



Meadowlands Mobility – An Economic Imperative A White Paper on Transportation – 2008

We present here the position paper of the Meadowlands Regional Chamber of Commerce as it relates to improvements in public transit, road infrastructure, and the out-of-the-box thinking required to enhance the mobility of our precious region, one of the most widely traveled, congested, and diverse in the United States of America. This advocacy -- because we are ever conscious of the fact that capitalizing on the promise of economic opportunity and quality of life over the next 25 years is wholly contingent upon our ability to alleviate congestion and improve commercial and residential mobility.

The preparation of a White Paper on Transportation is always a heady task, because the objective is to ensure optimal advocacy. The Chamber's role is to be the voice of the business and residential community, while drawing the attention and focus of diverse agencies charged with the responsibility for transit and transportation planning. So we look at New Jersey Transit's docket, at the New Jersey Department of Transportation's Transportation Improvement Projects or TIP list, at the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission's Transportation Plan, at the priorities of Hudson and Bergen counties and we are naturally overwhelmed by the sheer volume and numbers, and most certainly by the dollar signs projected to see these projects through. In addition, it is important to note that the Meadowlands region covers multiple municipalities, counties and legislative districts which often fragment our political leadership on these matters. It is our purpose and intention to both bring them together and, more importantly, to hold them together.

The Chamber's Executive staff along with members of the Transportation Sub-Committee of its Board of Directors, sits on many stakeholder committees and planning entities which allows us to play a leadership role in establishing consensus among those who invest mightily in our Meadowlands.

In this document, we have relied on the premise that while we need to remain focused on specific projects that require multi year attention and major investment, we also must take a more aggressive look at initiatives that can be implemented in the short term that do not have eight or nine figure price tags attached. We also are signaling our support for the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission's Transportation Plan, as well as the plans of New Jersey Transit, the NJ DOT, and the Turnpike Authority, while recognizing that there is work to do in facilitating cohesion and synergy among them.

We are in sync with their efforts to quantitatively measure and understand what the future will demand, as they take population projections, investment forecasts, new job generation estimates and then consider everything from vehicle miles traveled to capacity overloads and potential system failures.

But because we live in the real world, we understand that there are projects that will win, while others lose, programs that will be implemented, while others will not. There is the inevitable race for attention and the even more important and inevitable race for dollars. So it is always incumbent upon us to hone in, to focus, and to say, that among the many, these are the most critical, these are the unabashed "musts".

A Look at the Immediate Future

In our last White Paper and again here, the Meadowlands Regional Chamber champions the development of major rail projects, Rail access to the Sports Complex, the new Trans-Hudson Rail Tunnel – Access to the Region’s Core, and the Passaic Bergen Rail Line are all moving forward. Our commitment to doing all we can to see these and other projects completed will never waver. However, the fact is that the success of any ongoing redevelopment effort in this region and the ability to retain existing businesses, while attracting new businesses, is absolutely contingent upon our ability to relieve traffic congestion and improve mobility today.

Mobility is a today and not a tomorrow thing.

For this reason, we have placed a renewed focus on improvements that are less cost-intensive and capable of implementation in the short, rather than the long-term. Mobility is everything, ever more vital and compelling, especially as we consider the coming impacts of major development and redevelopment projects such as Meadowlands Xanadu, the new Giants /Jets Football Stadium, the Encap Golf Project and the Secaucus Transit Village. Smart growth development utilizes transit service to lower the volume of auto traffic. The two must go together.

Our approach affirms that there is so much that can be done, right now, via transportation demand management implementation initiatives, to do the extraordinary. We all know the language – car sharing, ride sharing, van pooling, telecommuting, flex hours, cash-out parking incentives, zoning initiatives that reward companies who invest in travel demand management, transit incentives, etc.. In short, the little things matter and all companies in the district should be encouraged to work with Meadowlink Commuter Services, the designated transportation management association for our region, to reduce their collective vehicle miles traveled.

Buses-Internal Circulation-Shuttles-Secaucus Junction

Though often overlooked, buses comprise the key component of a flexible and responsive mass transit system. The Meadowlands District is home to some of the most heavily traveled bus routes in the nation. Our goal must be to expedite bus travel at posted speeds, while creating new intra-Meadowlands and inter-district travel connections. All local bus feeders in Lyndhurst, Rutherford, Kearny, East Rutherford, Moonachie, and Carlstadt must, accordingly, be augmented.

- Design and implement a network of high frequency bus/shuttle services on Exclusive Bus Lanes (XBL) -- Connect the key residential and commercial nodes in the Meadowlands to the transit hubs like Secaucus Junction, the Tonnelle Avenue Station, and the 42nd Street Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT). This would offer the commuting public the advantage of lesser travel time, therefore providing a meaningful alternative to the Single Occupancy Vehicle. Additionally, it could:
 1. *Optimize the use of limited road space and manage congestion at nominal costs.*
 2. *Leverage the multimillion dollar rail investments such as the Secaucus Junction and Tonnelle Avenue Stations in North Bergen.*
 3. *Provide an immediate benefit to the local community.*

The Route 3 Corridor is the transportation spine of the Meadowlands. About 30,000 transit riders travel in about 1,000 bus trips daily on this corridor, primarily to and from New York City. Most of the buses originate outside the Meadowlands and compete for road space with about 73,000 other eastbound

vehicles, mostly single occupancy cars, before they merge into the most successful Exclusive Bus Lane in the country, leading into the Lincoln Tunnel. Currently, many of these buses, in fact most of these buses, do not stop in the Meadowlands and hence do not serve the local community. A successful XBL expansion project in the Meadowlands can succeed, if we:

- *Provide exclusive road space for buses and mini-buses along Route 3.* A number of options can be explored to accomplish this, including shoulder use, exclusive lane designation, or bus/HOV sharing. A pilot program using shoulder lanes was recently initiated in Old Bridge on Route 9.
- *Provide Interconnections between the Route 3 New York bus routes and local routes.* This is a two-part plan – to provide a limited number of connection hubs where residents could connect from a local bus route to express buses, thereby distributing passengers to a number of routes where there is capacity, and reinforcing or supplementing the local networks. Our focus must be upon both AM and PM peak hour travel, and upon identifying the key locations that would function for both inbound and outbound travelers. These locations may include Meadowlands Parkway, Route 120, and the Route 3/17 Service Road.
- *Develop a Shuttle Feeder System from the local communities/ businesses to the new transit hubs.*

The Route 3 XBL could be designed to extend from the Allwood Park'n'Ride in Clifton to the existing Lincoln Tunnel XBL to create the region's primary transit corridor. Secondary XBLs along other arteries such as Route 17, Routes 1 & 9 and Meadowlands Parkway also could be utilized to complete the network.

The Chamber also will continue to advocate additional strategies to achieve the potential for improved bus service in the District, including:

- *Open the proposed Route 120 Bus Station adjacent to Meadowlands Xanadu.* This would provide an important access point for the future workforce serving the entire Sports Complex facilities, and patrons.
- *Institute New Bus Routes providing service directly from key Meadowlands points to New York City.* With continued growth and redevelopment, this will become a necessity, owing to the capacity limitations on existing through routes.
- *Implement Bus Rapid Transit Corridors –Planning ahead!* The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission and New Jersey Transit, in cooperation with Meadowlink Commuter Services, should combine forces, expertise, research, and out-of-the-box thinking to create a vision of the future involving bus rapid transit corridors and updated vehicles that facilitate the loading/unloading of passengers.
- *Provide adequate funding to fulfill future demands for capital equipment and operations.* The Governor, Legislature and Commissioners must recognize that the fundamental strategy to relieve congestion and move commuters out of single occupancy vehicles over the long term, is to provide safe, convenient and reliable alternatives. While we applaud the commitments that have been made to the rail system, corresponding investments must be made to enhancing bus infrastructure and equipment.
- *We must promote regional cooperation to address other capacity issues at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York, existing park & ride locations, and other facilities that constitute the regional network.* There is an opportunity at present for constructive dialogue between the governors in the tri-state area, and a new view of mutual interdependence and commonalities which can transcend differences to identify solutions to pressing transportation issues.

To repeat, it is essential that The New Jersey Department of Transportation, New Jersey Transit, and the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission work in conjunction with Meadowlink to develop a plan to optimize and expedite improvements in bus travel in the district, responding to existing and emerging development patterns. We recommend the allocation of \$20 million to study and implement the Route 3 XBL as an initial component of a comprehensive XBL system.

The Internal Circulation System

The Meadowlands District has about 27 existing and proposed key nodes of residential and commercial activity. Most of these are adjacent to major highways such as Route 3, Route 17, Routes 1 & 9, and Meadowlands Parkway, all of which have the potential to employ exclusive bus lanes, as noted earlier. New intra-district bus networks should be explored and developed to link nodes or clusters of nodes to the new bus hubs on Route 3, as well as to Secaucus Junction and the new Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Station at Tonnelle Avenue.

Other important links should connect the Sports Complex, Meadowlands Xanadu, the Secaucus Outlet Center, Harmon Meadow and major corporate parks. Innovative measures to create these networks should be examined, including:

- Shuttle Services – The internal circulation system would provide the appropriate opportunity to enhance and build upon the shuttle systems that have been developed by Meadowlink with their Easy Ride Program. These networks could be based on smaller 25 passenger mini-buses matching the scale of the ridership and narrower local streets. Shuttle routes would be designed to benefit from the synergy of including both residential and commercial nodes -- serving both Meadowlands employers and residents using the transit hubs. Funding could involve a partnership between the public sector and private sector beneficiaries.
Note: We are pleased that the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission included shuttle services in their recent draft Meadowlands District Transportation Plan. We urge that such shuttles be implemented as a priority action.
- Car Share – Transportation between certain nodes and during off-peak hours may not justify shuttle services. In such cases, Car Share programs could be utilized to facilitate circulation between nodes. Such vehicles could be rented on an hourly basis. This approach has gained popularity in other states and has considerable potential in this dense district. Optimal locations for placing such vehicles would be an appropriate subject for study in conjunction with the identification of local internal networks and nodes.

Secaucus Junction

The Frank A. Lautenberg Secaucus Junction Rail Station was a tremendous and wholly unprecedented transit investment for our region, the entire metropolitan area, and the State of New Jersey. A number of issues and challenges have kept this facility from reaching its full potential. While the many transit improvement plans that we do advocate will expand its utilization, these will take years to bring to fruition. The significance of this station as a regional hub must be recognized by all levels of government and action must be taken to optimize its use now.

- *The Chamber has long advocated the full development of Local Bus Links to Secaucus Junction.* This is an area that has never been fully addressed in public transit planning in our region. Given the stress on the interstate bus routes and the need to provide alternative travel choices, thus pulling commuters out of their single occupancy cars, Secaucus Junction must be recognized and enhanced as the primary commuter hub with links to all major nodes of activity in the District.

- For many reasons, *parking facilities* were not included in the design of this major rail station, as ridership was projected to originate in the Allied Junction development. Some thought that discouraging vehicular traffic was a key to promoting mass transit use. We now know this to be an inaccurate assessment. ***Examining the situation today, it is clear that providing parking at the station is critical and that the lack of it frustrates the optimal utilization of Secaucus Junction.*** We recognize parking is to, someday, be provided in the adjacent development, but this could be many years away. In the meantime, an interim solution must be developed to provide short to medium range temporary parking facilities, which would encourage use of the station. Many factors must be examined to insure the capacity of local roads to serve this parking facility and to minimize any impacts on the surrounding community, but such a study should be undertaken expeditiously.

Road Network Improvements

In establishing our priorities here, the thinking is direct and clear. There are east-west and north-south spines, critical corridor hubs that must be considered, first and always, simply because they are the most heavily traveled and critical thoroughfares serving the Meadowlands. These are the heavy, thru-traffic corridors, Routes 3 and 17 and the New Jersey Turnpike. And then there are secondary networks, where great opportunity to maximize flow and truly enhance mobility rests, as with Meadowlands Parkway and West Side Avenue. Our priorities include:

- ***The Route 3 Passaic River Bridge Crossing Project*** – This major project to improve Route 3 from Main Avenue in Clifton to the Route 17 interchange at the Clifton/Lyndhurst/Rutherford border has been in the design and planning stage for over 6 years. It is a rapidly deteriorating structure that is the cause of much congestion during peak hours of commuter travel requiring high priority. Due to the estimated cost of the original design, the project has now been reengineered with smart planning concepts to keep safety related features in but some aspects have changed reducing cost almost 60 million dollars. We applaud the planners for addressing the fact that the accident rate around the Rt3 Passaic River Bridge is 4 times the state average by keeping in new deceleration and acceleration lane features. Keeping in mind the size of the current developments in and around the Meadowlands Sports Complex, this project is THE critical initiator of congestion mediation. The project MUST move forward to construction so we urge the NJDOT to remain on design and construction bid schedule.
- ***Route 17 Improvements*** –Critical interchanges that must be addressed include *Highland Cross*, the always congested *Polito Avenue* and, most importantly, the *Routes 46/17* crossing. Projects must encompass signalization improvements utilizing the latest in signal technologies, the addition of safer and widened lanes with which to access and egress, and the generation of traffic free flow.But the exhausting problem that remains is that Route 17, south of Route 4, will never be what it should be, as long as there is a varied pattern of four and six lane sections that remain substandard in design. While we are pleased that work will proceed this coming year at the *Route 17/Essex Street* interchange, so much remains to be done, and while there have been many fits and starts on Route 17 corridor studies, no final product or holistic series of recommended improvements has been forthcoming. This is unacceptable and a holistic *Route 17 Corridor Study*, that considers the enhancement of parallel road structures that can serve to relieve the pressures on Route 17, should finally be completed so that coherent and comprehensive recommendations for improvement can be advanced.
- ***New Jersey Turnpike Improvements*** – This vital freeway, which serves the eastern corridor of the United States and our Meadowlands, can never be overlooked. There are numerous toll plaza capacity improvement projects -- the *18W Interchange* enhancement, which will provide direct access to the New Jersey Sports Complex, while also providing a

direct link to Meadowlands Xanadu, the new Stadium, the Carlstadt/Moonachie industrial zone, and the prospective Paterson Plank Road redevelopment. Note that while all attention is on the Sports Complex, this also will be designed to facilitate truck and goods movement. Continued focus also must be upon the 16W/18E/ Improvements and enhancements.

- **Route 3 East/Meadowlands Parkway Interchange Improvements and Meadowlands Parkway Extension** – The Meadowlands Parkway entrance and exit ramps from Rt 3 on both the East & West corridors should be widened and striped for multiple lanes to enhance flow. The extension of *Meadowlands Parkway* in Secaucus over New Jersey Transit's Main Line, connecting to the western terminus of New County Road is essential, in order to provide greater public access and accommodate redevelopment along the Hackensack River. This will clearly improve access to Harmon Cove and for its 16,000 employees, the southernmost areas of Secaucus, areas south of the Main Line, and the proposed Secaucus Transit Village.
- **Paterson Plank Road Widening** – This is a proposed extension from four to six lanes. While often overlooked, this project remains critical for the Sports Complex, Meadowlands Xanadu, the Paterson Plank Road corridor, as well as east-west corridor mobility in the region. Situated as it is to provide relief for Route 3 at a critical juncture.
- **Portway, Phase I** – This term seems to move in and out of vogue, but it cannot be allowed to fester, as goods movement is a vital component of the regional economy, and key corridors must be streamlined. This project includes the Wittpenn Bridge Replacement, the Route 7 Widening and improvements, the Portway Fish House Road/Pennsylvania Avenue improvements project, and a network of projects along the Route 1&9 Corridor. As part of this, major and cost-effective improvements, as planned, must be made to West Side Avenue to augment truck movement there. Truck only access to the Turnpike from West Side Avenue is a real possibility that should be studied immediately. Portway is a dramatic project that will have, to the extent that it is completed, watershed consequences for the Meadowlands.

Rail Improvements

Encouragingly, a number of critical rail transit projects that the chamber advocated have been advanced since we published our last **White Paper**. Of particular note, Rail Access to the Sports Complex is under way, and substantial support has been committed at the Federal and State levels to the Access to the Region's Core project – the new Rail Tunnel under the Hudson River which also has our strongest support. We will monitor the progress of Pascack Valley Line improvements such as the construction of passing tracks for passenger and freight trains affording hourly and off peak service in both directions. This is necessary to accommodate anticipated increased flow both to and from the Sports Complex and Secaucus Transfer. To this end, we look forward to an operational review of the Phase I Rail Link to the Sports Complex project when completed, and to sharing comments and ideas about the feasibility of prospective alignments for the Phase II link.

Clearly, many other prospective rail improvement projects in the planning stages must be brought to fruition in order to accommodate the continued economic growth of the region and to assure an always maximized quality of life in the Meadowlands. Projects that will continue to receive prioritized and primary advocacy in the immediate months and years ahead include the following critical projects on the docket:

- **Diesel Multiple Unit Self-Propelled Cars/Northern Branch** - The frequency of service and flexibility provided by these cars would, we believe, contribute mightily to the utilization of the region's rail system, prospectively serving the Sports Complex links, the Pascack Valley Line and eventually, and especially, the Northern Branch.

While we recognize that the utilization of new equipment requires operational adjustments, the hurdles and challenges to be overcome, pale in comparison to the benefits foreseen.

These units will provide the desired link from the northern terminus of the HBLRT in North Bergen into Tenafly. Service delivery will be dramatically expedited by utilizing DMUs on the existing infrastructure, as opposed to laying new light rail track beyond the Park & Ride terminus.

We understand that controversy remains, as light rail advocates continue to argue for the further extension of light rail. This should be put to rest, once and for all, however, as the benefits of the Diesel Multiple Unit Self Propelled Cars and the accompanying cost savings to be effected speaks for itself. That New Jersey Transit has moved forward to order the first vehicles of this kind is particularly noteworthy and very encouraging.

- *Activation of the Harrison-Kingsland Line* – This will result in a historic addition of direct public transit service to the southeastern corridor of the Meadowlands which only featured freight service in the past. With the incorporation of a new station in Kearny, there will be a link both from and to the southeastern industrial corridor of the district and redevelopment nodes, prospective transit villages, and EnCap. While planning progresses, strong advocacy by the community and elected officials is urged in order to accelerate the project time frame (now 5 – 8 years) and assure the necessary funding.
- *Passaic-Bergen Rail Line* – This ten-mile rail link will provide an important economic revitalization catalyst as well as a vital connection from northwest Bergen County and beyond into the District. Fully seven stations are planned between Passaic and Hackensack. Priority must be given to resolving negotiations with the NY-Susquehanna Railroad and making this link a reality.
- *HBLRT Extension to Harmon Meadow, Secaucus Junction and/or the Sports Complex.* We remain keenly interested in The New Jersey Transit study examining the potential options and the benefits of the same. New Jersey Transit should work closely with the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission and the community to ensure that any proposed extension maximizes investment by linking critical employment and residential nodes in the District. Cost-Benefit analysis here will mean anything as investment will have to be justified. We look forward to examining the results of the study and to proceeding with a recommendation to proceed, if warranted.

A Note on Congestion Pricing

While the issue of congestion pricing is causing much debate, the lead on this, when and if it is to come, will be from New York City as it attempts to remedy its own mobility issues. We must openly debate this tactic and better understand the impacts it has on our region and we do believe that New Jersey, all respective agencies, and the legislature, would do well to investigate congestion pricing options as they may relate to identifiable, heavily congested corridors and major cities in our State as well. The truth is, while it is premature to advocate anything, the meadowlands is suited for experiments with congestion pricing, where those paying would, in the end, only be paying for the right to the speedier option. Denying none, providing alternatives, there is a “why not” question here that begs to be answered, considered, and discussed. All we are saying now is that the feasibility of congestion pricing should be studied and factored into our thinking. Let’s get out front on this issue and consider what good can be done to provide a dynamic catalyst for change. The great London experiment appears to be working. So why not, at the very least, start talking about it.

Again, we are making no specific recommendation here as nothing is on the table. What we are clearly saying is that now is the time to think about this, to study it carefully, and to place some thoughtful and creative proposals on the table for consideration.

Summary of Recommendations and Action Items

In sum, we believe that unique opportunities exist in the Meadowlands today to dramatically enhance mobility. These recommendations focus on the following which represents our highest priority.

- OPTIMIZING BUS TRANSPORTATION THROUGH EXCLUSIVE BUS LANES CONNECTING MEADOWLANDS HUBS AND NEW YORK – ROUTE 3 BEING THE PILOT PROJECT
- PROVIDING INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE ROUTE 3 BUS ROUTES AND LOCAL OUTES
- ALLOCATING SUFFICIENT DOLLARS TO IMPLEMENT AND STUDY THE ABOVE, INCLUDING CAPITAL EQUIPMENT AND OPERATION.
- IMPLEMENT SHUTTLE SYSTEMS CONNECTING RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL NODES – SIGNIFICANT GIVEN THE MAJOR REDEVELOPMENTS SUCH AS ENCAP, XANADU, EQUINOX, SECAUCUS JUNCTION, TONNELLE AVENUE HBLRT,.
- IMPLEMENTATION OF PARKING AT SECAUCUS JUNCTION, EVEN CONSIDERING IT AN INTERIM USE, TO PROMOTE USE OF THIS MAJOR INVESTMENT. DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL BUS LINKS.
- A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF ROUTE 17 SOUTH OF ROUTE 4, THAT IDENTIFIES FEASIBLE INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS AND ENHANCEMENT OF PARALLEL ROUTES, RECOGNIZING CAPACITY IMPROVEMENTS ON ROUTE 17 ITSELF ARE CONSTRAINED BY RIGHT-OF-WAY ISSUES.
- IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROUTE 3 PASSAIC RIVER BRIDGE REPLACEMENT, WHILE A PROGRAMMED IMPROVEMENT, IT MUST BE HELD TO A SCHEDULE.
- INTERCHANGE IMPROVEMENTS ON THE NJ TURNPIKE, INCLUDING 18W, 16W, 18E – ALL SIGNIFICANT WITH RESPECT TO THE SPORTS COMPLEX REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.
- ROUTE 3/MEADOWLANDS PARKWAY INTERCHANGE IMPROVEMENTS, TO RELIEVE EXISTING CONGESTION

RAIL IMPROVEMENTS THAT WE CONTINUE TO ADVOCATE FOCUS ON:

- THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIESEL MULTIPLE UNITS SELF-PROPELLED CARS,
- THE REACTIVATION OF THE HARRISON-KINGSLAND LINE,
- THE PASSAIC-BERGEN RAIL LINE
- SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PASCACK VALLEY LINE
- THE BUILDING OF “THE TUNNEL” TO ADD A 2 TRACK RAIL LINK TO NYC

What is referenced above is of particular importance, because it boldly addresses that which can be done in the short term much at reasonable cost to relieve congestion and improve mobility.

We commit to advancing these issues and to taking an always aggressive lead on behalf of the business community, the people, and the many municipalities that we serve to facilitate improvements and action.