

# TRANSIT

**ON TRACK** a joint project of REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION and NEW YORK CITIZENS FOR BALANCED TRANSPORTATION to formulate a long-term transit strategy for the NEW YORK REGION.

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No. 1488

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## MONTAUK-ARCHER IS THE BEST OF THE QUEENS SUBWAY ALTERNATIVES, TRANSIT-ON-TRACK SAYS

The Montauk-Archer subway proposal would provide the greatest service improvement for Queens residents, connecting the new 63rd Street tunnel to Manhattan to the new subway station at York College in Jamaica, according to a report issued today by Transit-On-Track, a joint project of Regional Plan Association and New York Citizens for Balanced Transportation.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) is currently studying five options, but the first phase of that study contained enough evidence to make a clear choice in favor of the Montauk-Archer connection, according to the report.

Transit-On-Track is monitoring the progress of the MTA capital program, advocating changes or amplifications where needed and suggesting a long-term transit policy for the tri-state New York Urban Region.

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The Transit-on-track report (attached) was based on a longer study, Long Island Rail Issues, available from Transit-On-Track.

Attachment  
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## MONTAUK-ARCHER IS THE BEST OF THE QUEENS SUBWAY ALTERNATIVES

After 16 years and an investment of \$635 million, the 63rd Street subway tunnel under the East River will finally open for service in 1985. But it will carry only one trainload of people in the peak hour, because its connecting link to Jamaica--the Queens Bypass Express--was deferred in 1978, when Mayor Edward I. Koch and Harold Fisher, then Chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), agreed to study alternative connections.

The first phase of that study was completed in March 1982, and the second phase--the Queens Subway Options Study--will be completed in June 1984. The MTA Board is expected to make a final decision by the end of that year. The second phase is considering five options:

- \* No new construction;
- \* The original six mile Queens Bypass Express along the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) main line to Continental Avenue;
- \* A short link under Northern Boulevard to the existing Queens local tracks (N and GG);
- \* A spur to the Sunnyside Yards area, where subway passengers would transfer to new LIRR intra-city services operated over the Montauk line from Queens Village and Rosedale;
- \* The Montauk-Archer subway service, connecting the LIRR Montauk line directly to 63rd Street (without any transfer at Sunnyside) and linking it up in Richmond Hill to the Archer Avenue subway now nearing completion in Jamaica.

While the second phase of the study is coming up with valuable new information about these alternatives, the first phase contained enough evidence to make a clear choice in favor of the fifth option, the Montauk-Archer subway service. The detailed numbers are likely to change, but the conclusion seems firm.

Montauk-Archer has six major advantages:

1. Montauk-Archer offers passengers the greatest time savings.

If travel time is valued at \$6 an hour, and transfers considered equivalent to a delay of four minutes, the capitalized value of the time savings is \$691 million for Montauk-Archer, compared to \$472 million for the Queens Bypass Express, \$52 million for the Northern Boulevard connection, and an actual time loss for the LIRR transfer scheme. The time savings would be greatest in neighborhoods now far from any rapid transit lines, such as Maspeth and Glendale, which would be served by the Montauk-Archer scheme but not by any of the alternatives.

2. Montauk-Archer has by far the best ratio of benefits to costs.

Past estimates indicate that the cost of Montauk-Archer, not counting rolling stock, will be moderate--about \$220 million (1980 dollars), compared to some \$520 million for the Queens Bypass Express, \$210 million for the LIRR transfer, and \$70 million for the Northern Boulevard link. In order to evaluate these costs, however, they must be compared to the benefits. The travel time benefits of the Montauk-Archer scheme are three times greater than its construction cost. By contrast, the time savings of the Queens Bypass Express and the Northern Boulevard link are worth only about 0.9 and 0.7 times their respective construction costs. The LIRR transfer scheme has negative benefits.

3. Montauk-Archer would reduce overcrowding on the "E" and "F" trains better than any of the other options except the much more expensive Queens Bypass Express. The Northern Boulevard link and the LIRR transfer scheme would be only about two-thirds as effective. They would not provide even the absolute minimum comfort level for passengers--and that assumes only 7 percent growth in ridership; if there were more, as seems likely, they would be even worse.

4. Montauk-Archer makes the best use of the large investments already put into the 63rd Street tunnel and the Archer Avenue subway. With Montauk-Archer, the projected use of the 63rd Street tunnel is 24,000 inbound peak-hour passengers, compared to 31,000 with the Queens Bypass Express, 14,000 with the LIRR transfer scheme and only 12,000 with the Northern Boulevard link. The Archer Avenue subway in Jamaica would be best utilized with the Montauk-Archer route, attracting 16,000 peak hour riders, compared to 12,000 with the Queens Bypass Express, 8,000 with the Northern Boulevard link, and 6,000 with the LIRR transfer scheme. These figures also indicate the potential Montauk-Archer has for stimulating economic development and other improvements in Jamaica Center.

5. Montauk-Archer would immediately improve the shape of the subway system. It would fill a large void that now exists between the Queens Boulevard line in the north and the Brooklyn services in the south. It would also encourage the removal of at least three more miles of the Jamaica El ("J" service) in Richmond Hill and Woodhaven--a significant benefit. That section of the El is expensive to operate, has very low patronage, and will require major investments for rehabilitation in the future. Moreover, the El depresses the neighborhood and removal would enhance adjacent property values.

By contrast, the Northern Boulevard link would require short-turning the "GG" Crosstown Brooklyn-Queens service one stop before the Queens Plaza station, forcing patrons into a long underground walk through a new corridor to an Ely Avenue transfer for the "E" and "F" trains. That would have a negative impact on an underground subway service which ought to be preserved. The other two options would not endanger the "GG" service, at least, but would not encourage the removal of the Jamaica El, either.

6. Montauk-Archer offers long-term opportunities for improving the configuration of the subway system. The Queens Bypass Express was planned to complement a costly Northeast Queens line that does not seem

to be in the cards for the foreseeable future. By contrast, Montauk-Archer would enable an abandoned 2.2 mile section of the Rockaway line to be reactivated at a very low cost. This would provide 15 to 22 minute time savings for travellers going to Midtown Manhattan from Woodhaven, Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and the Rockaways. It would also provide a 15-minute shortcut for the JFK Express "train to the plane", which now winds its way laboriously through Brooklyn. By cutting its travel time from 45 to 30 minutes, its patronage--now at 1.3 million a year--would be greatly expanded.

A transfer to the "M" service at Fresh Pond and removal of 1.6 miles of the Flushing Elevated through Long Island City are among the other long-term benefits that would be possible with Montauk-Archer. It should be stressed that Montauk-Archer will only use half of the capacity of the upper level of the 63rd Street tunnel, so feasibility plans for using the other half should be worked out as this option proceeds.

Last, but not least, the long-planned and relatively low-cost Southeast Queens Extension of the Archer Avenue line--extending "E" train service to Laurelton--will be much less attractive if overcrowding on the "E" and "F" trains is not relieved by either the Montauk-Archer scheme or the original Queens Bypass Express. The Southeast Queens Extension is important for Jamaica Center and, indeed, for all of southeast Queens.

Reconfiguration of the system would not only provide travel benefits, but environmental benefits from the removal of elevated lines, as well. Both would translate into higher land values and better prospects for economic development in the borough of Queens.

There are two immediate dangers to the implementation of the Montauk-Archer subway option:

1. Its out-of-pocket cost to the MTA is higher than that of the Northern Boulevard link. Given that the MTA capital program plans to spend more than \$1 billion a year on the subway system in coming years, however, the Montauk-Archer scheme would not be unmanageable over the

five year period from 1987 to 1992. Even if its cost doubled by 1990, it would consume less than 10 percent of the MTA's capital funds.

Public officials may need to be reminded that the best solution is not the cheapest solution, but the one that offers the most benefits for every dollar invested.

2. Montauk-Archer has encountered some community opposition in the Glendale area, where it would pass by the backyards of suburban-style residential properties. The adjacent owners are understandably concerned about noise, vibration, lack of privacy and dangers to children. These are legitimate concerns, and they are being addressed by officials at the MTA. If any New Yorkers have reason to be cynical, it is the residents and transit passengers of Queens, who have witnessed years of study and delays in transit decisions. MTA officials should therefore continue to address all areas of local concern. Nonetheless, some residents are likely to continue to oppose the Montauk-Archer project-- even though it will unquestionably improve the value of their property-- because they value their present relative isolation more than the prospective monetary gain.

Public officials should respond to legitimate local concerns, but a few property owners should not have veto power over a project that offers major benefits to the entire borough of Queens, to Manhattan, and to the whole Region.

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