



Borough traffic strategy crucial to Island's future, experts agree

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"I would want a network analysis for a larger region," transit policy expert says

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- When the Empire Outlets open on the St. George waterfront **in 2016** and the New York Wheel opens next door **in 2017**, thousands of people are expected to pour onto the Staten Island Ferry from Manhattan every day and head over to the new tourist attractions.

But what about those who drive from New Jersey, Brooklyn, other parts of Staten Island and elsewhere?

Planning and transportation experts say some type of plan is needed to ensure the throngs added to the already slow-moving traffic on Staten Island don't choke the borough.

Sam Schwartz, a leading transportation engineer whose projects include transportation logistics of Brooklyn's Barclay's Center, the Mets' CitiField and the World Trade Center, has been hired by the two developers to mitigate the impact that new traffic will have on the borough.

While "Gridlock Sam," as he is known, recommended **traffic mitigation measures**, like traffic light improvements, re-striping new turn lanes and expanding and extending streets near the site to ensure better access, the city Department of Transportation has not outlined what specific measures it will take.

In a meeting with the Advance in March, DOT Commissioner Polly Trottenberg noted the urgency of the matter and said, "I think we're still figuring out what is going to be some of the best plans here. It's going to take some smart traffic maneuvering, that's for sure. Because we hope a lot of people will come by ferry, but we know not everyone is going to come by ferry. People from New Jersey are going to drive over."

She noted then that the DOT has been working with Schwartz and the city Economic Development Corporation but had no answers to the traffic issues yet.

"Believe me, we're hearing loud and clear the sense of urgency out here," she said in March. "So, I'm hoping we'll start having ideas pretty quickly that we're going to start sharing."

Even if the DOT does include the aforementioned traffic mitigation measures, some transportation experts argue

TRAFFIC TROUBLE DEAD AHEAD

Will the borough be ready?

This is part of a periodic series on the transportation challenges the borough will face with the coming of the New York Wheel, the Empire Outlets, new housing projects, retail developments and other projects across the Island.

that it probably won't be enough to handle the influx of automobiles throughout the Island — not just on the North Shore.

LARGER REGION AFFECTED

Joseph L. Schofer is a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern University with a focus in transportation policy.

With the exception of tourists from Manhattan taking the ferry, "it wouldn't surprise me if they drove," he said. "Reasonable forecasts can be made to prepare for that."

Planners can look at the numbers — trip generation rates — and make analytically-driven judgments about where people are coming from, including how they will get there: Public transit or cars.

This is a focused development "so people are only going to come from certain directions," he added. And that means that immediate streets nearby aren't the only ones that should be studied, but the other avenues on which people will travel to end up in St. George.

If he were involved as a planner, "I would want a network analysis for a larger region," he said.

While he has only a casual knowledge of the proposed projects, Schofer said projects of their size — and expected number of visitors — normally warrant a separate traffic impact study.

The Environmental Impact Statement included a **transportation analysis** for the projects that studied about two dozen intersections north of the Staten Island Expressway. It also looked at pedestrian traffic, bus routes, ferry traffic, Manhattan subways and parking.

The statement concluded that, "The proposed project would add a substantial number of vehicle trips to the study area."

The DOT has required that 10 intersections be studied after the developments open.

There is \$1 million in a traffic mitigation fund. But the DOT has not put out plans for how and if it will use it.

Jonathan Peters, a professor of finance and chairman of the department at the College of Staten Island, is also a research fellow at the University Transportation Research Center at the City College of New York and does research in regional planning, and road and mass transit financing.

He noted that like the Barclay's Center, which "they plunked down right on top of Atlantic Avenue because you have a convergence," the St. George projects are also at a nexus with the ferry, Staten Island Railway and bus lines.

"That's a real benefit," he said. "This is actually in a location where there's a lot of good transit opportunities."

But he acknowledged, "it's a challenge" to address drivers. "You have to adapt and change over time," he said.

Peak traffic times will be heavy and "New York City planning has to do its job and decide whether it has to do a full-blown traffic study."

The projects should be viewed with an eye on balancing the economic growth with traffic mitigation because "it will present some challenges," he said. "Some of it will have to be worked out as it comes into play."

James Rausse, president of the New York Metro Chapter of the American Planning Association, said the chapter supports the planned development in "very walkable" St. George and like Peters, pointed to the mass transit options, "all with capacity to absorb many of the new visitors."

"In addition to the mitigation measures called out in the [Final Environmental Impact Statement], the APA New York Metro Chapter encourages project sponsors and developers to create a Transportation Demand Management program to further lessen the impact of auto traffic on the area by promoting alternative travel modes and off-hour deliveries."

When all is said and done, Peters sees the St. George location as a "sweet little spot" for the developments.

"Staten Island has challenges in terms of its transportation and infrastructure," he said. "This happens to be a location where the infrastructure is in place."

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