Regional Plan Association

. . . a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the co-ordinated development of the New York- New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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NEWS RELEASE

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RPA Proposals for Public Transit Improvements
RESHAPE SUBWAY MAP FOR BETTER COVERAGE OF CITY, FASTER SERVICE, LOWER COSTS, LESS CROWDING; DRAMATIC CHANGES AT KEY STATIONS

Regional Plan Association today proposed a $12 billion program of public transit improvements needed to support the regional economy as it enters the 21st Century. The recommendations are based on a three-year study of the Region's transportation needs.

The plan includes a reconfiguration of the subways to achieve better coverage of the city's neighborhoods, to allow faster speeds, and to get rid of overcrowding. The improvements are proposed to make New York City and the tri-state Region more attractive to employers and residents, reduce transit operating costs and draw people to public transit from their cars.

The plan includes an extension of the Flushing line to the Meadowlands in New Jersey, a new light rail line in Nassau County and other New Jersey and Long Island improvements. Only new capacity can relieve the lengthy and growing rush hour delays in getting across the Hudson, according to RPA.

It includes major renovations at a handful of key stations, including Times Square and Atlantic Terminal, and other improvements of the passenger environment.

It also includes capital investments and operational changes that will increase ridership with better service and cut costs with a more productive use of manpower.

"There are five major areas of the city without subway service; three of them are in Queens," said John P. Keith, President of Regional Plan. "There are seven neighborhoods with more service than the density of the area requires, where costly duplication could be eliminated. A number of areas are more than 30 minutes from Manhattan and so would benefit greatly from faster service. Two lines--the Lexington Avenue Express and the 53rd Street Tunnel (E and F trains)--are too crowded to provide minimal comfort standards by running more trains.

"RPA's reconfiguration scheme would correct all of those deficiencies at a reasonable cost. It contains some new ideas--like extending the Flushing line to Giants Stadium in the Meadowlands--and some old ideas, like the Second Avenue subway. It would make full use of the 63rd Street Tunnel, and it would make the system less expensive to operate than it is today. We don't say this is the only way to achieve those goals--our plan merely illustrates what could be done--but we do say that it's more cost-effective to build new lines that do achieve those goals than to rehabilitate old lines that don't."

The proposals unveiled today emphasize the 12-county MTA District. The Association will publish a more comprehensive plan for the whole 31-county tri-state Region later this year.

Illustrative Reconfiguration of the Subways

The RPA proposals would add 17 miles of subway and 20 miles of surface lines and subtract 26 miles of elevated line, for a net increment of 11 miles. That is only an 8 percent net expansion, but it would improve the effectiveness of the system dramatically, according to RPA. The proposals are summarized in the attached table. The recommended projects fall into three main categories:

1. High-capacity, high-speed connections to the 63rd Street Tunnel in Queens are the top priority. The Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) has many miles of lines in Queens that are barely used for local travel; the RPA proposals include three projects which use LIRR rights of way to provide better subway service in Queens:

-- The Montauk-Archer bypass of Queens Boulevard (Item 1) would allow subway service on the Montauk branch of the LIRR from the upper level of the 63rd Street Tunnel to Richmond Hill, where a connection to the Jamaica El near 121st Street would bring trains into the lower level of the Archer Avenue subway in Jamaica. This is by far the most cost-effective way of linking the 63rd Street Tunnel with the Archer Avenue subway, thus making full use of more than a billion dollars already invested in those projects, according to RPA. But other approaches are feasible, including various versions of the original 1968 plan.

-- Completion of an extension into southeast Queens (Item 2), also on LIRR surface trackage, would reduce inordinately long travel times from that area, replace more expensive bus routes with subway service, simplify operations on the LIRR and improve access to Jamaica Center. The most expensive portions, in Jamaica, have already been built.

-- An unused LIRR right of way in Rego Park (Item 3) could provide 30 minute service from Manhattan to Kennedy Airport, compared to 50 minutes on the Train to the Plane through Brooklyn. This line could also be used by Jamaica elevated trains crossing over to the Fulton IND (A) line, allowing the elevated line from East New York to Woodhaven Boulevard (J) to be removed.

2. The Second Avenue subway from Water Street to 180th Street in the Bronx remains the best way to relieve overcrowding on the Lexington Avenue Express, to provide service to the burgeoning Water Street area in lower Manhattan and to promote the revitalization of the central Bronx. It is also needed to handle the increase in service from Queens when the 63rd Street Tunne

is fully utilized. A slightly scaled-down version of the original Second Avenue subway project could be built in four stages for about $3 billion (Items 4,7,8,9), beginning with the section from 63rd Street to 34th Street (1986 dollars).

3. Replacing els with new lines can provide a host of benefits which could not be achieved by rehabilitating the els (See RPA release #1554, February 24, 1986). The RPA proposals include seven projects in that category:

-- The Church Avenue-Bay Parkway link (Item 5) would complete IND construction terminated when World War II began and allow for the elimination of the McDonald Avenue El (F) and consolidation of the F and N services on the Sea Beach line.

-- That would allow a later branch into southeast Brooklyn via the Bay Ridge division freight cut to Floyd Bennett Field (Item 12). It would provide significant time savings from Brooklyn College and the Rockaways, allowing the Rockaway Park el to be removed in favor of bus service to Floyd Bennett Field.

-- The relocation of the Canarsie elevated service (L) into unused railroad tunnels under East New York and alongside the Bay Ridge rail line (Item 6) would provide substantial time savings and other amenities, allow removal of almost 3 miles of elevated structure in East New York, and contribute to the revitalization of one of the city's most deteriorated areas.

-- The Flushing realignment in Sunnyside, Queens (Item 10) would eliminate time-consuming and screechy curves in Long Island City, enabling transfers from the Flushing line to the 63rd Street Tunnel at Thomson Avenue.

-- Replacement of the Broadway IRT north of Dyckman Street with the "A" train on the Putnam division right-of-way (Item 11) would cut a 36 minute trip from Riverdale to 28 minutes. As part of this project, a new Harlem River Tunnel would replace the unwieldy Broadway bridge.

-- A new tunnel under Jewel Avenue to Queens College (Item 13)

would allow service into Northeast Queens along tracks used for a spur during the 1939 World's Fair.

-- Use of the Broadway IRT (1) to allow cutting back the Jerome Avenue elevated line (4) at Fordham Road (Item 14) would replace two miles of el and bolster the whole Fordham Road area.

New Jersey and Long Island Projects

The RPA proposals also contain four projects involving other parts of the MTA than the Transit Authority:

-- An extension of the IRT Flushing line beneath the Hudson River to the Meadowlands Sports complex (Item 17). It would connect with the light rail line proposed by Governor Kean along the New Jersey side of the Hudson River. The extension is needed to relieve delays in crossing the Hudson and give New Jersey commuters the option of a trip to either the east side or west side of Manhattan.

-- A rail tunnel from Staten Island to Bayonne (Item 18) could then make the Staten Island Rapid Transit system (part of the MTA) a connected part of the regional network for the first time by linking it with the proposed light rail line in New Jersey.

-- LIRR access to Grand Central through the lower level of the 63rd Street Tunnel (Item 16) would make travel from Long Island to the east side of Manhattan dramatically quicker and more convenient, attracting many people who now prefer to fight auto traffic.

-- The most pressing recommendation is for a light-rail line in Nassau County from Oyster Bay to Valley Stream (Item 19), connecting with the LIRR at Hempstead, Mineola and Valley Stream. With a 3.3-mile connection through downtown Hempstead, two lines could be separated from the LIRR network--the 4.7-mile line from Valley Stream to West Hempstead and the 14.5 mile diesel line from Mineola to Oyster Bay--and run as a discrete north-south light rail service, with one or two car trains every 10 or 15 minutes all day. This would simplify rail operations on Long

Island, reduce their cost, and encourage more local ridership and more concentrated development areas where it would be appropriate. The recommendation is pressing because the LIRR will soon decide on the location of a new station in Mineola in connection with a grade crossing elimination project there; it must be put in the right place to make the light rail line feasible, the Association said.

Improving the Passenger Environment

All subway stations should be restored to a neat appearance by cleaning, painting, replacing fallen tile, removing superficial clutter and installing new hardware and signs. The MTA has been making progress in that direction, according to the RPA report. In addition, dramatic changes should be made in the passenger environment at key stations where easy access and an inviting appearance would make a great difference in people's perception of the subways. Among the proposed improvements:

-- Spacious entrances and gently-sloping stairs, making the transition from street to subway as imperceptible as possible;

-- A feeling of openness, with a view of the mezzanine from the sidewalk and with air and sunlight allowed to penetrate;

-- Escalators, plants and other pedestrian amenities, including places to sit down and shops and restaurants nearby.

Among the stations where major renovations are urged by RPA are Times Square, Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn, Herald Square, Fulton Canal and Nassau Streets (Item 15).

In addition, the RPA study recommends expanding a program to make pedestrian connections between stations where transfers are desirable and points out 12 promising links.

Improving Service and Cutting Costs

The RPA proposals include a number of other capital investments and organizational and operational changes aimed at (1) reducing operating costs through a more productive use of

manpower, such as automatic fare collection; (2) increasing ridership with service improvements such as less crowding at rush hour, more frequent service off-peak, and faster service in general; and (3) improving the MTA's implementation of new initiatives by separating responsibility for new subway construction from TA operations. For a more detailed description of these recommendations, see RPA releases #1554 (February 24, 1986), #1555 (March 3, 1986) and #1556 (March 10, 1986). For RPA's recommendations on how to pay for a plan of this scope and fill the MTA's annual funding gap, see release #1557 (March 17, 1986).

The Transit on Track Program

These recommendations are the product of a three year study of the Region's public transportation needs, directed by Boris Pushkarev, RPA's Vice President for Research and Planning. The study was financed by grants from the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation and a number of businesses.

In a larger sense, the recommendations are the product of more than 20 years of research into the relationship of public transportation to:

-- urban design (Urban Design Manhattan, Viking Press, 1969; and Urban Space for Pedestrians, MIT Press, 1975.);

-- economic opportunity (Public Transportation and Economic Opportunity, RPA, 1972);

-- energy use (Power for the MTA, RPA, 1977); and

-- land use (Public Transportation and Land Use Policy (1977) and Urban Rail in America (1982), both Indiana University Press.)

-- Long Island (Long Island Rail Issues, RPA, 1983.)

Regional Plan Association has been involved in the planning of the regional transportation network since the 1920s, when the Regional Plan of New York and Environs (1929) laid out the network of highways and bridges almost exactly as it was later built. Due to the depression, the private rail systems did not

build the proposed new rail network, so that after WWII, the new highways undermined the railroads. Commuter Transportation, RPA's 1961 report to the U.S. Senate Interstate Commerce Committee, led to the first federal support for the commuter railroads. In the mid-1960s, RPA organized the citizen campaign which led to the formation of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The RPA proposals will be discussed at a Transportation Conference at the Grand Hyatt on Tuesday morning, March 25, 1986. The conference is co-sponsored by RPA, the Association for a Better New York and The Daily News. For further information, contact Deborah Parker at (212) 398-1140.

"Many of these proposals have been floated before and met with political opposition, but in the context of an overall plan which demonstrates their very large benefits, they should be more acceptable," said Dr. Keith. "People are suspicious of proposals to replace elevated lines with new lines because in the past the els were torn down and then the new lines were never finished; this plan clearly calls for opening the new lines first. And some lines that have been stopped by intense local opposition--such as Montauk-Archer in Queens and the Rego Park spur to Kennedy Airport--have the biggest city-wide benefits. They may develop a city-wide constituency when those benefits are publicized properly.

"This program would be expensive, but with per capita income rising, it's affordable. A $12 billion program over 15 years amounts to about $73.00 a year per resident of the MTA District, where per capita income is rising $310.00 a year. And it's definitely worth the cost. It will pay for itself many times over in lower operating costs and higher farebox revenues."

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AN ILLUSTRATIVE PROGRAM OF SUBWAY SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION

	New line length: tunnel	New line length: open	Elevateds: miles removed	Order-of-magnitude construction cost in millions of 1984 $
1. Montauk-Archer bypass of Queens Boulevard	0.2	5.6	-2.8 (Myrtle)	$ 310
2. Southeast Queens line completion	--	3.0	-0.3 (LIRR trestle)	180
3. Rego Park spur re-activation to JFK	--	2.0	-3.7 (Jamaica) -0.9 (Lefferts)	160
4. Second Ave South I (63rd to 34th)	1.5	--	--	600
5. Church Ave to Bay Parkway, Brooklyn	1.7	--	-4.3 (McDonald)	420
6. Canarsie relo-cation, Brooklyn	--	2.5	-2.8 (East New York)	160
7. Second Ave North I (63rd to 149th)	4.2	(1 mile completed)		1,140
8. Second Ave South II (34th to Water St.)	3.3	--	--	1,240
9. Second Ave North II (149th to 180th), Bronx	2.0	1.0	-4.0 (Westchester)	660
10. Flushing realign-ment, Sunnyside, Queens	--	0.8	-1.6 (Long Island City)	120
11. IND to Riverdale-Kingsbridge, Bronx	0.6	1.0	-2.3 (Broadway IRT)	240
12. Southeast Brooklyn to Floyd Bennett	1.0	0.5	-1.7 (Rockaway Park)	240
13. Northeast Queens Jewell Avenue line	2.0	0.5	--	420
14. Jerome Avenue via Fordham Road to Manhattan	0.5	0.5	-2.0 (Jerome)	210
15. Rebuilding major stations	--	--	--	1,500
	17.0	20.0	-26.4	$ 7,600
TOTAL NEW TRANSIT AUTHORITY	37.0 miles			
NET GAIN	10.6 miles			
Projects Not Part of the Transit Authority				
16. LIRR Grand Central access	3.0	--	--	$ 1,400
17. Flushing Line trans-Hudson ext.	3.0	3.5	--	1,200
18. Staten Island via Bayonne	2.0	7.0	--	1,400
19. Light Rail Oyster Bay-Valley Stream	--	3.3	--	135
			GRAND TOTAL	$11,735