

# Transportation Advisory Panel Meeting

## Public Transportation and Smart Growth Roundtable

December 10, 2020 | 10:00-11:30am

### Attendees

- **Chair**, Marie Therese Dominguez, Commissioner, New York State Department of Transportation
- **Moderator**, Nick Sifuentes, Executive Director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign
- See Presentation slides for full list of roundtable participant names and organizations

### Meeting Notes

#### Introduction

- Marie Therese Dominguez welcomed everyone and introduced agenda.
  - Reviewed meeting procedures and roll call
- Nick Sifuentes provided an introduction
  - Strategies and policies under consideration will help New York (NY) reach its Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) goals

#### Panel Discussion – *facilitated by Nick Sifuentes*

Nick S. – How can we best bridge the first-mile, last-mile (FLM) gap?

- Sam S. – Microtransit is important, such as Chariot and Via. Microtransit and micromobility are different.
- Art G. – Many transit agencies have shifted to core routes during COVID, which makes FLM even more important. Another trend is more biking, and more stations need to be more bike accessible and friendly.
- Rob P – 10% of riders access via bikes. Bike lockers help too. They help fund these installations. You can only change land use so much, especially in the short-term.
- Jennifer D. – Both biking and walking are important. FLM is not just that, it's more than a few miles.
- Kate F. – There is a need to help people feel comfortable with walk and bike infrastructure. There is some interesting pilot work being done in London with last mile freight delivery with cargo bikes. It is proving that a lot of last mile delivery (e.g. smaller goods) can be faster and more efficient with the same volume compared to trucks that are often operating below capacity.
- Justin B. – Basic maintenance is a big issue where sidewalks, crosswalks, and bus stops aren't well maintained. 10-15 years refresh isn't enough, we need more resources statewide.
  - Jennifer D. – If state Department of Transportation (DOT) can look more broadly and not just at vehicle throughput, then small tweaks can be easier. We don't need to take all of the cars off of the road to enable safer environment for bike/walk.
- Bob S. – Quality of the experience of the first/last mile is important for encouraging bike/walk. There needs to be more planning infrastructure to support these other solutions.
- Scott B. – Seamlessness when it comes to scheduling of trips and a customer-centric focus is critical right now. The ability to put these pieces together is important.

Nick S. – This idea of making it easier to get to transit, this can be done through small tweaks. What are some ways on how to do that?

- Jennifer – Need to ask the community, and it might depend on local feedback.
- Kate – Can use raised asphalt, concrete barriers in higher speed areas, other options for lower speed areas (e.g. precast concrete). Flexible bollards. Bike share. Protected bikelanes are critical. Conversation with community is critical.
- Art – Need to make it easier to use. Take the easiest app with high usage and replicate that. Make it easier to use and pay.
- Rob P. – CA's integrated travel program uses existing technology for riders to plan trips in real time. They also use real time General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data and integrated ticketing. If your goal is to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs), you want to get people to take longer journeys on trains (even if they have to drive there).
- Scott B. – Wayfinding is important. So is the ability to seamlessly move between modes.

Nick S. – Consider access and not just expansion. There is an important equity component and making sure communities are involved. What are things that state and local governments can do to make transit more accessible outside of the Mass Transit Authority (MTA)?

- Sam S. – The real estate industry is behind the original transit. Value capture is a good way to encourage Transit Oriented Development (TOD). The Brooklyn-Queens Connector (BQX) is a good example of that. The private sector is willing to put up a fair amount of money through real estate taxes and protection against gentrification. Involving the private sector, esp. real estate sector, can allow for more expansion of services.
- Justin B. – Sprawl and poor land use are barriers. Many jobs are placed in first and second ring suburbs that are only accessible by car. Need to tie land use policies to transit policies.
- Art G. – Build back better. Reimagine the transit networks especially during COVID. Make sure bus shelters and accessible sidewalks are there.
- Jaqi C. – Amazon workers on long island were demanding private bus service because of lack of MTA buses. Shows an opportunity for MTA to increase service.
- Kate F. – Why don't people take transit? Because it'll take twice as long and they don't want to transfer. How to make transit more reliable. We need enhanced reliability + bus lanes. People don't inherently mind transferring buses: they mind uncertainty and long waits. If transfers are reliable and buses are coming every few minutes, people are more likely to take advantage of them.
- Sam S. – E.g. Ikea in Brooklyn – picked the worst place possible from transit perspective. Proposed to MTA that they place bus areas in the premier/front locations with bathrooms for drivers. Treated it as an intermodal transit hub (e.g. ferries). Made it far more comfortable for customers. Requires private sector engagement.
- Justin B. – The challenge with upstate is we lack the congestion to be able to push private sector to work on this. Only California (CA) has taken this seriously and not just using vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as the metric for transit planning. Until we can change the way we design roads to measure impact, we won't be able to convince private sector to install multimodal transit options.
- Kate F. – Agreed, we need to reduce VMT and look at the metrics that matter to the goals we're pursuing.

- Rob P. – GHG emissions are so important in CA, and most funding discussions include GHG. Need to integrate emissions into every transportation conversation in NY. The Zero Emissions Vehicle (ZEV) target helps.
- Bob S. – There is a need to capture the public’s imagination. If there’s a regional plan with metrics in place, then you empower the municipalities to follow that. The planning process helps.
- Scott B. – In smaller communities, outcomes are important like health care and human service metrics.
- Sam S. – Metrics such as level of service are important. You also need to look at budgets. Where do we get the money?
- Jaqi C. – Agree that we need to bring the public with us. Service changes. Public cares about getting from point A to B. What are the real-life impacts?
- Art G. – Seattle talked about X percent of region being within 10 minutes of a transit route with 10-minute headways.

Nick S. – What metrics and policies are important? It’s hard to understand the system and lack of connectivity. How can NYS make these services easier to use to encourage intermodal transfers and make wayfinding easier?

- Jaqi C. – Design for people with disabilities. Need to increase accessibility. Wayfinding helps everyone. Need to do fare integration using new technology and payment methods.
- Rob. P. – Cal-trans just focused on fare integration and credit card companies are interested in increasing the number of transactions.
- Jennifer D. – From consumer side, they want to get where they’re going. Need to make it more possible to not have a car. Encourage local agencies to collaborate well.
- Kate F. – Targeting information on wayfinding to people who need it most. Don’t make ADA planning the last thing you do: it would provide benefits beyond that population. Wayfinding won’t help you if you still have to wait 30 mins for your connection, however. Need more options combined w/ wayfinding.
- Scott B. – Focus on customers, including travel training and teaching people how to use the systems.
- Justin B. – We rely too much on public sector. Need to bring in private sector. Change transportation demand management (TDM) and codes to incentivize private sector and change behaviors. Remove parking incentives and our policies to make it harder to drive and park. Parking shouldn’t be a benefit for employees.

Nick S. – Availability of amenities to support trip-chaining doesn’t really exist. What role can private sector play here? How can govt and service sponsors best facilitate these sorts of activities?

- Jennifer D. – Instead of negative incentives for greenfield development, maybe we flip it.
- Kevin L. – Trip chaining can work in Long Island. The counties and towns need to work with private sector to help invest in those areas.
- Bob S. – How does regional planning help? Community-based. We don’t have the tools to make site-specific decisions. There is a need to know the unknowns.
- Kate F. – Zoning and tax incentives are the strongest levers for government. Focus incentives on businesses that are near transit. Portland in 1970s was a dead zone, but Governor and Mayor gave tax incentives so Nordstrom can stay in downtown which catalyzed further economic growth.

- Art G. – Not just trip chaining, but “trip not taken.” Minimize traveling entirely.
- Jennifer D. – Transit gets looked at to solve local land issues. Need to go back to land use especially in less dense areas.
- Justin B. – We don’t comprehensively collect walking/biking information on intersections, but we have that for vehicles. Need to put all modes on the same playing field to be successful.
- Sam S. – half of trips in Barcelona could be walk or bike. We need a department of mobility or accessibility to analyze these trips.

Nick S. – With regards to COVID, we know that passenger utilization and revenues are at record lows. What new and additional financing strategies should passenger rail and transit be looking at to be able to maintain system health and enact these strategies?

- Sam S. – Transit has taken a larger hit than autos. There is a fear of transit. A number of studies say no clusters can be found on transit. We need to address the misconception. Congestion pricing needs to be taken seriously and accelerated. Fare tolling plans can be implemented. Raising fares will protect low- and moderate-income residents. Cars are 20x more likely to be in a fatal accident per mile.
- Kevin L. – Whether people use mass transit or not, we all benefit. There is a \$16B problem for MTA. No one wants to see fare increases or service cuts. We need federal assistance. We can’t focus on new routes, but just focus on existing service and budget cuts.
- Art G. – Before pandemic, a lot of major cities were very seriously thinking about congestion pricing, but those conversations have been put on hold.
- Bob S. – There is lots of focus on metropolitan areas. Where’s the population globally? There is a shift to urban areas. Need a federal agenda that will work right into state planning, then regional planning will give us the fine-grained metric we need in metropolitan areas.
- Sam S. – Great Depression was biggest time for great planning. We need shovel-ready projects when the recession ends so that the economy can be jumpstarted immediately. We should do planning even if funding hasn’t been identified.
- Jennifer D. – There is a lack of planning resources in small towns (e.g. Ithaca). Huge equity issue. A lot of people getting pushed out because affordable housing is 20 miles away from the jobs. Need to rethink transit to include other modes especially without subway or those without standard work schedules.

Nick S. – On equity, what can NYS do to make sure that frontline communities are heard and served?

- Justin B. – Upwards of 30% of households in Buffalo don’t have cars. But in a lot of those areas, you have highest instances of crashes for pedestrians and cyclists. Need support for these communities.
- Jaqi C. – Go into listening mode and not always as experts. Communities want to be heard. Approaching these processes from bottom up critical, not “we know best” top-down approach. Need to be collaborative not dictating.
- Scott B. – Some communities and passengers have proven over the last 8-9 months that transit is essential to them, and we need to invest in those individuals.
- Kate F. – If we care about equity, we should create metrics to track equity. Talk about what a meaningful access metric looks like. People most likely to get killed on roads are low-income and people of color (POC).
- Sam S. – Engage the private sector for low- and moderate- income (LMI). Need to improve transit service for those areas. Microtransit may be better: have 3 smaller minibuses come in

one hour vs. 1 large bus once an hour? Need to think about right-sizing and demand-based transit. Via is an example, but we need to tailor for LMI.

- Kate F. – It's part of an infrastructure conversation here as well. Get infrastructure set up to provide convenient, reliable, affordable service.
- Jennifer D. – In smaller communities, it's not a question of 10 or 30 minutes, it's a question of whether there's an option at all. Microtransit and bike share matters too. Transit agencies shouldn't defend their silo so much.
- Kevin L. – TOD and smart growth can help address equity and social justice issues. For example, Robert Moses projects on long island. Need to lay utilities groundwork as well.
- Scott B. – How to engage LMI and older communities.
- Bob S. – Structure of regional economic councils. It matters where you put things. Urban poverty is bad, but rural poverty is worse.
- Art G. – Add affordability to the discussion. Affordable housing around transit hubs and of transit fares in general. It helps with jobs.

Nick S. – Other than land use policies, what other policies or actions should NYS consider to facilitate development of low carbon transportation options?

- Kevin L. – Projects take too long to get approved. New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) projects are dragged out. If it's an important project that addresses significant state goals, whether it's affordable housing, climate change, encouraging smart growth, etc., the state should be providing lead agency status when it comes to SEQR.
- Ben C. – People will choose the service that is faster, cheaper, or both. Providing free transportation support in terms of improving/expanding roads, transit can't compete. With state budgets where they are, we should think about whether we should really be expanding a road.
- Justin B. – Need to change NYS SEQR process. There is too much delay on projects whether it's highway removal projects. Doesn't want state to lead that process because it's too slow. Rethink how we look and fund these processes. Transportation alternative grant programs are their only sources. They don't have grant writers.
- Sam S. – It's become a legal document, so SEQR has become a failure and needs to be overhauled because of how long it takes.
- Jennifer D. – In car-sharing, we run into insurance issues. Need to look at a lot of things that might not seem related. Have lost 3-4 major car sharing services. We have also dealt with some tax issues: car sharing is causing low income users to be taxed by 20% because it is being taxed the same as rental cars.

Nick S. – Heard a lot of mobility, metrics, planning process, how to engage communities, prioritizing VMT and GHG first. Including affordable planning.

Nick thanked everyone and concluded the meeting.