future. Fourteen subway lines, 33 local and express bus routes, multiple ferries, bikeways, a heliport and the PATH -- no part of New York City is more connected to the entire metropolitan area. Make no mistake, our future as the international capital of finance and commerce -- now redefining what it means to be a central business district with a thriving residential and tourist population -- depends on it.

Lower Manhattan's one square mile is home to 318,000 employees and close to 57,000 residents, and last year hosted 6 million tourists. In 2007, subway ridership was 86 million, total ridership was 123 million and average daily ridership was 338,000. That's a lot of Metrocard swipes! Many of the Lower Manhattan's larger employers say that access to mass transit is the reason they started, stayed or relocated in Lower Manhattan, and it's a huge plus for residents and visitors as well.

Add the current focus on sustainability to the mix, and maintaining and expanding Lower Manhattan's mass transit network seems like a no-brainer. But it is under siege, hostage to pennywise but pound foolish gap closing exercises. In an area where 90% of employees either take public transportation or walk to work, where unprecedented levels of private and public construction have made our historically congested streets less passable and endless delays in critical transportation infrastructure projects have profoundly degraded the passenger experience, the MTA has proposed dire cuts in bus and subway service. These cuts could reverse a decade of commercial, residential and tourism growth by eliminating some underground and surface lines and reducing the quantity and quality of service on others. It doesn't make sense.

Consider these possibilities: no M6 buses down Broadway to major retailers like J&R and Century 21 or international tourist destinations like the Museum of the American Indian or the Sports Museum. No W service at all, further complicating the commute of commercial tenants on Water Street heading to Western Queens. No late night N service south of Chambers, isolating this growing residential part of our community. No more M15 buses to City Hall. Ever.

And, where is the Fulton Transit Center, the above-ground, architecturally distinctive subway hub with retail which has the universal support of Lower Manhattan business, elected officials and community leaders? This post-9/11 project was supposed to open in December 2007, untangling underground connections, linking east to west, attracting commercial tenants and delivering the kind of retail and related amenities available in every other major transit hub.

Downtown needs the Fulton Transit Center, and we need it now. This cost-effective and energy-efficient project will create 4,000 construction-related jobs and is ready to go. Hundreds of millions of public dollars have already been spent on the below-grade aspects of the project; when will work begin on the above-grade portion, so essential to Lower Manhattan's commercial, residential and tourist populations?

Governor Paterson and Mayor Bloomberg recently requested billions of dollars in federal stimulus aid package proposed by President-Elect Obama for State and City transportation projects. From my perspective, the Fulton Transit Center should be at the top of any list: shovel-ready, "green" and a linch-pin of the future of America's iconic live/work community, Lower Manhattan.

Now is the time to defy expectations, not manage them. Many of New York City's greatest achievements -- Rockefeller Center, the Empire State Building, Battery Park City and the World Trade Center -- were begun in tough times. Let's not lose sight of the forest for the trees by imposing crippling cuts and delays on the transportation network that defines and supports Lower Manhattan.

*- Liz Berger is President of the Downtown Alliance*