



Regional Plan Association

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

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NEWS RELEASE

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This is the first of eight weekly press releases which Regional Plan Association will put out between now and March 23, 1986 containing information from its study of the future of the regional transportation system. The first of six installments of the study itself will be made available with next week's press release, and the other installments will follow. The last of these releases will present an outline of the Association's proposed long-term plan for transit in the Region, which will be summarized in the March 23rd issue of the Sunday Magazine of the Daily News. This will be followed by a Transportation Conference at the Grand Hyatt on March 25, 1986 to discuss the Association's proposals and to organize efforts to secure funds for such a plan. For further information about the study or the conference, contact Bill Simmer at Regional Plan Association, (212) 398-1140.

REGIONAL GROWTH CENTERED IN MANHATTAN; TRANSIT SYSTEM INADEQUATE FOR EXPECTED GROWTH, PLANNERS WARN

Since 1977, jobs have increased faster in the Manhattan Central Business District than in the rest of the tri-state Region for the first time in decades, but the regional transportation system is utterly inadequate to accommodate the growth that is likely to occur in the next 15 years and beyond.

That is the major conclusion of a three-year study of the regional transportation system about to be published in six installments by Regional Plan Association, a nonprofit research

and planning organization founded in the 1920s. Later this Spring, the Association will propose a long-term plan for the Region's public transit system, based on the findings of its study.

"Unless the Region's public transit system is physically and institutionally reconfigured," says RPA President John P. Keith, "it will not be able to compete with the automobile, and we will be in for an uncontrollable, unabateable flood of automobile traffic which will drown out much of the economic growth that could otherwise be expected."

The Region's Growth

The population of the tri-state Region declined from 1972 to 1980, but by 1984 it was growing by 115,000 people a year, mostly because net outmigration finally came to a halt, as more people were able to find jobs here, the Association said.

The number of jobs also recovered, after declining from 1969 to 1977. By 1983, they had reached an all-time high of 9.2 million jobs. The focal point of the Region's economic resurgence has been the Manhattan CBD: with 22 percent of the jobs overall, it captured 25 percent of the jobs added since 1977. This is because the fastest-growing industry groups (medical services; business, legal and professional services; social services and nonprofit organizations; theaters and amusements; and finance, insurance and real estate) are heavily concentrated in Manhattan.

The job growth in Manhattan is the logical result of such megatrends as the shift to a service economy and New York's rising prominence as a world city--and therefore it is likely to continue. While the rate of CBD job growth may taper off as rents rise, back offices relocate and clerical activities are automated, the CBD has demonstrated its ability to attract a significant portion of the nation's increase in employment, especially during periods of economic prosperity.

RPA projects that employment in the Manhattan CBD, which stood at 1.99 million in 1983 (the last year for which complete

data are available) will increase by 260,000 jobs by the year 2000. This figure may be low, as it assumes that Manhattan's recent resurgence will slow down greatly, the Association said.

The Impact of Growth on Travel

An increase of 260,000 jobs in Manhattan would be likely to result in an increase of about nine percent in the number of daily entries to Manhattan. (This is based on past relationships between jobs and trips to Manhattan, which are analyzed in the first of the six papers of the Association's transportation study, "MTA Ridership: Trends and Prospects".)

If recent trends continue, and RPA believes they will, as many as one-third of the new trips to Manhattan could come from New Jersey. That means travel demand from New Jersey to Manhattan will increase by some 22 to 24 percent by the year 2000. At present, some 40 percent of the trips from New Jersey to Manhattan are by car and 60 percent by public transit, and this pattern has been fairly stable recently. Clearly, neither mode could handle the projected increase without expanding capacity.

Rush hour delays for autos at the trans-Hudson crossings are already well over half an hour, and both the express bus lane and the two PATH tunnels are being used to capacity. Current thinking is to use more of the half-used Amtrak Penn Station tunnel, more bus lanes and new ferryboats to relieve the pressure, but the scale of the unmet demand across the Hudson--some 80,000 more trips every day in one direction by 2000--suggests a new rail tunnel, ultimately. (It would take 10 auto tunnels to get that many people across the river by car, the Association said.)

On the New York side, the projected increase of some seven percent in travel demand to Manhattan would seem to be more manageable, except that the key directions where demand is growing are precisely the ones where subway lines have been overloaded for years--especially Queens (which is why the 63rd Street Tunnel is so necessary.) Moreover, while the split

between public transit and auto use has been stable in New Jersey, in New York, the automobile has been gaining.

If current trends continue, a seven percent increase in Manhattan-bound trips from the New York side would mean an increase of 28 percent in auto use, an increase of seven percent in bus and commuter rail trips, and a decrease of five percent in subway trips, the Association said.

"It doesn't take much imagination to visualize the havoc that would be produced by a 28 percent increase in auto trips to Manhattan from the New York sector," said Dr. Keith. "The only way to avoid that havoc is to make subway service attractive and convenient enough that people will voluntarily prefer it to driving. Transit systems in other cities--San Francisco, Atlanta, Washington D.C.--are increasing their share of the downtown travel market, even though auto travel is much less aggravating there than in New York. It can be done here, too--but it will take a dramatic reconfiguration of the subway system. We have no illusions that this will be easy to achieve, but the alternative is very disturbing indeed."

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