New York City Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission Public Hearing

Creating a Regional and Intra-city Waterborne Transportation System
Financed by Revenues from Congestion Pricing

January 16, 2008

New York Water Taxi (NYWT) is appearing at this hearing to support the concept of congestion pricing and encourage that a portion of the funds generated be used to create a comprehensive waterborne mass transportation system to mitigate congestion in Manhattan, New York City and the Metropolitan Region. Public and private ferry systems currently operating in the New York Harbor now carry almost 100,000 passengers a day, primarily from Staten Island and New Jersey to Manhattan's two business districts.

Creating a comprehensive system could double the number of daily passengers riding waterborne mass transit and take over 40,000 cars off the regions' highways, bridges and tunnels enhancing regional air-quality in the next ten years; reducing congestion and commuter travel times. The right-of-way are federally protected and aids to navigation maintained. Our waterways have been used to move people for the past 12,000 years, need little or no maintenance and have no traffic congestion.

Waterborne mass transit benefits economic development, environmental quality and emergency preparedness; and is critically important to the future growth of New York City and the metropolitan region. Waterborne mass transit can provide new mass transportation to support residential, commercial, retail and recreational developments located along the water's edge where there is little existing mass transit infrastructure. The infrastructure cost for waterborne is negligible when compared to other mass transit options. The system that NYWT proposes to be funded with the revenues generated by congestion mitigation programs and would consist of a larger regional ferry system linked to an intra-city ferry system as well as the current interstate system serving New York and New Jersey.

Regional Ferries

Using our existing infrastructure of city, state and federal parks within 50 miles of the city, over 40,000 cars could be taken off the regions' highways, bridges and tunnels within the next ten years. Linking the larger regional ferry system to system to a robust intra-city waterborne transportation system over the next ten years, the city could expand existing services and create a comprehensive waterborne mass transportation system that would support economic development, enhance tourism and provide much need transportation redundancy for emergency preparedness in the City and metropolitan region.

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At this time, long-distance waterborne commutation is limited to New Jersey's Monmouth County. Public planning for waterborne transport has focused primarily on the Hudson Valley and the South Shore of Connecticut. Recently, the Long Island Sound Ferry Coalition, of which New York Water Taxi is a member, has begun a more comprehensive look at transportation opportunities on the Long Island Sound. The major limitations to implementing long-distance transportation in the New York metropolitan region are fourfold:

- lack of front-end parking;
- limited roadway access to waterfront sites;
- local community resistance to ferry traffic; and
- concern about the "alienation" of parkland.

However, there are 14 city, county, state and federal parks on the waterfront within 50 miles of New York City that were designed and built between 1930 and 1960 to provide suburban recreational opportunities for city residents. All of these facilities are accessible by four-lane parkways and major highways that are heavily used by commuters going to and from New York City. These facilities are in areas where long-distance commuters spend considerable resources in terms of time, fuel, tolls and parking to get back and forth to work.

These parking lots are almost empty for nine months of the year and during the summer months the parking lots are approximately 20% full during weekdays and filled to capacity on the weekends. This corresponds well with regional commutation patterns which are heaviest on weekdays in the fall, winter and spring and lighter in the summer months when many workers take vacation.

Using revenues from the proposed congestion mitigation plan, a creative public-private partnership could encourage multiple use of this regional infrastructure to support long-distance commutation as well as recreation. Federal funding could be used to build ferry terminals at these locations without taxing existing parks and recreation budgets with congestion mitigation revenues would provide the required 20% local match. Parking fees could be shared with the parks creating a new revenue stream for underfunded parks and funds to maintain and improve parking facilities.

In addition, the ferry terminals would support waterborne transportation to the parks on busy summer weekends and help relieve roadway congestion and pollution near the parks, provide a new mass transit option for regional residents, and create a seasonal market for the regional ferry system. The fact that this new waterborne transportation system would be used for recreational access and generate new revenue to maintain the park should satisfy concerns about "alienation" of parkland which has limited the use of parkland for commuter transportation purposes in the past.

The 14 city, county, state and federal parks and recreation facilities within the region which have good road access, available parking and access to navigable waterways (see Attachment A) include (the approximate number of parking spaces at each park is noted where known to the author):

- Sunken Meadow State Park on the North Shore of Long Island - New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (6,878 parking spaces)

- Heckscher State Park on the South Shore Long Island - New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (4,500 parking spaces)

- Jones Beach on the South Shore of Long Island - New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (19,683 parking spaces)

- Rockland County State Park – New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (4,400 parking spaces)

- Orchard Beach in the Bronx - New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (5,400 parking spaces)

- Rye Playland in Westchester – Westchester County Department of Parks and Recreation

- Palisades Interstate Park (Iona Island, Alpine Boat Basin, Englewood Boat Basin and Rockland Lake) - New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation/Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

- Jacob Riis Park in Queens – Gateway National Recreation Area (7,000 parking spaces)

- Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn - Gateway National Recreation Area (1,000 parking spaces)

- Great Kills in Staten Island - Gateway National Recreation Area (800 parking spots)

- Sandy Hook in Monmouth County New Jersey - Gateway National Recreation Area (3,000 parking spaces)

- Sherwood Island State Park in Connecticut - Connecticut Department of Parks and Recreation.

Serving these locations would require a fleet of large-scale high-speed vessels similar to those currently used to service Monmouth County commuters. The vessels would travel at approximately 40 knots and carry up to 400 passengers each to safely and comfortably service these routes. This system of regional ferries would be linked to the current interstate system serving New Jersey and a new intra-city system of ferries and water taxis in New York Harbor that would provide feeder and distribution system for this larger regional transportation system.

Intra-City Waterborne Transportation System

The development of New Jersey's Hudson County waterfront, over the past 20 years, was made possible by waterborne mass transportation. The successful redevelopment of the Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx and Staten Island waterfront also depends on the availability of adequate waterborne transportation. So too will commercial developments such as the new passenger ship terminal and IKEA in Red Hook; and a host of public projects ranging from the redevelopment of Governors Island, to new waterfront parks including the Hudson River and Brooklyn Bridge Parks, National Parks of the New York Harbor and the Harbor District.

Perhaps more importantly, the City's emergency preparedness depends on waterborne mass transportation. Recent events such as 9/11, the 2003 blackout and 2005 transit strike show the need for a robust waterborne transportation system to support the region's response to emergencies.

The emergency evacuation plans of government agencies and private corporations all assume the availability of waterborne transportation as a primary means of egress from Manhattan in the event of a natural or man-made catastrophe. In addition to emergency egress, waterborne transportation enables first responders' immediate access to the affected areas, ensures the maintenance of commerce during an emergency and assists in recovery.

New York Water Taxi described the challenges facing private ferry operators in testimony to the Commission (December 14, 2007). NYWT believes that waterborne transportation should play an important role in the city's growth and could be a major component of a congestion mitigation plan if integrated with other forms of mass transit. However, the public and private sectors must work together in partnership to successfully develop a comprehensive waterborne mass transportation system.

This partnership should involve private operators, local elected officials and advocacy groups working with the primary public agency stakeholders including the City of New York, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, New Jersey Transit, the New York and New Jersey State Departments of Transportation, as well as the appropriate Federal agencies ranging from the Federal Transportation Administration to the Department of Homeland Security. The City's financial institutions and waterfront real estate developers should also support this partnership.

To date, public support for waterborne transportation has focused primarily on the construction of approximately $350 million in new ferry terminals on both sides of Hudson River to support interstate commerce. While this is an important first step, much more must be done to develop both the regional and intra-city elements of a waterborne mass transit system. The region's mass transit policy has provided capital and operating subsidies for light and heavy rail and the construction and maintenance of HOV and dedicated commuter bus lanes but not for waterborne mass transit.

In addition, funding for new dock construction, public operating subsidies would be needed. These subsidies could be reduced by fare box revenue. As the system and ridership grows the public subsidy would diminish with the goal of eventually making the system economically viable. The publically supported ferry service from Vallejo, California to San Francisco recoups 60-80% of its operating costs from the fare box.

NYWT has been operating in the New York Harbor for the past five years and based on our experience we are suggesting three different services be considered to start the development of an intra-city waterborne transportation system. These examples are included to illustrate the potential of an intra-city system and are not intended to be all-inclusive. The Company has not had the opportunity to consider additional services to the Bronx and Queens which should no doubt be included.

An East River Service could stop at 24 locations (See Attachment B) and carry approximately 10,000 people a day by 2018. A West Side River Service could stop at 10 locations (See Attachment C) and carry approximately 5,000 people a day by 2018. In addition, this service could be expanded to West 125th Street, Riverdale in the Bronx and points further up Hudson like Yonkers, Haverstraw, Tarrytown, Nyack, and Ossining. A Brooklyn Coastal Service could stop at seven locations in South Brooklyn (See Attachment D) and be linked to parking facilities such as the 400-car parking lot at the Brooklyn Army Terminal.

The system NYWT proposes has numerous stops to encourage pedestrian access and to minimize the upland impacts of waterborne mass transit on the adjacent neighborhoods. The waterborne mass transit system should be integrated with the surface and rail system fare programs such as MetroCard. This would facilitate seamless transfers between rail, surface and waterborne transportation, adding flexibility to the system and encouraging greater use of the waterborne elements of the regions mass transportation system.

New York Water Taxi thanks the Commission for the opportunity to speak at this hearing and looks forward to working with the City, State and Federal government to develop a comprehensive waterborne transportation system serving the New York Region and the New York Harbor.

Working together in a public/private partnership, the city can support and expand its waterborne transportation system to meet the needs of New York City and the region in the future. However, without a significant source of funding this system will never develop. New York Water Taxi urges the Commission to recommend that the development of a waterborne mass transit system be funded with a portion of the revenue generated by the proposed congestion mitigation plan.

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