

Comments at Transit Riders Council – April 16, 2008
by Matthew Katz
President, Roosevelt Island Residents Association

Good evening, Mr. Roberts and Members of the Board:

My name is Matthew Katz and I am the President of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association, RIRA, elected to three two-year terms by my neighbors. A little background:

Roosevelt Island is a planned community in the heart of New York City, owned by the City and leased to the State until 2068. Our commuting population is presently composed of 12,000 residents plus the employees of two chronic-care hospitals, various retail stores, and the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation.

We are served by an aerial Tramway, currently operating at capacity, and the F train subway line. During the morning commute, the subway platform is jammed, and my neighbors must let several trains pass before squeezing into a car. The experts tell us that the problem is caused by increased ridership throughout the length of Queens. We know the causes. What has not been addressed are the solutions to our growing transportation problems. After all, we are an island and we can't opt for a different bus or subway line when ours are out of service or operating at beyond capacity.

Residential development on Roosevelt Island continues to increase our population. Buildings #5 and #6 of our Southtown complex will be occupied by next winter, to be followed by Buildings #7, #8, and #9. This will surely increase our population to 16,000 or so within the next five years. In addition, there is discussion of converting Goldwater Hospital's ten-acre site into more residential development. The problem of how we will get to work, get to school, get to doctors' appointments must be addressed now before our crush becomes a crisis.

A more immediate problem is the question of how to supplement our transportation mix when the Tram is out of service for major renovations starting in 2009. During the rush hour, the Tram carries 125 commuters every four minutes to Second Avenue and 59th Street. We've heard vague plans of some bus service to be directed to Queens Plaza to compensate for the loss of service. At present, we don't know whether the Tram outage will be for six months, nine months or some other period, but planning should begin now. Clearly, the RIOC fleet of Red Buses is inadequate to deal with the Tram downtime. I know that our Assemblyman, Micah Kellner, addressed some of these problems to you in his March 19th letter, but I want to reinforce his concern that the Transit Authority must deal with these issues and in a timely manner.

When I spoke to your predecessor, Larry Reuter, in similar circumstances during the winter of 2002, to press for the inclusion of the Tram in the MetroCard system, he was enthusiastic. We began a two-year process of negotiation with RIOC [the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation], in which I acted as a factor, and with the help of then City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, that culminated in the elimination of the last two-fare zone in New York City.

My goal is to enlist your assistance in maintaining my Island community's ability to move freely to and from Manhattan. At present, we haven't a single working dock on Roosevelt Island and, even with the inclusion of Water Taxi service, this will only be a drop in the bucket of our transit needs. I look to you and your organization to provide the solutions that will maintain the viability of my island home.

Thank you for your time.