

# **MTA LIRR East Side Access Project**

## **Technical Memorandum Assessing Potential Design Changes**

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### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This technical memorandum provides an assessment of the environmental consequences of several potential changes in the design of the East Side Access Project. Specifically, the assessment examines these changes with respect to the findings of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) prepared for the project, dated March 2001, and the Record of Decision issued by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in May 2001 to determine if any additional impacts not discussed in those documents would result from the design revisions. Four potential design changes were examined:

- New tail tracks south of Grand Central Terminal (GCT).
- A new 50th Street ventilation plant/truck dock.
- Loop track modification in Sunnyside, Queens.
- A new entrance at the Roosevelt Hotel.

The following assessment is based on data presented in the project's FEIS as well as additional field surveys conducted in summer/fall 2001. To the extent possible, the analysis uses the same methods and criteria developed as part of the FEIS to determine the significance of any potential environmental impacts.

Each design element is discussed separately below. A brief description of the new element and the reason for the change is followed by a discussion of the affected environment and consideration of potential impacts during construction and operation. These impacts are then compared to the conclusions of the FEIS to determine if new or additional mitigation would be necessary if the design change were adopted by the project.

### **B. NEW TAIL TRACKS SOUTH OF GCT**

#### **POTENTIAL DESIGN CHANGE**

One of the design changes being proposed is the addition of four tail tracks south of GCT, extending south from the platform tracks of the project's new Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) terminal at GCT. This new design element was selected from a series of options developed to increase the LIRR's operational flexibility at the terminal, especially during perturbed conditions. At both LIRR track levels in the new terminal, two tail tracks would extend beneath GCT from the terminus of the new platforms at approximately 44th Street. The four tail tracks would be approximately 1,700 feet long (including crossovers) and would each be capable of storing a 12-car consist. Each tail track would be in a separate cavern extending south to East 38th Street and would be connected to the terminal's eight platform tracks in a switching cavern beneath GCT. During perturbed conditions, such as when disabled trains are occupying platform space, the inclusion of tail tracks would improve operating conditions by providing space to move the disabled trains out of the way to allow for normal operations at the platforms.

The tail tracks would require a ventilation system for normal operations as well as emergency conditions. Based on the preliminary ventilation assessment, a pair of jet fans would be installed in the annular tunnel space associated with the wye section in each tail track and a 200-square-

foot ventilation shaft would lead to street-level gratings in the sidewalk at a location between East 37th and East 40th Streets near Park Avenue.

The caverns (approximately 1,700 feet long) for the four tracks would be constructed with the same tunnel boring machines (TBMs) to be used for the Manhattan running tunnels. Similar to construction of the main tunnels, disposal of muck and transportation of construction materials would occur through the Manhattan tunnels and 63rd Street Tunnel using the access shaft in Queens. At their northern connection with the GCT platform tracks, approximately 500 feet of the caverns would be constructed using a controlled drill-and-blast method. For this assessment, it is assumed that the ventilation shaft would be constructed primarily from below, with limited cut-and-cover work at the surface, similar to the construction discussed in the FEIS for East 55th Street.

### **AFFECTED AREA**

The study area for the tail tracks is shown in Figure 1. This area includes the area of the proposed alignment as well as the cross streets where a ventilation shaft beneath the street bed may be located. As shown in Figure 1, the study area encompasses the area between 42nd and 37th Streets from midway between Madison and Park Avenues to midway between Park and Lexington Avenues.

As shown in Figure 1, the land use in the study area is predominantly commercial office from East 42nd to East 39th Street. Buildings fronting on Park Avenue in this area are tall, ranging from 25 to 46 stories. These buildings and those on the side streets in this area have ground-floor retail space, including restaurants and banks. An urban plaza that is well used by office workers on weekdays wraps around 101 Park Avenue at the northeastern corner of Park Avenue and 40th Street.

East 39th Street marks the area's transition to a residential neighborhood: the blocks between 39th and 37th Streets are predominantly residential, with hotels and institutional uses. On these blocks, a mix of small (5- and 6-story) and mid-rise (15-story) apartment buildings front on Park Avenue and smaller buildings occupy the midblocks on the side streets. Many of these residential buildings have ground-floor professional offices, primarily medical-related. Several hotels and institutional uses are located in this portion of the study area. On the west side of Park Avenue, both corners of 38th Street are occupied by hotels. One of these hotels has outdoor seating associated with its café/restaurant stretching north along Park Avenue from 38th Street. On the east side of Park Avenue, the Roman Catholic Church of Our Savior is located on the southeast corner. This study area also includes several buildings occupied by missions to the United Nations and consul generals' offices.

The study area includes a notable transportation feature: a tunnel carries vehicles beneath the center of Park Avenue between East 34th and East 40th Street. North of East 40th Street, the roadway rises up from the tunnel to a viaduct in the center of Park Avenue that carries vehicles around GCT to and from East 46th Street. In addition, the Lexington Avenue subway line (Nos. 4, 5, and 6 routes) also runs beneath Park Avenue in the study area. Pedestrian entrances to the subway system are located within the building on the east side of Park Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets.

The area has several historic resources. These include the Park Avenue viaduct, which carries vehicular traffic up and around Grand Central Terminal. The Park Avenue viaduct is a New York City Landmark (NYCL) and is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR). Four historic structures are on 42nd Street in or close to the study area: Grand Central

Terminal (NYCL, S/NR, and National Historic Landmark [NHL]), the Bowery Savings Bank Building at 110 East 42nd Street (NYCL), the Chanin Building at 122 East 42nd Street (NYCL, S/NR), and the Vanderbilt Avenue Building at 51 East 42nd Street (eligible for S/NR). Farther south, the building at 57 Park Avenue (between 37th and 38th Streets) is also a NYCL and S/NR. This building was built as the Adelaide L.T. Douglas House and is now the Guatemalan Permanent Mission to the United Nations and Guatemalan Consul General. In addition, the midblock portions of 38th and 37th Streets between Park and Lexington Avenues are part of the Murray Hill Historic District (NYCL), which also includes portions of 36th and 35th Streets.

The area, like the rest of East Midtown, is busy with traffic. Pedestrian traffic is heavier in the northern section of the study area, near GCT and 42nd Street, especially during rush hour.

### **POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING CONSTRUCTION**

The FEIS did not consider the potential impacts of construction activities south of Grand Central Terminal, as none were proposed in the design analyzed in that document. The new tail tracks would add construction activities south of GCT, but as discussed below, these new activities would not result in significant adverse impacts.

Although most of the construction work associated with the tail track tunnels would be done below the surface, temporary disruptions would occur to the area surrounding the location of the ventilation shaft. Cut-and-cover excavation would be necessary where the ventilation shaft rises to street level. This would require closing one lane of traffic to allow excavation to proceed. The work would at times be noisy and disruptive, but it would be of short duration and therefore would not result in significant adverse impacts in terms of land use, social conditions, economic conditions, visual conditions, or traffic. The new construction work would be less disruptive than the work already described for areas north of GCT. Those activities were not expected to result in adverse effects to nearby historic resources, so neither would the more limited work required for the tail tracks.

Because it involves excavation, the cut-and-cover construction work has the potential to affect buried archaeological resources. In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, further research into possibility of such resources being located in the affected area would be conducted once the shaft site location has been identified. Once geotechnical borings are available for review, the potential for adverse effects to occur on archaeological resources at the shaft location would be considered in accordance with the project's Programmatic Agreement executed by FTA, MTA, and the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). A copy of the Programmatic Agreement was provided in Appendix B of the FEIS.

The tunneling work required for the new tail tracks would be similar in nature to that described in the FEIS north of GCT. Therefore, similar to that tunneling work, the new tunneling and excavation required for the tail tracks also would not result in significant adverse noise or vibration impacts during construction. The location of the new tail tracks—130 feet below the surface within rock—is of similar depth below street level, and within similar geological conditions to the Manhattan tunnels analyzed in the FEIS.

Construction activities related to possible tail tracks also would not have the potential to result in disproportionate impacts to low-income or minority populations, which are protected by Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations." As described in Chapter 18 of the FEIS, Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse

human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on low-income and minority populations. The Manhattan study area analyzed for environmental justice in the FEIS included the area that would be affected by the tail tracks. As noted in the FEIS, the Manhattan study area did not have a population that would be considered low-income or minority relative to Manhattan as a whole or to New York City. Specific data for the two census tracts closest to the proposed location of the tail tracks (Tracts 80 and 82, extending from Third to Fifth Avenue, 35th to 42nd Street), confirm this conclusion. In this area, the 2000 census reports that 87 percent of the population consider themselves to be White alone (rather than in combination with another racial or ethnic group), compared with 54 percent for Manhattan overall and 45 percent for the whole city. Some 6 percent of the population was living below the poverty level in 1989 (as reported in the 1990 census, the latest census for which income data are available), compared with 21 percent in Manhattan overall and 19 percent in New York City as a whole. Thus, the population in the area of the possible new tail tracks should not be considered to be minority or low-income relative to the larger reference areas of the borough and the city.

### **POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING OPERATION**

Once the new tail tracks are in place, no impacts would occur as a result of operation of LIRR trains in these tunnels. The trains would operate at very low speeds, and therefore would not result in significant adverse noise or vibration impacts. Further, as described above, the location of the new tail tracks—130 feet below the surface within rock—is of similar depth below street level, and within similar geological conditions to the Manhattan tunnels analyzed in the FEIS. In addition, ambient noise and vibration conditions in this area are similar to those at Manhattan locations analyzed in the FEIS. The new tail track tunnels would be beneath the Lexington Avenue subway tunnels under Park Avenue, similar to the location of the new East Side Access tunnels analyzed in the FEIS, which were beneath the Metro-North Railroad tunnels under Park Avenue north of Grand Central Terminal.

The tail track tunnels' ventilation system would operate during normal operations to exhaust warm air from the tunnels. This air would be exhausted to street level through grates in the sidewalk at a location between East 37th and East 40th Streets near Park Avenue. The presence of grates in the sidewalk would not result in adverse impacts on land use, visual character, neighborhood character, or historic resources, particularly considering that such grates are common throughout Manhattan. The air exhausted from the tunnel would be similar to what occurs at other sidewalk grates throughout Manhattan, and would not adversely affect pedestrian conditions. Similarly, no significant adverse impacts would occur in other impact areas considered in the FEIS.

As described earlier, the population in this area is not low-income or minority in nature, so no environmental justice concerns would be raised by the presence of the new tail tracks.

## **C. NEW 50TH STREET FACILITY**

### **POTENTIAL DESIGN CHANGE**

This option would involve acquiring four low-rise (five- and six-story) buildings at 44, 46, 48, and 50 East 50th Street, between Park and Madison Avenues, to allow construction of a support building for the East Side Access Project. The existing buildings would be demolished and replaced with a new facility housing loading docks, cooling towers, ventilation equipment, and emergency generators. This facility would be in addition to the East 44th Street ventilation plant discussed in the FEIS.

This proposal is superior to the design analyzed in the FEIS since it would consolidate many ancillary facilities in one location and reduce construction and maintenance costs. The FEIS design included a ventilation facility in the Madison Avenue concourse with fresh air intakes in sidewalk grates along 49th Street and exhaust grates on both sides of 50th Streets. In addition, mechanical equipment such as cooling towers was to be installed on the roof of GCT. The project also envisioned using the existing GCT truck docks at Depew Place. As the design proceeded, several issues arose that led to the proposed design modification, which incorporates all of the above ancillary uses. First, the existing Depew Place truck docks, located approximately ½ mile from the new LIRR terminal, are presently operating at capacity. A screening analysis of alternate locations was performed that identified East 50th Street as the preferred location. Second, the cut-and-cover work on both 49th and 50th Streets would require a costly relocation of utilities and Con Edison underground vaults. Last, the rooftop cooling towers that were to be located on GCT would have been far from the chillers, requiring substantial piping and resulting in a poor design in terms of operations and maintenance.

The new structure, approximately 80 feet square and 66 feet high, would have four floors and a basement at the concourse level and would combine all of the needed functions into one location. The ground floor would have loading docks with two bays for 40-foot-long trucks, a bay for vans or small trucks, and one bay for a large dumpster/compactor. Trucks at the loading docks would be fully accommodated within the structure and would not extend out into the street. The loading docks would serve the approximately 18,000 square feet of retail space in the new concourse. The structure would house fresh air intakes, exhaust vents, and HVAC equipment with rooftop cooling towers. A plan and section of the proposed structure are provided in Figures 2 and 3.

#### **AFFECTED AREA**

As shown in Figure 4, the buildings on East 50th Street between Park and Madison Avenues are predominantly commercial (office). The buildings to be acquired contain ground-floor retail space and restaurants, with commercial space above (see Figure 5). They are flanked on both sides by large office buildings, one fronting on Park Avenue (the 25-story building at 300 Park Avenue) and the other on Madison Avenue (the 40-story building at 437 Madison Avenue). Loading dock facilities for those buildings are located adjacent to the proposed site on both sides. The building at 300 Park Avenue is “L” shaped, and thus also abuts the back of three of the four buildings proposed for acquisition. The fourth building to be acquired abuts a two-story building on 49th Street occupied by a restaurant. On the opposite (north) side of 50th Street, the block between Park and Madison Avenues is occupied by a large, 33-story building fronting on Park Avenue (320 Park Avenue), with a loading dock facing the project site; a smaller 2-story building occupied by a restaurant space directly across from the project site; and the Helmsley Palace Hotel on the west half of the block (including the main entrance to the hotel and the well-known Le Cirque 2000 restaurant).

The buildings to be acquired are not potential historic resources. Although these buildings were constructed as townhouse structures, they have been substantially altered and retain little architectural integrity (see Figure 5). On the north side of 50th Street, the Villard Houses at the corner of Madison Avenue are a NYCL and listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The former Villard Houses are a set of six brownstones facing a courtyard on Madison Avenue, with side elevations on 50th and 51st Streets. They are now part of the Helmsley Palace Hotel, which in addition to the former brownstones also includes a 51-story tower behind (east of) the brownstones that extends through the block from 50th to 51st Street. This modern high-rise tower effectively separates the historic Villard Houses from the proposed project site, which is across 50th Street and farther east than the hotel tower.

This block of 50th Street, like the rest of East Midtown, is busy with traffic and pedestrians. East 50th Street is also a crosstown bus route for the M50 and M27 buses, which head east on 50th Street and return west on 49th Street.

### **POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING CONSTRUCTION**

As described in the FEIS, the rights of owners and tenants of real property to be acquired to implement the project are protected under the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, and the Uniform Relocation Act Amendments of 1987 (together, the “Uniform Act”). Under the Uniform Act, the owners of the buildings and the businesses to be displaced would receive just compensation for their property, relocation assistance, and other benefits (described in Chapter 5 of the FEIS). As described in the FEIS for other businesses to be displaced, it is anticipated that the displaced businesses would be successful in locating suitable alternative space.

Construction of the proposed building would be like other building construction, which is a common occurrence in New York City. Any adverse effects would be temporary and limited to the immediate area (e.g., adjacent buildings, street, and sidewalks). The construction work would be contained mostly within the site, with very little off-site disruption.

Possible adverse effects could include disruption to pedestrian and vehicular traffic and increased noise and fugitive dust. Construction would require the temporary loss of the adjoining sidewalk and one lane from 50th Street. As described for other construction locations in the FEIS, a maintenance and protection of traffic plan would be employed to ensure continued passage of the taxis and buses on the 50th Street transitway. Currently, through traffic other than buses and taxis is not permitted on East 50th Street, because of its status as a transitway. With the maintenance and protection of traffic plan, the bus and taxi volumes on this street could be accommodated during the construction phases without adverse impacts to traffic flow.

Any increases in noise or dust from construction activities at the site would be temporary, most likely occurring during the day, and would not be noticeable outside the immediate area surrounding the site. The construction of the building would be similar to what occurs on a daily basis throughout Manhattan and would not result in significant impacts on the surrounding area.

Other than the temporary disruptions described above, construction of the new 50th Street facility would not result in adverse effects in other impact areas analyzed in the EIS. Overall, construction activities would not result in significant adverse impact in land use, social conditions, economic conditions, visual character, historic or archaeological resources (as the site is already occupied by buildings with basements, any potential for archaeological resources has already been destroyed), natural resources, hazardous materials, traffic and transportation, noise, vibration, or air quality.

As described below under “Potential Impacts During Operation,” few people live in the immediate vicinity of the proposed 50th Street facility. Construction activities, which would be typical of any new building, would not raise issues of environmental justice.

### **POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING OPERATION**

Once the project is in operation, activities at the 50th Street facility would have a minor effect on the surrounding environment. Issues of concern include land use compatibility and visual character, traffic congestion, air quality, and noise.

In terms of land use, the new building would reinforce the service entrance character of the block already established by the presence of three other loading dock areas. The building would be similar to the other commercial structures on the block; however, it would contain only a small amount of office space. Visually, the new building would replace four small buildings with one mid-rise building, creating a more uniform appearance. Again, the appearance of this building would reinforce the character of the block as the rear of most of the buildings on the block.

With respect to traffic, operations at the proposed facility would involve the arrival and departure of various trucks throughout the day. Based on the estimated 18,000 square feet of retail space (primarily small shops with limited, if any, food establishments) in the new concourse, approximately 15 trucks would make deliveries at the new loading dock over the course of a day. These trucks would consist of a mix of vehicles ranging from small service and delivery vans to large 40-foot box and garbage trucks. Most of the deliveries would arrive during off-peak hours. In the peak hour, approximately one to two trucks, consisting mostly of vans and small refrigerator trucks, would use the loading docks. This small number of vehicle trips would not have a significant impact on traffic conditions along East 50th Street. As shown in Figure 2, the vehicles would fit within the loading dock area and would not extend into the sidewalk or street.

The mechanical equipment in the East 50th Street facility would be designed to meet all applicable noise standards and regulations, similar to what was discussed in the FEIS for the East 44th Street ventilation plant. Due to the high level of activity on East 50th Street as well as noise from the adjacent commercial buildings, noise from operation of equipment at the East 50th Street facility would not result in a significant adverse impact.

During normal operation, exhaust from the facility's ventilation system would consist of clean air from the station caverns, concourse, and/or tunnel spaces. During an emergency situation, smoke would be purged from the station and discharged through tunnel exhaust systems, including the exhaust system in the East 50th Street facility. This is similar to what was described in the FEIS for the East 44th Street ventilation building. Since the discharge of smoke during emergencies would only occur on a short-term basis when needed, no significant adverse impacts would result.

Overall, addition of a new 50th Street ventilation facility would not result in significant adverse impacts in any of the analysis areas presented in the FEIS. In addition to the topics described above, no significant adverse impacts would occur from introduction of the new building in terms of social or economic conditions, historic resources (the new building would be visually compatible with the rest of the block and would not therefore adversely affect the context of nearby resources), archaeological resources, natural resources, or hazardous materials.

The new facility also would not raise issues of environmental justice. The census tract that includes the affected block of East 50th Street was part of the overall Manhattan study area included in the FEIS in the consideration of environmental justice. As described earlier, that study area does not have a high population of low-income or minority residents compared to the borough or city overall. Specific data for the affected census tract (Tract 102, which extends from Park to Fifth Avenue, 49th to 56th Street) demonstrate that the area is predominantly non-residential. In this 14-block area, the total population in 2000 was 269 people, of whom 95 percent considered themselves White only (much higher than the Manhattan total of 54 percent or the citywide share of 45 percent). In 1990, some 25 percent of these people were living below the poverty level, which is slightly higher than the Manhattan total of 21 percent and the citywide total of 19 percent. However, no significant adverse impacts would occur to this small population group as a result of the new 50th Street facility, so environmental justice issues would not occur.

## D. LOOP TRACK MODIFICATIONS

### POTENTIAL DESIGN CHANGE

The project is proposing a change in the location of a loop track at Sunnyside Yard leading to the LIRR's Existing Rail Yard (formerly known as Yard A). Sunnyside Yard currently operates with three loop tracks. The FEIS considered a layout with one additional loop track, to be added on property owned by Amtrak, inside the other three tracks. This would require construction of a tunnel to allow the loop track to pass beneath the mainline tracks. Based on additional engineering design and constructability analysis, it is now proposed to construct an additional loop track outside the other loop tracks. A new, outside loop track would give the Long Island Rail Road valuable flexibility in its Sunnyside operations by creating two entrances to the Existing Rail Yard. The outer loop track would be less complicated to construct than an inner loop track, because it could use the existing 43rd Street bridge to pass beneath the mainline, eliminating the need for a new tunnel through the mainline embankment. In addition, an outer loop track could be shared with Amtrak while a new inner loop track could not, because of grade changes that would limit the possibility of crossovers between tracks. A new outer loop track would not eliminate the possibility of an additional, inner loop track as well. In that case, the yard would have a total of five loop tracks. The design of inner and outer loop tracks will be coordinated with Amtrak.

The additional outer loop track would involve expanding the limits of the Sunnyside Yard rail complex to the east, to occupy the sidewalk space beneath and close to the mainline bridge at 43rd Street. The area affected by the new loop track is shown in Figure 6 (the new loop track is labeled "outer sidewalk loop"). Figure 7 provides a sectional view of the new loop track's location in the current sidewalk space beneath the existing mainline bridge. Approximately 400 feet of existing sidewalk space would be affected. The new loop track would also require the acquisition of additional industrial property along 43rd Street not described in the FEIS. These properties are similar in use and character to those identified in the FEIS. In the FEIS, the industrial building at 3856-3864 43rd Street (Lots 200, 195, and 192) was to be acquired for the westbound bypass. As shown in Figure 6, the proposed change to the loop track location would require the acquisition of additional, adjacent private property at 3650-3652 43rd Street (Lot 191), as well as approximately 6,100 square feet of sidewalk from the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT). In addition to those properties at 3856-3864 and 3650-3652 43rd Street, the project would also require some portion or all of several other parcels on 43rd Street. Specifically, these industrial private properties are at 3640 43rd Street (Lot 189), 3638 43rd Street (Lot 185), and 3630 43rd Street (Lot 375). Further surveys are needed to determine the specific area of land to be acquired from these properties.

As shown in the cross section provided in Figure 7, the proposed outer loop track would occupy the space between the existing concrete bridge piers adjacent to the current loop track and the steel piers at the sidewalk's edge. The sidewalk could be relocated outside the steel piers, into the lane currently used for parking. This would result in the loss of approximately 20 to 30 parking spaces. Alternatively, the parking lane could remain and the sidewalk could be eliminated on this side of the street.

### AFFECTED AREA

The surrounding area is markedly different in character north and south of the east-west running mainline tracks and bridge. To the north, the area is predominantly industrial, while to the south, it is residential (see Figure 8).

North of the mainline tracks, a series of industrial buildings front on 43rd Street (these buildings are shown in the photos in Figure 9). These properties abut the Sunnyside Yard rail complex to the west. At the corner of 43rd Street and Northern Boulevard, a large Pathmark supermarket fronts on Northern Boulevard. Across 43rd Street from the industrial uses, the New York Presbyterian Church occupies a large new building along the north side of 37th Avenue, just north of the elevated mainline tracks. A large accessory parking lot for the church is located across the street on the south side of 37th Avenue. More industrial/auto-related uses are located just north of the church, including a car and truck rental lot.

South of the mainline bridge, the area west of 43rd Street is dominated by the Sunnyside Yard rail complex. A tall chain link fence along the street separates the yard from the surrounding neighborhood (see photos in Figure 10). The east side of 43rd Street marks the beginning of the Sunnyside Gardens residential neighborhood. This neighborhood consists of low-rise (generally two-story) brick houses with attached one-story garages (see Figure 11). Many of the blocks have landscaped interior courtyards.

This residential area is part of the 16-block Sunnyside Gardens Historic District (S/NR), a planned residential community built between 1924 and 1935. Sunnyside Gardens was conceived and designed by the founders of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) and was the first planned community in the United States that reflected the utopian ideal of the British garden city movement. The movement favored the development of small, self-sufficient communities with plenty of open space to replace what was perceived to be an unhealthy and congested urban environment.

The new loop track location is across 43rd Street from the northwest corner of the Sunnyside Gardens neighborhood. In this area, the layout of the residential neighborhood reflects its development in proximity to the industrial Sunnyside Yard rail complex. Along the east side of 43rd Street and both sides of Barnett Avenue near 43rd Street, a wall of one-story garages face the rail complex (see Figure 11). These garages act as “bookends” to the block between 43rd and 44th Streets and Barnett and Skillman Avenues, the closest block of the historic district to the loop tracks. The remainder of the block is laid in much the same fashion as the rest of the historic district, with small rowhouses surrounding interior courts. On this block, the houses are oriented east-west, with the narrow, west ends of the rowhouses facing 43rd Street, behind the garages. These facades have few windows, typically consisting of only two above the garages. In contrast, the long, north-south facades contain balconies and decorative window treatments such as bay windows. Behind the garages, the residents of the closest two-story houses at the western end of the block have views toward the rail complex.

South of the proposed loop track, a small bridge over the loop track provides vehicle access to a large General Motors repair facility that is located inside the loop track, alongside the mainline tracks. As described in the FEIS, the project will relocate this bridge. To the south of the bridge, a warehouse/light industrial building on the west side of 43rd Street abuts the loop track. Just south of the industrial building, a park is located at the corner of Skillman Avenue and 43rd Street. This 2-acre park, George P. Torsney Park, is mostly paved and contains play areas. The park is buffered from the loop track by the bulky warehouse buildings.

Vehicular traffic on 43rd Street is light. Pedestrians use the sidewalks on both sides of 43rd Street, although pedestrian activity is light.

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING CONSTRUCTION

To enable the construction to proceed, additional properties to those discussed in the FEIS would be acquired under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act; as required by that act, property owners would be compensated for the value of their property and relocation expenses. Specifically, additional private property at 3650-3652 43rd Street (Lot 191), and potentially at 3640 43rd Street (Lot 189), 3638 43rd Street (Lot 185), and 3630 43rd Street (Lot 375) would have to be acquired, as would approximately 6,100 square feet of sidewalk from NYCDOT. The photos in Figure 9 show the properties to be acquired. The additional properties to be acquired are similar in form and function to the adjacent properties that were identified in the FEIS. The additional property acquisition requirements of the outer loop track are not expected to result in significant economic impacts for the property owners.

During construction of the outer loop track and adjacent bridge piers, the west side of 43rd Street under the railroad bridge would be closed. Parking would be temporarily suspended on both sides of the street and a single lane with traffic lights may be required at times. When the bridge piers are erected, 43rd Street would be temporarily closed and all traffic would be detoured. This would take place during off-peak hours to minimize the impact on local traffic. The street closings and maintenance and protection of traffic plan would undergo NYCDOT review and approval. Due to the low volume of traffic using 43rd Street, the construction of the outer loop track would not result in any significant adverse traffic impacts.

Noise from construction of the outer loop track would not be any different than what was already disclosed in the FEIS for activities in the same general area such as the bridge over 43rd Street or the work associated with Harold Interlocking east of 43rd Street. Construction of the outer loop track would therefore not significantly affect the character of the Sunnyside Gardens Historic District.

Similar to other areas discussed above, construction of the outer loop track would involve disturbance to subsurface soils, which would be subject to an archaeological review under the Programmatic Agreement with SHPO.

Construction activities associated with the outer loop track would not result in significant adverse impacts in other areas assessed in the FEIS. Overall, this construction work would be in the same general vicinity as work evaluated in the FEIS. No significant adverse impacts would occur to land use, social conditions, economic conditions, visual resources, natural resources, hazardous materials, or air quality. Since construction activities in the area would be similar to those considered in the FEIS, they would not result in issues of environmental justice either.

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING OPERATION

The proposed outer loop track would occupy the sidewalk on the western side of 43rd Street, extending to the steel piers at the sidewalk's edge (see the second photo in Figure 10). The sidewalk could be relocated outside the steel piers, which would require narrowing 43rd Street by removing a parking lane (as shown in Figure 6). Alternatively, the sidewalk could be eliminated from this portion of the street to allow the parking lane to remain. A new barrier would be constructed along the eastern edge of the loop track and the Sunnyside Yard rail complex. This wall would begin north of the mainline bridge, continue under the bridge (between the metal bridge supports that currently separate the sidewalk from the roadway), and south along the edge of the new loop track. About 200 feet south of Barnett Avenue, the new loop track's curve westward would bring it back into the boundaries of the existing rail yard complex, so that the existing sidewalk could remain in place south of this point. The new wall would continue south

along the Sunnyside Yard boundaries in place of the chain link fence that is there today. Trees would be planted in front of the new wall along the sidewalk. Figure 12 illustrates the new wall.

This change at the edge of Sunnyside Yard would have the potential for effects on land use and neighborhood character, visual resources, historic resources, and parking. These are discussed below.

In terms of land use, the potential outer loop track would result in a slight extension of the boundaries of Sunnyside Yard. This would affect only a limited area, and would largely replace existing industrial uses with a different transportation-related use. Railroad use of the properties north of the mainline bridge would change the appearance of that portion of 43rd Street by removing bulky two-story industrial buildings and replacing them with a solid wall surrounding this portion of Sunnyside Yard. Overall, the industrial character of this portion of the street would remain and the change in specific use would not alter the overall neighborhood character of the immediate area. Overall, no significant adverse land use or neighborhood character impact would occur.

The potential for the outer loop track to affect visual resources is limited to the areas where there is an existing line of sight to the proposed physical changes. Visual impacts are assessed by considering the type and number of viewers, the viewer's position or viewpoint, and the values that viewers place on the appearance of the existing visual environment. Different viewer groups tend to have different sensitivities to changes in the visual environment. For example, residents of the nearby Sunnyside Gardens Historic District will likely have a higher sensitivity to visual changes than workers in the area or pedestrians traversing this block.

South of the mainline bridge, the Sunnyside Gardens Historic District viewshed (i.e., the area from which trains operating on the outer loop track would be visible) is limited to an estimated 10 or fewer residences that have direct views (the western houses facing 43rd Street, shown in Figure 11). The houses in the midblock have only oblique views to the loop tracks, if any at all, from their windows. There are no views from any of the gardens on the block, as they are enclosed by the garages. As shown in the second photograph in Figure 10, views toward the yard and area that would be affected by the new loop track are of a four-lane street (including two parking lanes), sidewalk with brush that is not maintained, and a chain-link fence. Beyond the chain-link fence are trees and various mechanical structures associated with Sunnyside Yard. Views also include the concrete bridge, supported by steel piers, that carries the elevated mainline tracks over 43rd Street, as well as the trains that move across the bridge throughout the day.

The proposed changes would affect views from the Sunnyside Gardens Historic District, since the new loop track would bring the rail complex closer to the historic district than it is today. With the proposed outer loop track in place, views of the chain link fence and, through the fence, of the tops of trains moving on the loop track, would be replaced by views of a tall, solid wall (see Figure 12 in comparison with the second photo in Figure 10). Since Sunnyside Gardens has existed in the context of nearby railroad uses—including the elevated viaduct that carries trains along the north side of Barnett Avenue opposite the district as well as Sunnyside Yard and its loop tracks—the extension of the yard complex farther east would not introduce a new incompatible use. The new wall itself would be compatible with the edge of the nearby residential neighborhood; the buffer it would create between Sunnyside Yard and the Sunnyside Gardens Historic District would improve security and minimize any contextual effects resulting from the greater proximity of yard and its operations to the historic district (see Figure 12).

Noise and vibration from rail operations along the loop track would not be noticeable, due to the slow speed of the trains using the track, the presence of the new wall, and the high background

noise from the frequent train passbys on the LIRR mainline passing overhead on the 43rd Street bridge.

The loss of 20 to 30 on-street parking spaces is not expected to create a parking shortfall in the area, as many of the spaces are most likely utilized by employees of the businesses that would be relocated. Plans will be reviewed with NYCDOT, which can determine whether the loss of sidewalk space or parking spaces would be more appropriate.

In all other areas assessed in the FEIS (e.g., air quality, natural resources, hazardous materials), no significant adverse impact would occur as a result of a new outer loop track. The new loop track also would not raise issues of environmental justice. The census tract that includes the residential neighborhood closest to the loop track is Tract 183, which extends from Barnett Avenue to 47th Avenue, 43rd Street to 46th Street. According to the 2000 census, 55 percent of the 6,766 people who live in this census tract consider themselves to be White only, compared with 44 percent for Queens as a whole and 45 percent citywide. The 1990 census reported 10 percent of the population in this census tract as living below the poverty level, compared with 11 percent in Queens and 19 percent citywide. Consequently, this tract does not have a high proportion of minority or low-income population.

## **E. POSSIBLE NEW ENTRANCE AT THE ROOSEVELT HOTEL**

### **POTENTIAL DESIGN CHANGE**

As the design work proceeds on the project, the location of off-street entrances has undergone additional analysis and refinement. The FEIS noted that the entrance locations it described were not final, and that impacts associated with new entrances would be similar even at slightly different locations. As a result of this ongoing design work, a new entrance is being considered on East 46th Street, in the Roosevelt Hotel. As discussed in the FEIS, the Roosevelt Hotel was found to be eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places by the SHPO during the EIS process. Therefore, this new entrance would be provided subject to the review and approval by SHPO, as required by the Programmatic Agreement executed for the project under Section 106.

The new Roosevelt Hotel entrance would provide for:

- Improved passenger flow and travel time reduction from train platforms to 46th Street.
- A greater level of accessibility for passengers near Madison Avenue and 46th Street.
- An in-line connection between the escalator banks located under 46th Street that serve the mezzanine caverns.
- A fire emergency exit required by the State Building Code as determined by maximum allowable travel distances between exits.

The new entrance at the Roosevelt Hotel would require the acquisition and reconstruction of a small portion of the hotel's basement and ground-floor space on East 46th Street. At the street and basement levels, approximately 1,700 and 1,600 square feet, respectively, would be affected. Currently, the street-level space is vacant, while the basement area contains hotel services, circulation, and mechanical equipment. The occupied space would all be relocated as part of the construction of the new entrance. Figure 13 illustrates a section of the proposed new entrance through the Roosevelt Hotel.

On the building's façade, the new entrance would occupy a full bay (former retail window). This would require changes to the marble beneath the existing window. As currently proposed, the entrance would be open (i.e., without doors), with a canopy above it indicating the presence of a

Long Island Rail Road entrance. The entrance space would be completely separate from the interior of the Roosevelt Hotel.

The Roosevelt Hotel historically had an internal passage that led to Grand Central Terminal. However, that passage is not proposed for re-use for the East Side Access Project because it is not wide enough to accommodate the estimated number of passengers that are expected to use this proposed entrance.

### **POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING CONSTRUCTION**

As noted above, the Roosevelt Hotel is eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Therefore, any project activities that affect the hotel are subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. As described above, no work would proceed without review and approval by the SHPO. Work on the hotel may also be subject to Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, as amended, which prohibits actions by the Secretary of Transportation that require “use” of a historic property that is listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register, unless a determination is made that there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of such land, and all possible planning has been undertaken to minimize harm to the 4(f) property.

The proposed alterations to the interior and façade of the Roosevelt Hotel require approval by the SHPO as part of the project’s Programmatic Agreement.

### **POTENTIAL IMPACTS DURING OPERATION**

The new entrance at the Roosevelt Hotel would have no measurable effect on the pedestrian or transportation analyses presented in the FEIS. Therefore, the new entrance would not generate significant traffic, parking, pedestrian or air quality impacts in the study area. Overall, the new entrance would not result in substantial differences in any of the analysis areas presented in the FEIS, with the possible exception of historic resources, as discussed above. No significant adverse impacts would occur on land use, social conditions, economic conditions, visual resources, archaeological resources, natural resources, hazardous materials, or any of the other areas considered in the FEIS.

## **F. CONCLUSIONS**

As discussed above, the proposed project design changes would result in some short-term construction impacts at locations not previously identified in the FEIS. However, these would not constitute significant adverse impacts, and therefore would not require preparation of a Supplemental EIS. In addition, no long-term operational adverse impacts were identified that would require new or additional mitigation measures to be implemented as part of the East Side Access Project. ♦



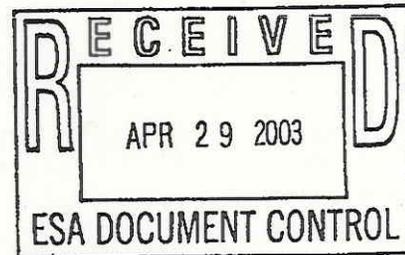
U.S. Department  
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August 30, 2002

Mr. Christopher P. Boylan  
Deputy Executive Director  
Corporate Affairs and Communications  
Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
347 Madison Avenue  
New York, New York 10017-3739



Dear Mr. Boylan:

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has completed its review of your July 19, 2002 correspondence regarding the environmental review of the alternative design options for East Side Access.

The information provided for two projects: the Vent Facility/Loading Dock at 50<sup>th</sup> Street; and Loop Track Modifications at Sunnyside Yard is satisfactory and FTA does not require any further information. Please consider the environmental review for these projects complete.

The other two projects: New Tail Tracks South of Grand Central Terminal and New Entrance at the Roosevelt Hotel still require review under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act in accordance with the East Side Access Programmatic Agreement. FTA looks forward to reviewing the Section 106 information when it is completed.

Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Letitia Thompson  
Regional Administrator

Cc: Sarah Rios, MTA  
Anthony Japha, MTA/LIRR East Side Access  
Joe Petrocelli, MTA/LIRR East Side Access



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July 1, 2002

Mr. Christopher P. Boylan  
Deputy Executive Director  
Corporate Affairs & Communications  
Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
347 Madison Avenue  
New York, New York 10017

**Re: Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Long Island Rail Road  
East Side Access Alternative Design Options**

Dear Mr. Boylan:

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has completed its review of the correspondence dated March 5, 2002 the environmental review of alternative design options for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Long Island Rail Road (MTA/LIRR) East Side Access (ESA) project. Upon receipt of the information requested in this writing, FTA Region 2 will be in a position to approve your requests.

In that regard, please see our comments as follows:

**1. New Tail Tracks South of GCT:**

Although this design option was not included in the FEIS, it allows for the construction of four tail tracks to provide LIRR with operational flexibility during emergencies at Grand Central Terminal. As this option does not call for additional service, as part of East Side Access project, no further environmental analysis is required other than Section 106 review.

**2. The Vent Facility/Loading Dock at 50th Street:**

This design option calls for the acquisition of four properties that were not reviewed under the FEIS. As indicated in the FEIS, LIRR/ESA must follow the Uniform Relocation Act to relocate the displaced tenants and compensate the property owners. Please provide FTA with a full list of the businesses being relocated to ascertain whether there are any Environmental Justice/Title VI issues needing to be addressed. In addition, identify any parking facilities to be included in the property acquisitions? In that regard, identify the number of parking spaces to be lost.

Additionally, there appears to be NYCTA bus stops situated within the proposed improvement area. Please confirm the impacts, if any and how that will be handled with the agencies having jurisdiction.

### **3. Loop Track Modifications at Sunnyside Yard:**

This option would change the location of the proposed loop track in Sunnyside Yard from an inner loop track to an outer loop track. An outer loop track could be shared with Amtrak while a new inner loop track would limit Amtrak operations due to grade changes that would limit the possibility of crossovers between tracks. It is recognized that a new outer loop track does not eliminate the possibility of an additional inner loop track. The FEIS indicated that several properties needed to be acquired to facilitate development of the loop track. The proposed outer loop track requires the purchase of all or partial purchase of several properties. As indicated in the FEIS, MTA/LIRR will follow the Uniform Relocation Act to relocate the displaced tenants and compensate the owners. Please provide us with a full list of the businesses being relocated to ascertain that there are no Environmental Justice/Title VI issues. The FTA is concerned that the westerly sidewalk on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street in Sunnyside, Queens will be taken for the loop track and not replaced. Please work with the New York City Department of Transportation to ensure that pedestrians have adequate sidewalk space on the west side of 43<sup>rd</sup> Street and advise FTA of your negotiations. MTA/LIRR should also coordinate the landscaping around Sunnyside Yard with the appropriate New York City agencies and affected community. In that regard, FTA has received the information demonstrating that outreach has been conducted with the community. Please continue to keep us advised of continuing outreach efforts.

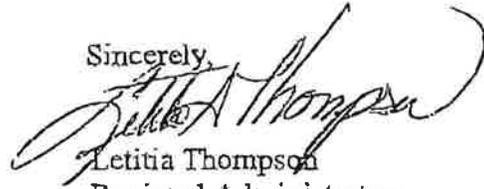
### **4. Possible New Entrance at the Roosevelt Hotel:**

As the Roosevelt Hotel is eligible for landmark status, the new entrance design would have to be approved by FTA and SHPO, as enumerated in the ESA Programmatic Agreement. Please inform us if the vacant retail space becomes tenanted and there is a need to conduct relocation efforts. No further environmental analysis is required, as there are no major impacts to the Hotel.

Thank you, for your assistance, in the field in reviewing these design changes. Please keep us informed as to future design changes. Upon receipt of the information contained in this correspondence, FTA will be in a position to approve your alternative design option requests.

Lastly, while this correspondence does not include information that identifies the influence these design changes will have on the project budget, it is expected that the ESA budget information we are scheduled to receive at the end of July will address those issues.

Sincerely,



Letitia Thompson  
Regional Administrator

cc: Anthony Japha, LIRR - East Side Access  
Joseph Petrocelli, LIRR - East Side Access  
East Side Access File