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Keynote Address

Improving Metropolitan Mobility: Strategies for the Bi-state Region

Keynote Speaker: Stanley Brezenoff
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

The Transportation Research Forum was founded here in New York City 35 years ago, and it is fitting that this year's meeting be held here because, whatever your professional specialty, it is in motion somewhere in the metropolitan area, and a local TRF member is likely to be in the middle of the action.

There is a lot going on in transportation that translates directly into issues, problems, and concerns that are fundamental to this region, to this country, and to this society.

For example, double-stack rail service, high speed ferries, new airport transit links, electronic toll and fare collections, "smart highway" systems, new rail transit links, and improved intermodal rail transfers, are all happening here and they all stand to make a difference in the lives of the people who live here.

This region, America's busiest gateway and biggest marketplace, is mobilizing itself to take full advantage of the changes sweeping transportation in America.

We are applying intermodal thinking, new technologies, and increased federal funding across the region.

The Port Authority and our sister agencies in both states are working together to build more capacity into the regional network. We intend to make

our services more flexible and more reliable in all aspects.

I will provide a quick tour of the major work underway and sketch the vision that is emerging of a unified regional network for moving people and goods.

Dozens of initiatives are underway. Taken together, they promise steady progress toward a system that offers wider transportation choices, more competitive gateways to world trade, easier access to economic opportunity, and reduced air pollution without reduced mobility.

If you are working in this region now, you are already part of this new wave of investment and service improvement.

If you are with a company that serves national transportation markets, you should look to the new opportunities opening up here for public and private partnerships to move people and goods within the region and through our gateway facilities.

Obviously, the new national directions embodied in ISTEA and other new federal laws have opened the way for strategic public works investment that can sharpen the competitiveness of mature regions like ours.

These policy reforms coincide with a set of emerging technologies and new ser-

vice concepts that offer us new tools for improving regional transportation. We may not have been the first to adopt most of these recent innovations, but you will never find so many of them in one place as you will here through the 90's and beyond.

The Port Authority is extending itself as never before in our 72-year history, with a broadened capital program, and with service-oriented changes in our operations. We want to ensure that the region takes every opportunity presented by these changes through the decade. Frankly, we know ISTEA is a limited-time offer coming out of Washington.

Our regions' port operations feel the presence of competition from other global and domestic business centers.

With thousands of business customers and tenants using our crossings, terminals, and commercial spaces, we know they need better service and tight cost control to survive their competitors.

That is why we are reshaping the way we do our business to be more responsive in providing transportation, developing partnerships, and planning for the future. Our agency is a unique public enterprise. It is self-supporting, spans two dynamic states, and is home to more, and different, public and private partnerships than any other area.

The region has to have its transportation act together to keep the jobs and business activities it has now and to capture new economic growth. We are in a race with competing regions to upgrade and inter-connect the in-place transportation assets that many other cities are creating from the ground up.

The race isn't over by any means, but our pace is quickening. The region's elected leadership has strongly supported

new transportation investment by providing taxes, tolls, and other resources when needed. Both states have promoted projects and planning that move the region toward a more seamless network.

Obviously, I won't pretend that New York and New Jersey don't sometimes compete with each other. If you listened to the news this morning, you noted that 900 jobs are moving to Jersey City from their current place in Manhattan, and the news received a lot of attention. But that internal regional competition has sharpened the region's determination to support economic growth, and it hasn't impeded progress on strategic transportation investment benefitting both states.

We also value the federal government's recent support for the critical role played by transportation systems in metropolitan life and national competitiveness. International gateways in this and other regions are national assets. We see a much improved policy framework for melding federal, state, local, and private sector investments to support national goals.

In this climate, the Port Authority has been able to advance its ambitious airport redevelopment programs, port improvements, and vital interstate transportation investments. Both state transportation departments have strengthened their planning and network management efforts.

New Jersey Transit and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority have been improving transit systems that are the envy of every urban area with a Clean Air Act problem. More than half of all transit rides in the United States occur here. Today, the Port Authority, and these two transit agencies, serve a 17-county region that is

home to 18 million people and 8 million jobs. More than 700 million tons of freight are moved within the region each year.

Each weekday, all these commuters and cargo containers go into motion together. They share an overlapping network of highways and rail lines overburdened on many critical routes and managed by hosts of operators.

What is changing now is that the region's major transportation players are forming a series of working partnerships to improve the regional network. We are moving on three broad fronts and I'll sketch the array of efforts that are now underway.

First, we want smoother connections and improved services. Every toll crossing and highway in the region should be part of a common electronic toll collections system within the next few years, allowing truckers and others to maintain a single payment account and save time on the road too.

The MTA is beginning implementation of electronic fare card systems on the subway, the heart of the region's rail transit network. Subway fare cards open the way for major expansion of the region's existing joint ticketing and transit marketing efforts. PATH (The Port Authority Trans-Hudson commuter railroad) Quick Card is already offered with New Jersey Transit Commuter Rail monthly tickets.

More reliable traffic flow for the region's busy highways is happening through TRANSCOM, a 15-agency tri-state group. TRANSCOM links operations centers for major vehicular and transit facilities. It is a point of coordination as we put in place IVHS systems and motorist advisory services. Employer support of transit is growing through the

TransitCenter, a marketing alliance of the MTA, NJT and PATH. The TransitCenter is signing up more businesses for TransitCheks. TransitCheks are vouchers that employers can give workers to help pay transit fares on every public and private transit system in the region.

Our airport mobility is being upgraded. These projects include major terminal and frontage improvements at LaGuardia, new roadway systems at JFK, and a people mover linking terminals and parking at Newark International Airport.

These projects, plus air cargo improvements, and other work, reflect \$1.3 billion spent by the Port Authority since 1988, with nearly \$2.0 billion more programmed through 1997. Airlines and other businesses are investing nearly as much equity at the airports at the same time.

The second of our three broad fronts includes many major new services that are in the works.

Transit access to all three regional airports is on the front burner.

Plans for linking each airport to the regional rail system are going into environmental impact study reviews this fall. We estimate that Kennedy and LaGuardia links could eliminate as many as 500,000 miles of roadway travel daily.

High speed ferries and other waterborne links are augmenting the regional transportation system. Governor Cuomo last month announced plans for several new routes linking Manhattan with three boroughs and Westchester County. Light rail transit is coming to New Jersey's redeveloping Hudson waterfront, and may be across 42nd

Street here in Manhattan. NJT is moving forward with expanded commuter rail connections linking services within New Jersey and bringing more trains into Penn Station in New York.

The third of our three broad fronts, and, perhaps most important, we are strengthening intermodal freight links. On-dock rail service and double-stack access is available at our Port Newark-Elizabeth container port. Rail-related truck trips are down by 50%. A bar-code system is saving truckers time at the terminal. At our Auto Marine Terminal, good access and good service by trained local workers boosted volume by 70% last year, in the midst of a recession, to make this the nation's largest auto-handling port.

A barge service links Brooklyn's Red Hook Terminal with the mainland, bypassing long-term reconstruction work on the Gowanus Expressway.

Construction continues on the Oak Point Link to the Harlem River intermodal yards. We are acting with both states and New York City to preserve the rail freight right-of-way to Staten Island through Cranford Junction.

We are also enhancing truck access on the existing bi-state highway network. That is another critical need. We are looking with both state transportation departments and other agencies at future truck access needs around the Newark Airport and Seaport complex and the (New Jersey) Turnpike connection to the George Washington Bridge.

Two more initiatives at an early stage of development are especially important to bi-state markets served by the Port Authority. First, we are reviewing a potential modernization and expansion of

the Goethels Bridge linking the region via Union County and Staten Island.

Second, we are planning with other agencies to take a very serious look at creating a major new rail connection for transit and freight across the core of the region.

Accomplishment of all or even most of these projects is obviously not guaranteed. Funding is a constant issue, but these projects generate economic value that should make them affordable to a region concerned with competitiveness and improved air quality.

A lot depends on how well we can explain the benefits of these projects.

Transportation does not rank high among public concerns in campaign polls and surveys.

But jobs do, quality of life does, the environment does, a good local tax base does.

We have to explain how better transportation brings these things into reach.

We have to remind people that the reason this region has been so strong economically over the centuries is because of the wisdom, courage and conviction of our fore-fathers, and because of their willingness to put money on the line that had pay-off only over the long term.

We today enjoy the benefits and fruits of that foresight and that investment.

We have the same obligation to the region if we expect our children and our grandchildren to enjoy the kind of prosperity that this region has enjoyed over the years. I will end with a story. Governor Al Smith, a very astute

politician, was a populist and a champion of public works investment. He campaigned tirelessly in and out of office for far-sighted steps like the creation of the Port Authority.

When he made the case to legislators in Albany, he didn't cite statistics. Instead, he told a story – a very sad story – of the tortured path over many days of Mr. Potato.

Mr. Potato came from a farm in Ohio. Over many days, Mr. Potato made his way to market in New York. That story helped Al Smith prevail in the legislature.

That is the kind of approach and advocacy we need to bring to our current efforts.

Food on the table, a new inner-city job, a commuter arriving home in time for dinner, a breath of fresh air – that is what good transportation does for people and communities, and we need to keep, and increase, all those benefits here in this region.

Question - You mentioned building transit connections to the airports. Is it really going to happen after all these years, and how will it be funded?

We have a plan for using revenues from the passenger facility charge to create rail access directly to LaGuardia and Kennedy Airports from Manhattan. This is an ambitious project and we are optimistic about being able to do it. But, it faces a number of hurdles.

This would be on our own tracks. It would be an AGT (Automated Guideway Transit) that would run through rights-of-way on the Vanwyck Expressway and the Grand Central.

Question - Is the barge service you referenced in your speech the same as the Cross Harbor Railroad float-bridge service?

Brezenoff - Actually, what I described was not Cross Harbor (Railroad). Cross Harbor continues to operate.

What I alluded to was a barge service that was created about a year or a year and a half ago as mitigation for what is going to be an 8 or 10 year reconstruction effort of the Gowanus Expressway.

The Gowanus Expressway runs along the coastline of the port of New York in Brooklyn.

Even under the best of circumstances, the Gowanus Expressway is a highly congested roadway.

The only way cargo coming into the port at Red Hook and the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal can get to the mainland is to get on the Gowanus.

Cargo is trucked through Manhattan, or cargo goes the other direction, to LaGuardia, and then on to final destination.

This long range construction project responds to operators of the terminal, and to shipping lines. They said they couldn't risk the additional substantial delays.

So, we created a barge service that takes cargo landed at Red Hook and transports it across to New Jersey where it can be railed or more easily trucked.

The barge service has been very popular. We are going to introduce some productivity improvements which will reduce the cost.

Question - How do you respond to criticism that the Oak Point Link is already obsolete because it will not enable double-stack service into New York City?

Brezenoff - The question of the future of the Oak Point Link has a range of answers, from the very optimistic, to sort of a wait-and-see what develops, to the extremely pessimistic.

Among those who are most optimistic about it, there is a belief that ultimately the clearances up through Selkirk will be increased so that more volume could come into Oak Point Link.

But, that requires a much greater investment than current resources permit.

The only way I can really answer the question is to say that New York State, New York City, and the Port Authority have now put considerable resources into the Oak Point Link. So there will be much incentive from those entities to

make this work. That would probably include prodding Conrail to use it.

Question - What about the possibility of using Penn Station tunnels for freight?

Brezenoff - We are very interested in the possibility of freight coming into Penn Station at night on Amtrak rail tracks. We believe that would be a good use of resources. Amtrak does not agree. We are going to continue to discuss this with them.

Amtrak has said that they need those tracks at night for repair trains, and they might be concerned that freight operations at night will impact their passenger activities the following day.

But, certainly from a capacity perspective, it seems to make a great deal of sense to take advantage of the rail tracks at night to get freight in, and start getting better utilization out of the Sunnyside yards carrying the freight right through.