

***Expert Roundtable on Transportation  
and Outdoor Spaces***  
-Summary of Findings-

**BACKGROUND**

Launched in 2007, the *Age-friendly New York City* initiative is assessing local structures and services in order to develop strategies that will make New York City more accessible to, and inclusive of, older people with varying needs and capacities. This work, which is being carried out by the New York Academy of Medicine in collaboration with both the Mayor and the City Council of New York, is particularly focused on eight domains of city life, including:

- outdoor spaces and buildings;
- transportation;
- housing;
- respect and social inclusion;
- social participation;
- communication and information;
- civic participation and employment; and,
- community support and health services.

Now in the assessment phase, the initiative is collecting information about the advantages and barriers older New Yorkers experience in the eight areas of city living outlined above – and what changes may be needed. To inform this process, the New York City Council and the New York Academy of Medicine are co-convening a series of seven roundtable discussions to talk directly with experts from various sectors. The purpose of the roundtables is to identify the ideas, concerns, and ideas relating to the anticipated growth of the City's older population *and* to identify contributions that these respective sectors can make (and in some instances, have already made) toward bettering the lives of New York's older residents -- and what may be needed to develop/expand these efforts. The seven roundtables, which were carried out in January and February of 2008, focused on the following topic areas:

- 1) *Business*, chaired by Partnership for New York City President Kathryn Wylde;
- 2) *Housing Development*, chaired by Citizens Housing and Planning Council Executive Director Jerilyn Perine;
- 3) *Civic Engagement*, chaired by Wagner School of Public Service Professor Walter Stafford;
- 4) *Transportation and Outdoor Spaces*, chaired by Straphangers Campaign Senior Attorney Gene Russianoff;
- 5) *Tenant Rights*, chaired by Citywide Taskforce on Housing Court Executive Director Louise Seeley;
- 6) *Social Services*, chaired by United Way of New York City CEO Gordon Campbell; and,

7) *Health*, chaired by New York Academy of Medicine President Jo Ivey Boufford.

The following provides a summary of the major themes to emerge from the Transportation and Outdoor Spaces Roundtable discussion, which was held at the New York Academy of Medicine on Wednesday, February 20, 2008.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

- City Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo, Chair of the Committee on Aging
- City Council Member James Vacca, Chair of the Subcommittee on Senior Center
- Ruth Finkelstein, Vice President for Health Policy, The New York Academy of Medicine
- *Chair:* Gene Russianoff, Senior Attorney, Straphangers' Campaign at NYPIRG
- Aviva Sufian, Senior Policy Analyst, NYC Department for the Aging
- Caryn Resnick, Deputy Commissioner, NYC Department for the Aging
- Cathy Unsino, Advocate in Aging
- Christian DiPalermo, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Parks
- Ethel Sheffer, President, American Planning Association - Metro NYC Chapter
- Igal Jellinek, Executive Director, Council of Senior Centers and Services of NYC (invited)
- John Beard, Senior Epidemiologist at the Center for Urban Epidemiological Studies, The New York Academy of Medicine
- Jon Orcutt, Senior Policy Advisor, NYC Department of Transportation (invited)
- Karen Phillips, Consultant & Member of the NYC Planning Commission
- Karla Quintero, Director of Research, Transportation Alternatives
- Lauren George, Program Manager, Citizens Committee for New York City (invited)
- Lawrence Carter, Director of Advocacy, Disability Network of NYC
- Merrilie Camhe, President, Epigraph Studios
- Michael Gusmano, Senior Research Analyst at the International Longevity Center & Assistant Professor of Health Policy and Management at Columbia University
- Tom Angotti, Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning at Hunter College
- Victor Calise, Citywide Accessibility Coordinator, NYC Parks Department

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- How do you foresee use of outdoor spaces and transportation being affected by population aging in the next 10 to 15 years?
- How are the needs of older people being addressed in ongoing initiatives? What are the gaps?
- What might be ways to include or expand the voice of older people in your decision-making?
- What supports/changes are required to accommodate the needs of older people?
- What steps might your agency/organization be willing to commit to in the short term? Long term?

### **MAJOR THEMES TO EMERGE**

The discussion focused primarily on the barriers many older people face when trying to get out and about in their communities, as well as the need for comprehensive and creative planning in order to meet the needs of all. Participants emphasized that what hampers older people hampers everyone so improvements for older people are often beneficial for all.

#### **I. Planning**

##### **a. Improvements Already Planned**

- Settlements take a long time to get settled

- HOV lanes for bridges from Brooklyn
- Better bus routes planned
- PlaNYC improvements for parks can be done without going to the state
- Mayor's Plaza Initiative is good

**b. Need for comprehensive planning**

- Tensions acknowledged regarding use of parks—active versus quiet activity
- Suggested Improvements should be tied to budget priorities and timelines
- Need master plan that addresses a healthier environment and the needs of older people and families rather than just schedule of improvements
- Plans should acknowledge when things gets most use
- Neighborhood projects are needed with citizens committees that can look at access, crossings, air quality, transport, all at once
- Red areas reflect lack of choice for elders. Multi-modal neighborhoods should be built. Can we pilot this?

**c. Data Issues**

- PlaNYC notes population growth but doesn't account for needs of different age groups
- Walkability maps are good. Parks commission has maps that further show access to leisure walking opportunities (as opposed to errands)
- Should do user surveys of the parks to see what is needed

**II. Reducing Obstacles to Getting Out and About**

**a. Outdoor Spaces**

- Well-used parks are the best parks so need to work on features that make them accessible and usable
- There is no master plan
- Open spaces make intergenerational activities possible
- Rules requiring adults accompany children means benches get filled quickly and not enough for seniors
- More park bathrooms need to be made accessible
- By design a lot of park land is not accessible
- Parks comfort stations have been unlocked. Parks provide most of the bathrooms in the city (640)
- Parks has an ADA committee and is offering equipment and
- Balance active and quiet zones in parks through design features
- Riverside park is well-designed for allowing everyone to be able to access the water
- 10-minute goal is too long. Need more green space at base of buildings and in streets.
- Vacant lots are an opportunity to claim green space. Should act on these before the housing market changes.
- Benches needed and benches with tables make for a people-friendly city
- Harlem elderly would like to use the park but cannot access it
- Cars in the parks are a danger but how else can people in areas with poor public transport get to the parks?

**b. Cars**

- Need parking policies
- Outer boroughs are car-dependent

- Free transportation for everyone would influence car traffic

#### **c. Taxis**

- Universal design need that would help passengers and drivers
- SUV, hybrid taxis are very hard to get into
- Only 3% of fleet is accessible. Accessible taxis are expensive. Should coordinate with other cities to bring the costs down
- There is a pilot program via 311 to allow access to wheel-chair accessible taxis. This needs to become better known so it is used more and will be expanded.

#### **d. Pedicabs**

- Older people reported they might like pedicabs
- Need them to be accessible
- Is a green form of transportation

#### **e. Biking**

- Biking infrastructure is scary
- There are older bicycling enthusiasts and as Baby Boomers age there will be more. The plans to calm or create quiet zones in parks should be balanced with the need to provide cardiovascular exercise opportunities.

#### **f. Sidewalks/Pedestrian Issues**

- More benches
- Leveling
- Crosswalk timers
- Traffic calming would improve the walking environment
- Curb cuts help everyone

#### **g. Buses**

- Blinking bus sign is hard to read
- Are very slow and yet are key to accessing open space
- Shelters need seats
- Hybrids and articulated buses do not accommodate motorized scooters. These scooters are the only transport Medicaid reimburses. Creates segregation
- Large areas of the city are not well-served
- Long travel times on buses require bathroom access for seniors.

#### **h. Access-A-Ride**

- A separate but unequal mode of transport that is being pushed for sake of increasing the speed of the bus routes but is not fair
- Segregates people from their friends
- The rides are inefficient, wasting gas and time with poorly planned routes and drivers who get lost. GPS would help.
- This program needs accountability.

#### **i. Subways**

- Elevators are not the total sum of creating accessible subways.
- Hard to cross the gap from the pavement to the subway car. Need retractable ramps.
- Ridiculous for the conductor to recommend with only one stop's notice that you need to change cars to access a certain station
- Need railings on the steps down the middle
- Outer borough elevated stations are not accessible

#### **j. Signage and Visibility**

- Crowding in the cars obscures view of stop signage
- There is chaos in the signage with ads and other information in the stations. Information should be provided in a simple, unchaotic way
- Need consistent signage at every stop so people know what to expect and have a route they can follow
- Maps needed at every subway door
- More visible maps
- Need audible and visual cues
- Lighting should be improved, especially at stairs and crossings
- Low-light areas should have additional cues such as painted lines, textures sloped pavement to guide