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## The Public Ought to Know: Let the mayor know about your priorities

By Corey Bearak

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Corey Bearak

In less than six months we elect a new mayor or keep who we got. Rather than attempt to rebut what follows, some might argue the mayoral election influences today's column.

Consider this example: An op-ed piece I recently wrote for Newsday generated a letter to its editor from Phil Ragusa. Signing the letter as Queens County Republican Party vice chairman and 26th Assembly District State committeeman, he wrote that I criticized the mayor's reversal of course on the Cross Harbor Tunnel to "land a senior-level job in a Mayor Ferrer administration." I wonder if Phil will say the same thing about former Community Board 11 Chairman Bernie Haber's thoughtful letter two weeks back in this paper that took exactly the same position.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority announced cutbacks on its plans to refurbish subway stations in Kew Gardens, Forest Hills and other locations. The current MTA capital plan already delays the Second Avenue Subway and the East Side Access project to bring the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal. The Regional Planning Association strongly recommends these projects, which may face fatal setbacks.

The issue is money. The city, state and federal governments need to fund MTA projects. A restored regional commuter tax could raise needed cash.

Another good cash source involves MTA assets. This includes the rail yards on Manhattan's Far West Side and off Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, where the New Jersey Nets propose an arena as part of a retail, office and residential development.

Doesn't the MTA have a fiduciary responsibility to dispose of the Hudson and Atlantic yards at values that raise real cash for real priority projects? The MTA's virtual gift of the Far West Side site to the New York Jets (they practice at my alma mater, Hofstra, in Hempstead) raises insufficient cash for mass transit projects.

That explains the suits to block the deal for a stadium for the Jets and 2012 Olympics by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, the New York Public Interest Group and the Transport Workers Union. They have no affinity with Cablevision which also sued.

The MTA board linked their gift to the Jets to the city's plans to pay to extend the No. 7 subway line to that site, a lower priority project compared to Second Avenue and East Side Access. The city would use payments anticipated from projected real property values from development on the Far West Side. This development, if left to occur naturally, would provide revenue for the city's general fund; it could support core service and projects the city often scrambles to fund.

City Hall needs to explain why it refuses to contribute to priority transit needs but finds no difficulty in funding a key component of Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff's Olympic X transportation plan.

While many focus on remaining state approvals, the City Council can kill the Far West Side project. Its speaker proposed legislation; Bloomberg's lawyer - the City Corporation Counsel - claims the bills would violate the City Charter by diminishing the mayor's power. The Council appears poised to pass the legislation and override the mayor's expected veto; it will be resolved in court.

Rather than legislate, the Council can simply wield its considerable budget power.

The mayor's Preliminary Revenue, Expense and Contract budgets (the

executive budget was released after my deadline) reveals some lines where astute "adjustments" to certain units of appropriation will restrict City Hall's ability to advance a dumb plan.

If Speaker Miller plays the budget card, it might cause the mayor to fold, accept a Queens stadium site, save the claimed 18,000 jobs a stadium would produce, provide the MTA adequate revenue from its rail yard assets and put some station projects back on track.

And the mayor just might - as Rudy Giuliani did before - withhold funds for essential community programs and projects the Council adds to the budget and which might not function if their city funding gets delayed.

It's all about priorities. We have choices. We have a voice. Dial 311. Tell the mayor: Oppose diverting money from the budget to aid a fellow billionaire, get the MTA to max out on the rail yards, build the Olympic (and football) stadium in Queens and support a regional commuter tax to get our transit system priorities such as the Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access and all station rehabilitations back on track.

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