Memorandum

Metropolitan Transportation Authority
State of New York

Date February 3, 2005

To Peter S. Kalikow, Chairman

From Mysore L. Nagaraja, President

Re **EAST SIDE ACCESS PROJECT**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide additional information in response to comments and questions raised by Assemblyman Richard Brodsky via letter dated January 14, 2005.

What actions have been taken by the MTA to implement the East Side Access Project?

The current plan for East Side Access has been developed since the mid-1990's with the initiation of a Major Investment Study and the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement in May 2001. As part of this process, dozens of public meetings and several public hearings were held as alternatives were evaluated. Many meetings in Metro-North's service area and with Metro-North commuters were also held. A consistent theme at those meetings was to not adversely affect existing or future Metro-North service into Grand Central Terminal.

In May 2001, The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for the current plan for East Side Access (ESA). Since that time, $903 million has been committed towards work the contributes to the overall implementation of the ESA Project, including overall project design and construction of new rail yards and related facilities.

Federal funding for East Side Access is from the FTA's Section 5309 New Starts Program. This program is highly competitive and projects are evaluated on their technical merits and improvements to the regional transportation network. To date, ESA has enjoyed strong support from local and federal elected officials as it has successfully competed, nationally, for limited New Starts funds.

Has MTA considered the "Upper Level Loop"?

The "upper level loop" was analyzed during the MIS and EIS phase and was discarded because it cannot be built without severe impact to Metro-North operations and does not meet the service requirements for LIRR service to Grand Central Terminal (GCT). The upper level loop also does not save any money as significant cost elements are not considered by this scheme's proponents. In addition, the upper level loop alternative does not permit the Port Washington Branch of the LIRR to have direct service to GCT.

The MTA's proposed design for East Side Access has also been reconfirmed since the EIS was completed. When the responsibility for building East Side Access was transferred to the MTA Capital Construction Company (MTACC) in July 2003, one of the first actions taken was a thorough review of the design options for East Side Access to confirm the project 's scope and budget. The analysis included a review of planned service levels, ridership assumptions, exiting capacity and whether or not LIRR train service could be accommodated within existing Grand Central Terminal space. To further validate these efforts, an outside firm with no prior involvement with ESA was utilized. The result of these efforts was a reaffirmation that the current design for East Side Access is the proper one. It is the only design plan that provides for sufficient capacity to meet project demand, it does not overload the existing customer circulation areas of GCT, does not adversely impact Metro-North's existing and future operations and allows both railroads to grow.

Specifically, the upper level loop concept fails in several fundamental areas:

1. The required service level of 24 trains to GCT in the peak hours cannot be met. The upper level loop would only allow a maximum of 18 trains in the peak hour. In all probability, only 12 trains would be operated to have any chance at a reliable service. This level of service would result in severe overcrowding to LIRR trains with no ability to add more service.

2. The plan is operationally not feasible as it requires trains to operate at 12 mph around the existing upper level loop track at GCT. This speed cannot be achieved due to a tight radius and inadequate lateral clearances in the loop. In addition, this is a single track loop and any disabled train in the loop would have a domino effect and quickly back up and completely shut down service until the obstruction is cleared.

3. The upper level alternative would have severe impacts on Metro-North. During the multi-year construction period, Metro-North's weekday service would have to be curtailed to a weekend level of service (about a 50% reduction) since three of the four Park Avenue viaduct tracks would need to be removed from service. Metro-North service would also need to be permanently reduced with the loss of 4 out of 9 approach tracks to the upper and lower level platform tracks.

4. No additional circulation space, waiting space and exiting capacity is created to accommodate the additional 160,000 daily commuter trips that would come to GCT. This would result in severe overcrowding throughout GCT and would create service problems for both Metro-North and LIRR.

5. The upper level loop alternative also excludes the entire LIRR Port Washington branch from having direct access to GCT which would require everyone to transfer at Woodside.

6. Several high cost items such as rolling stock, yards, ADA compliance, ventilation and protecting MNR and NYCT operations during construction are completely ignored. Accounting for these costs would add back much if not all of the projected savings of the alternative proposal.

How long will the East 50th Street Vent Facility be used as construction staging area and what are the results of the Environmental Assessment?

The East 50th Street Facility will be used as an access point and staging area for building the new concourse at GCT for approximately 30 months. Materials to be delivered would include consumable hardware supplies, wood framing material, reinforcing and structural steel and concrete to support construction of the north end of the GCT concourse and caverns. Larger material would continue to be delivered to the site by rail from the Bronx and Queens.

The preferred alternative - the East 50th Street Facility with a through drive - will provide for a smooth flow of construction vehicles into and out of the site by allowing trucks to enter from East 49th Street and depart from East 50th Street. Trucks can also be loaded and unloaded from the driveway and not from either East 49th Street or East 50th Street.

In fact, creating a through drive between 49th Street and 50th Street was first proposed by the general public and has since been modified by MTA to also insure that after construction is completed loading and unloading will continue to be accommodated within the enclosed site, away from local streets and sidewalks.

The MTA has prepared a very detailed Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed East 50 th Street facility. The EA is a very thorough analysis that evaluated and mitigated impacts related to: neighborhood character, visual and aesthetic conditions, zoning, traffic, noise and vibration, air quality, safety and security and construction. The conclusion of the study is that the MTA's proposal will not have any significant impact on the environment. A hearing is scheduled on February 10, 2005 to consider public comment on the EA.

Will East 50th Street Facility violate any existing legislation on obstruction of roadways or sidewalks in Manhattan?

All construction work impacting New York City streets and sidewalks will be coordinated with the New York City Department of Transportation, consistent with applicable rules and regulations.

cc: K. Lapp