



**Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
Transportation Reinvention Commission  
Public Meeting of 16 July 2014  
Presentation by Rick Bell, FAIA, Executive Director AIA New York**

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Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to be here today to share a few ideas on behalf of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter and our 5,000 members here in New York City. I've learned a lot by listening to those presenting already, and, also from looking at the superb MTA graphics on the walls of this room. Three of the posters, in particular, stand out for the design as well as the ideas expressed. The poster titled "Rendezvous" notes that "the subway system brings people together by providing an easy way to move from place to place." Next to it, the poster called "Endurance" talks about the "enduring power" of the City's bridges and infrastructure. And that labelled "Endurance/Greener/Better" speaks of "environmentally friendly mass transit conserves natural resources as it moves millions of riders each day."

These three posters parallel the three ideas that I will be discussing this morning: "Rendezvous" relabeled as Capacity/Coordination/Communication, "Endurance" equated to Resilience, and Sustainability as it relates to design in general. The thoughts that I am expressing on behalf of the AIANY are largely drawn from our Platform for the Future of the City, developed in 2013 during the Mayoral primary election, and the Post-Sandy Strategic Initiative Report, which fed directly into the City's SIRR Report last year. Forgive me for reading verbatim sections from these documents, which are also here on hand for the record. The preface of the platform document notes that "The Platform for the Future of the City seeks to engage civic and community leaders, along with the public, in the day-to-day dialogue about making our neighborhoods and institutions a model for the nation and the world." That is, what I would say, today's "Reinvention" meeting is about.

## **CAPACITY AND COORDINATION**

In regard to the capacity and efficiency of the City's transportation infrastructure, and in particular, the mass transit systems, the Platform document states that the challenge is that "the City may lose momentum to develop major project such as the Second Avenue Subway, projects which are necessary to build greater capacity. New York City's transportation network is

aging, and needs improvement and renewal.” The document continues, saying “Transportation and infrastructure, in conjunction with land-use planning, serve as the City’s framework. The past decade has seen a remarkable collaboration between agencies and authorities, with much success as a result of the focus on issues of population growth, sustainability, and response to climate change. However, New York City has a good part of its transportation and infrastructure planned, maintained and built by entities - including the MTA - outside of city government. There need to be systems to better coordinate between the different levels of government to keep the forward momentum.”

## **RESILIENCE**

I agree with the statements made on behalf of the Citizen’s Budget Commission that any discussion of reinvention of transportation infrastructure must factor in regional planning considerations. The AIANY’s Post-Sandy Initiative Report, on this topic, states that “Regional coordination and planning for redundancy can ensure that our transportation and infrastructure networks will operate before, during and after severe weather events. These aging systems were not built to withstand today’s rising sea levels and severe storms. Identifying their vulnerabilities and planning for their reinforcement is an urgent priority, demanding interagency collaboration, public education, and commitment, and solutions that contribute to the design quality of the city and the region.”

The document continues, in regard to planning for redundancy, developing “robust, multi-system communication plans can alert the public to evolving conditions. Speaking about the MTA’s current redundant communication systems, I benefitted today from three means of announcing that there was no local service uptown from the Bleecker Street East Side IRT #6 station to this meeting. There was an electronic board making the announcement, along with a public address system verbal message. Most effective was an individual going car-to-car with the explanation about the reason, a stalled train ahead. Of course during extreme weather conditions, good communications are even more necessary and difficult to achieve.

The Post-Sandy Report’s Executive Summary notes, speaking of planning for resiliency, that “reinforcing vulnerable structures and repositioning critical equipment can protect vital infrastructure systems. Sensitively-designed elements can also serve as urban amenities. The MTA should also be commended for keeping for future use such wonderful amenities as the Old City Hall Station, which a small group of AIA leaders was able to tour a few weeks ago. How to make such facilities more accessible to the public at large is worth further discussion and opens the question of ongoing commitment to design, as shown with the completion of the Fulton Street Transit Center.

## DESIGN

Speaking of design, I remember being in this room for meetings of a prior MTA Blue Ribbon Commission on construction costs. At a lunch break, one of the MTA Board Members present, no longer on the Board, stated her objection to the plans for the Fulton Street facility, and, in particular the Oculus designed to bring natural light into the structure and down into the platform level. She said that “the MTA was not in the business of building cathedrals.” I would maintain that for our secular society, the public transit system is just as important to the prosperity and esteem of a city as the religious structures were during the Middle Ages.

In any case, the AIANY’s Platform preface declares that “As much as any other attribute, architecture and design define New York and distinguish it from all other urban centers in the United States.” It states that “Architecture and design play a role in the everyday life of all New Yorkers, from where and how we live and work, to the way we enjoy free time, teach our children, care for the elderly, and get around town. It is important that New Yorkers have confidence in our infrastructure and resiliency. Quality design of buildings - including transit facilities – and the public spaces adjacent to them, increases property values and drive the desire to be here.”

These three factors, Connectivity, Resilience and Design, in sum, need to factor into the MTA’s plans for the future. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. The AIA New York Chapter and its Transportation & Infrastructure Committee remain able and willing to be of assistance in this consultation and future discussions.

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