



Webster Avenue SBS Community Advisory Committee Meeting #1 Summary

Monday February 6, 2012, 6:30-8pm
Lincoln Hospital Auditorium
234 East 149th St, Bronx, NY 10451

Executive Summary

On Monday, February 6, 2012, The New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) and MTA New York City Transit (NYCT), held the first Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting for the Webster Avenue Select Bus Service (SBS) project at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. The meeting, co-hosted by Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., was attended by 28 members of the community. A list of the attending organizations is attached.

Charles Ukegbu, NYCDOT Deputy Borough Commissioner for the Bronx, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He noted the value of community feedback throughout the process of this project, and the crucial role the CAC plays as the “ear” for people in the community.

Mr. Ukegbu then introduced Borough President Diaz, who stated the importance of addressing transportation needs in conjunction with the redeveloping and re-zoning of the area. He noted that Webster Avenue’s up-zoning will bring economic development and housing to the area, and improved transportation infrastructure is needed to support the development. Borough President Diaz also noted that the difference between the proposed Webster Avenue SBS and the Fordham SBS is that the latter was designed to fit existing conditions, whereas Webster Avenue SBS will need to address transportation needs based on the future potential of the corridor. He asked the team to evaluate extending the service to E. 138th Street. To close, he invited everyone to his State of the Borough address on February 23.

Mr. Ukegbu then introduced Eric Beaton, Director of Transit Development for NYCDOT, who introduced himself and led the introductions of the CAC members present (see discussion below). Eric Beaton and Ted Orosz, Director of Long Range Bus Planning for NYCT, then presented a more detailed overview of the background and purpose of the project, outlined the goals and outreach process, and stated some of the already identified problems with bus service along Webster Avenue. The presentation also described the features of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Select Bus Service (SBS) and the results of the Bx12 SBS on Fordham Road. Lastly, a timeline of events through the completion of the study was provided to the CAC.

A copy of the presentation can be downloaded at: http://www.nyc.gov/html/brt/downloads/pdf/2012-02-06_brt_webster_cac1.pdf.

After the presentation, the project team opened the floor for discussion. The questions and comments are recorded below.

Discussion

During the introduction before the presentation, attendees were asked to introduce themselves and share their hopes and expectations in regards to bus service, safety, and transit needs along Webster Avenue. Expectations of attendees included the following: improved bus route amenities (e.g. shelters), enhanced service for the elderly and disabled, maintenance of new sustainable bus amenities, such as shelters and benches, and compatible solutions that match the needs of the business community (e.g. parking, deliveries) as well as for ongoing and future developments.

The following are the issues and considerations identified by individuals attending the meeting, organized by topic.

Curbspace and Deliveries, Parking

- Webster Avenue has lost many parking spots over the last fifteen years. Fordham Plaza is a critical location since the area attracts hundreds of commuters, and parking must be available to people who travel from areas outside of the Bronx. In addition, the new Fordham Plaza Redevelopment will add 250,000 square feet of office space and a proposed charter school. Additional parking will be needed to accommodate the increased number of visitors to the area.
- Curbspace is crucial for area businesses and their deliveries as well as for their customers to park. New bus stops may take away valuable parking. Can SBS be implemented without a separate bus lane if congestion-related issues can be solved with other measures first? Mr. Orosz responded by reminding attendees that since the study is in its preliminary stages, all issues and suggestions from the community will be considered in determining an appropriate solution for the corridor.
- Is curb space usage a factor and how much time savings could come from traffic signal priority? Mr. Orosz responded that time savings come from a combination of bus lanes, traffic signal priority and off-board fare collection. He went on to explain that there may be variations; for example a potential solution may be to implement an offset bus lane, so that bus lanes do not consume the valuable curbspace. He also reiterated that all ideas are conceptual and are not final. All feedback from the community will be used to determine an outcome that works for everyone.
- If people trusted transit reliability, they would use it instead of driving. Night deliveries on Webster Avenue were suggested.

Traffic and Congestion

- There is a problem with buses parking in front of the storefronts on Webster Avenue near Fordham Road, preventing people from being able to park and increasing congestion in the area.
- Webster Avenue, in the vicinity of E. 180th Street, often becomes backed up, especially during rush hour, due to congestion caused by traffic entering and exiting the Cross Bronx Expressway. This causes delays for the bus routes that pass through this corridor.

Bus Operations

- There needs to be more organized exiting and boarding to eliminate bus idling and layover.
- Since the Bx41 bus route was cut at Gun Hill Road, it is difficult to get to places north of there. An extension of the Bx41 should be considered to better accommodate bus riders. Reliability on local bus service should be improved. Is Webster Avenue wide enough to accommodate a bus lane? Mr. Orosz responded that Webster Avenue is indeed wide enough to accommodate a bus lane.
- The Fordham Plaza redesign will establish a “bus only” street along 3rd Avenue between E 189th Street and Fordham Road to make for better bus circulation in the area. This should be considered as part of this study.
- Buses should serve more subway stops, which would disperse more riders and bring a better balance between local and SBS routes.
- Better bus shelters are needed at The Hub. Often buses are delayed as a result of people getting off at the front of the bus rather than the rear. Suggest a campaign to encourage exiting at the back of the bus.
- By making bus lanes wide enough for buses to travel in, this will not only help to better divide traffic, but also improve safety and overall traffic flow.
- Traffic signals should be re-timed to speed the Bx41 and help eliminate delays along Webster Avenue. A letter expressing these concerns about SBS bus service was submitted.

Pedestrian Safety

- In the vicinity of Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue, there will be a large influx of pedestrians and pedestrian safety needs to be addressed. On Webster Avenue between Gun Hill Road and East 233rd Street, a number of housing units are being built, which will eventually lead to a large influx of people in the area. This is something to consider when forming solutions to solve pedestrian congestion issues and promote safety. Also, at 205th Street and Webster Avenue in Bedford Park, a new K-8 school is being built, which will be in addition to two existing schools in the area. This will draw more children to the area, making safety a priority, and increase traffic congestion in the area. Any SBS recommendations should consider how to address the 8 AM and 3 PM times to accommodate these changes and protect the safety of schoolchildren.
- Jaywalking is a common problem along Webster Avenue. Pedestrian barriers or medians in congested areas were suggested, which would help pedestrians to safely cross the street.
- The Gun Hill Road Congested Corridor Study should be looked at when determining a solution to pedestrian congestion and jaywalking along Webster Avenue. Staff noted that the study recommendations would be included.

Fare Collection

- A unified fare collection for all modes of transportation was suggested, including commuter rail, making it easier for people to quickly board and pay.
- Cash payments for fare should be avoided on the bus. This causes buses to be delayed because of passengers not having enough money to pay the fare, which holds up the bus line.
- Better fare enforcement on SBS is necessary to make sure riders are paying.

Miscellaneous Issues

- Since there are so many elements to consider in data collection, a possible joint-verification exercise between the community and different agencies would be beneficial to the study.

Closing

Mr. Beaton closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and stated the project team would be available after the meeting to answer any further questions. He also reminded attendees to take a comment sheet with them as they leave and that they can return it to Patrick Jordan by e-mail at webstersbs@zetlin.com or by mail at 314 West 71st Street, New York, NY 10023.

Attendees

- Bronx Borough President's Office
- NYS Assembly District 84 (Carmen E. Arroyo)
- Community Board 1
- Community Board 5
- Community Board 6
- Community Board 7
- Fordham Road BID
- Morris House
- Bronx Independent Living Services
- Mosholu Preservation Corporation
- Tri-State Transportation Campaign
- Pratt Center, Community Division
- Selga Realty
- North End Wine and Liquor
- Bronx Fashion
- Cookies Department Store
- HNP