

As part of the **Public Forums series on the NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan**, the Waterfront Alliance partnered with DCP to host a meeting on ***Ferries, Cruises and Transportation of Humans***. There were close to 80 attendees from nonprofit and community groups in NY and NJ, representatives from various maritime industries, government representatives, and citizens with a general interest in the waterfront.

Following introductory remarks and a presentation on the Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, Roberta Weisbrod from the Worldwide Ferry Safety Association and James Wong from NYCEDC set the stage for public discussion. They offered a detailed analysis of the growth of the NYC Ferry system, infrastructure needed for continued growth and trends related to ferry ridership.

Margaret Flanagan, Director of Outreach and Education at the Waterfront Alliance, facilitated an open forum Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) exercise. This enabled attendees to think collectively about major issues relating to ferries and human transportation. Participants then broke out into smaller groups to discuss these issues and report back their top priorities. The ideas and themes highlighted during the open SWOT portion are listed at the end of this document.

The questions guiding the discussion during breakout groups were:

- (1) **Infrastructure, planning and technology:** What issues related to infrastructure, planning and technology should we be focused on for the next 10 years? What are the related public policy areas?
- (2) **Governance & community stewardship:** Who decides? What are the governance and regulatory issues that we need to address in order to support the maritime sector?
- (3) **Equity:** How do we ensure all New Yorkers benefit from a robust blue network and waterfront in the region?
- (4) **Data & further Analysis:** Do we need further analysis, information or data to inform how we plan for the future of the waterfront?

### **Main Takeaways:**

Attendees discussed a range of topics, including recreation and public transportation, commerce and economic development, sustainability, and emergency preparedness. Conversation frequently focused on the management and governance of waterways. While there are significant challenges related to levels of management, infrastructure needs and climate change, attendees suggested there's a great amount of potential for waterborne transportation through its wide variety of co-benefits and its unique and strategic value-add for the city. They noted that taking advantage of this potential depends on increased regional, inter-agency and stakeholder cooperation, better utilization and leverage of public assets, and planning for and investing in climate-resilient, integrated 21st century infrastructure. During the breakout groups, more specific ideas, priorities and themes emerged, as summarized below:

**Climate Change + Environmental Sustainability**

Participants identified the need for policies and regulations that align with the best available climate data. This entails understanding climate change risks and impacts on existing infrastructure, and the need for long-term timelines and investments to protect and reconstruct existing public assets on the waterfront. Attendees also discussed sustainable technology such as environmentally sound (electric/hybrid) boats, and connections to appropriate recharging stations or eco-docks that are adapted based on climate science. Overall, participants noted the potential for innovation, workforce development, and ongoing educational opportunities.

**Expansion, Diversification and Public Transit Integration**

While there has been progress with expanded ferry service, participants repeatedly noted the potential of expansion and diversification of service. Most tables prioritized expanding routes and connections, especially to airports, as well as offering smaller landings and nodes that can accommodate a diversity of smaller vessels and that can better integrate with other uses such as public access, emergency preparedness, and evacuations. Other suggestions to explore included feeder ferries, short sea shipping, integrated passenger and freight/cargo/transportation of goods, and autonomous shipping. Participants also noted the role of major ferry terminals, focusing on the capacity and services that they could provide, and how the RFP process and public investment could drive greater ferry terminal improvements and innovation overall. A topic of discussion was the role of ferries as a form of public transportation and the need for greater transparency, accountability and integration with other forms of transportation (including parking, bikes, public transportation, etc). Suggestions included incorporating it within the MTA metrocard system and that the ferry system could be managed by NYCDOT.

**Equity, Connectivity and Community Benefits**

Participants raised the issue of having better physical, social and economic connections and integration from the water to upland communities. While recognizing the benefits and potential of waterborne transportation, participants also discussed how to ensure broader equitable development so that value is captured to sustain services and maximize benefits while not displacing waterfront communities. Central to this was the importance of integration with and inclusion of local communities along the waterfront, especially those that have often been marginalized or borne outsized environmental burdens. This included ensuring their access to and use of the waterfront, connectivity to multi-mode / relevant transit options (parking, public transit expansions, etc) and customization to local community needs. Attendees noted this should include integrating workforce development and jobs, a more inclusive idea of maritime and nautical heritage, and a focus on multi-use and multi-purpose ferry terminals that can showcase local businesses and serve as community assets.

**Governance and Management**

Attendees frequently cited ambiguous, confusing jurisdictions and governance of the waterways as a top concern. Participants noted that we need a streamlined, holistic and clearly outlined permitting process between various agencies. Attendees discussed the need for a regional approach that recognizes cross-jurisdictional issues. Participants also noted constraints and limitations related to underutilized public/city/state assets and the difficulty in making upgrades because of the current investments and

long term partnerships already in place. A central question was who pays for all of this and the division of responsibility between the public and private. Some participants suggested that the ferry system, for example, needs to raise more money – through fares, advertising, or other combined commercial opportunities. Others suggested that the waterways and ferry transportation should be recognized as critical ecological, economic and infrastructural assets and be supported appropriately.

The ideas and themes highlighted during the SWOT exercise were:

**Strengths and opportunities**

Educational potential; Popularity of ferries: expanded opportunities for affordable water access to New Yorkers and tourists, added new connectivity for commutes, sightseeing / recreation + mental health; Workforce development; Reducing carbon emissions, 'Most resilient transit option after floods, emergencies, Local technology — shipping, etc.; Potential for RFP process / public sector to drive innovation; Potential for waterfront development and expanded residential / communities; Small landings / existing infrastructure; Funding reallocation; Companies value employees' access to transportation; People's needs

**Weakness and threats**

Old/different uses and changing conditions; Gaps in waterfront access and connectivity; Permitting hurdles, including: Army corps of engineers, DEC mitigate new infrastructure, SPS new requirements for infrastructure; Waterfront building codes; Underutilized public terminals: prioritize access, responsibility, capacity (DOT, EDC, private operator); Climate change, sea level rise and fluctuations, storms, impact on bulkheads; Effects of resiliency plan (proposed infill, etc.); Pricing system; Gentrification, especially of the transit limited communities the ferries were aiming to serve; Dredging and depth; Over competition of public and private (existing industries); Funding - govt vs private; Parking, access and connectivity; How to better integrate / maximize the transportation of people and goods

**Key themes by comments:** connectivity, accessibility, innovation, public transit, climate change, cooperation, public assets, community benefit, emergency preparedness, multi-purpose, workforce development, public-private partnerships, transparency, sustainability, and jobs.