

# Investigating the CHPC archives

## A Dream Deferred: The Story of the Second Avenue Subway

**"Transportation facilities are now inadequate in many portions of this area."**  
-CHPC, 1938

Two years after construction restarted, the announcement was made in Summer 2009: the Second Avenue Subway project was delayed.

The latest plans for the subway line include a two-track line along Second Avenue from 125th Street to the Financial District in Lower Manhattan with a connection from Second Avenue through the 63rd Street tunnel to existing tracks for service to West Midtown and Brooklyn. The line, which is being built in four phases at a cost of \$4.4 billion, is presently in Phase One.

This is a project with a turbulent history.

The story starts in the 1920s, when the subway station was first proposed to meet the needs of almost two million European immigrants in Manhattan. But project cost overruns and catastrophic events in our nation's history, such as the Great Depression and World War II meant that the line was plagued with numerous postponements.

**The CHPC Archival Library showcases the hope and disappointment seen throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Two pieces from our collection have been digitized over the page:**

- **July 9, 1969: CHPC Memo Detailing Second Avenue's Disputed Route and Design** In 1968, MTA announced that it would resume building the Second Avenue subway line. After the announcement, East Siders and Planners began to dispute with one another over what each felt would be the station's best route and design. CHPC followed these discussions closely and kept detailed notes regarding each side's stance. A memo detailing this information can be found below along with a map of the disputed, proposed route.

- **July 10, 1969: CHPC's Second Avenue Subway Site Review at 570 Grand Street** In order to provide some insight to East Siders, Planners, the City Mayor and the City's Board of Estimate Department regarding Second Avenue's route and design, CHPC formed the Second Avenue Subway Station Committee. The Committee performed a site review at 570 Grand Street and drafted a memo of their recommendations. CHPC's recommendations included: designing the station so as not to preclude future junctions; suggesting to the City that it commission an independent study that analyzes such things as the job locations of East Siders, whether or not the bus system in that area could be modified to better meet the residents transportation needs, etc; and, that the City take the necessary steps to ensure that any increased land values resulting from the subway line being built inure to the City.

By Kercena Dozier, William R. Ginsberg Fellow

### Citizens Housing & Planning Council

Founded in 1937, CHPC is a non-profit policy research organization dedicated to improving housing and neighborhood conditions through cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors.

2nd AVENUE SUBWAY SITE REVIEW

July 10, 1969

Held at 570 Grand Street. (Sam Friedman and Charles Kliman discussed the community's proposal with the committee)

PRESENT: Donald Benjamin, George Brown, Simeon Goldstein, Hayden Johnson, Jonathan Kaplan, Alan Rudolph, Emil Schattner, Richard Scheuer, Ruth Senior, Roger Starr, Adam Starr, Marian Sameth, Sylvia W. Stark, Arnold Yoskowitz.

Note: Hayden Johnson, George Brown and Donald Benjamin left before the vote was taken.

Two transit problems are involved. One is to relieve the congestion on the Lexington Avenue line; the other to improve transportation for the Lower East Side. The proposed 2nd Avenue Subway route acts on the first but ignores the second.

The committee was convinced that the particular spur proposed by the local community would not solve the area's transportation problems. Too much backtracking would be involved in order to get access to the West Side and certain parts of Brooklyn. The committee therefore recommends that the 2nd Avenue Subway be so designed as not to preclude future junctions if some spur is deemed advisable, and that an independent study as to how best to improve transportation on the Lower East Side be instituted immediately, reporting directly to the Board of Estimate or the Mayor. The study will have to include an analysis of where people in the area work; an examination of whether better bus transportation might solve their needs and whether a spur from 14th Street on Avenue C to East Broadway might give them better connections. The committee was also agreed that we cannot ignore the effect that building the subway will have on land values in the area and the city must immediately consider ways and means to assure that the increase in land values inures to the city. The committee takes very seriously the problem of improved transportation on the Lower East Side. There was even some sentiment on the committee against proceeding with the 2nd Avenue Subway below 34th Street until the study is made and recommendations are framed.

# PROPOSED SECOND AVENUE TRUNK LINE

INCREASE IN SERVICE FOR MANHATTAN  
BROOKLYN, BRONX AND QUEENS

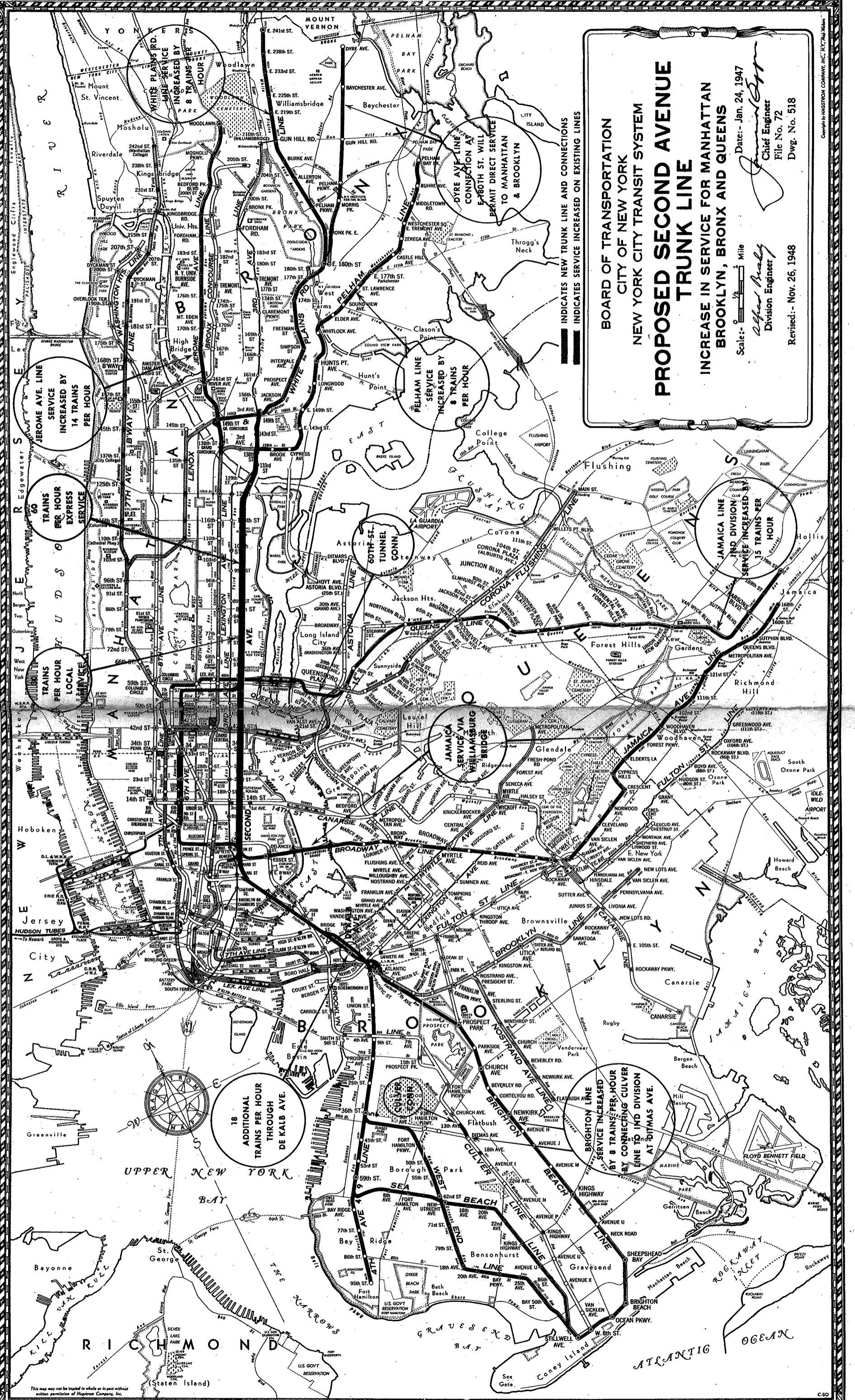
Date: Jan. 24, 1947  
Chief Engineer  
File No. 72  
Dwg. No. 518

*Alfred Brady*  
Division Engineer

Revised: Nov. 26, 1948

BOARD OF TRANSPORTATION  
CITY OF NEW YORK  
NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT SYSTEM

INDICATES NEW TRUNK LINE AND CONNECTIONS  
— INDICATES SERVICE INCREASED ON EXISTING LINES



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
Roger Starr  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
Marian Sameth



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Speaker called for cooperation and compromise between Lower East Side residents (at 14th Street) and business men from northern Bronx who do not afford enough public transit. Congressman has recommended that the subway be extended to 14th Street, proposed a route having two ordinary tracks on the surface between 14th and East Broadway. Representatives Schlesinger and others do not want to service the bulk of the area and not to provide a connection between Bronx Northern and Lower East Side and what local business there is located along the line.

July 9, 1969

TO: Lower East Side Second Avenue Subway Committee  
FROM: Arnold Yoskowitz  
Re: Summary of Positions on Second Avenue Subway Spur

Action Taken

The Board of Estimate approved six routes and general plans, including the Second Avenue route from the Bronx down to 34th Street--phase one of the MTA's Program For Action, last September. The Board also approved in principle six additional routes and asked the Transit Authority to submit detailed routes and general plans for approval; one route being the remainder of the Second Avenue subway from 34th Street to the Battery.

The State Legislature appropriated \$600 Million in State Bond Issue funds for New York City subway construction in May of this year. Among the allocations was a \$5.475 Million grant for design only on the extension below 34th Street of the Second Avenue line.

At Mr. Sutton's behest the Board of Estimate refrained from acting upon the Second Avenue southern extension at its June 3, 1969 session. The Board has indicated that it will act on the controversial proposal this month. Dr. William J. Ronan, MTA Chairman, in a statement before the Board of Estimate in June, urged quick approval "...so that we may maximize the utility of the fixed State appropriations by minimizing the impact of inflation on these essential construction jobs."

Opposition to Basic Second Avenue Route

Demands for serving the low- and middle-income Lower East Side population with rapid transit lines, either by diverting the Second Avenue route or by the creation of an additional spur, were strongly voiced by area government representatives, local party organizations, and independent citizens at a City Hall hearing. The hearing was convened at Borough President Sutton's urging by Community Planning Board 3 on March 4, 1969.

Speakers called for servicing the Manhattan bulge (Lower East Side south of 14th Street) and ending two fare zones for those least able to afford transportation costs. Councilman Low proposed a First Avenue Subway; he and others proposed a route having the subway veer east along Avenue C and East Broadway. Representative Scheuer and others demanded local stops to service the people of the area and not to provide a "commuter service from the Northern Bronx to Wall Street" and what Jack Sissman (Liberal Party) termed "a rich man's express, circumventing the Lower East Side with its complexes of high-rise low- and middle-income housing and its slums in favor of a silkstocking route." This would be provided by installation of a four track rather than a two track line.

There seemed to be a lack of sensitivity to the technical problems involved in rerouting to include key transfer areas for Brooklyn riders, and the expense per person served by rerouting. Charles Kleiman, Chairman of the Planning Board, as reported by the New York Times of April 5, urged a subway route down First Avenue, east on 20th Street to Avenue C, and then south to Pitt Street and west on East Broadway for an eventual link to South Ferry. The insensitivity may have been motivated by the hearings chairman's disclosure that Dr. Ronan "did not see fit to come or send a representative or disclose his plans." Mr. Frenkel termed this an insult to the community.

A representative of Transportation Administrator Constantine Sidamon-Eristoff read a prepared statement clearly setting forth important city-wide interests in the Second Avenue Subway route:

"The Transportation Administration will await with interest the expressions of sentiment concerning this location which will be forthcoming at this public hearing. However, this facility must be considered as an integral part of the total transit network. The Second Avenue Subway must be built to serve the people of Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island as well as Manhattan. Its route must be fully integrated with existing routes as well as those additional facilities now under consideration."

At the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council Board of Directors meeting of June 25, 1969, Mr. Ralph Lippman reiterated the complaint that "the MTA has failed to include a Lower East Side connection, in an area sorely in need of this facility." Mr. Lippman argued that transportation of an important labor pool to the financial and municipal government centers is tedious, time-consuming and costly, "Because the residents of the Lower East Side were subjected for so many years to lack of service doesn't excuse this continuation." Mr. Lippman

made it clear that the opponents of the present proposal do not want to act as "road blocks to progress", but merely want provision for a needed spur installed to service the "200,000 people in the lower-income brackets of the Lower East Side. Subways are for people; if that's old fashioned so much the better."

#### Proponents of Basic Second Avenue Route

The arguments in favor of the basic route were presented by Dr. Ronan in a statement before the Board of Estimate outlining MTA policy on June 3, and by one of his assistants, Mr. Sidney Frigand, at the CHPC Board of Directors' meeting on June 25.

#### I. SUMMARY OF DR. RONAN'S STATEMENT

##### A. Necessity for Additional Routes

The need for additional routes is evident to relieve overcrowded conditions on existing lines; reduce travel time; and to reach new areas where there is a demonstrated need for rapid transit; as well as to aid the continued growth and prosperity of New York City.

The proposed routes will help to maintain a well-balanced rapid transit system in terms of optimum utilization of the system as a whole. It will provide a well balanced distribution of traffic between routes and allow for flexibility of operation and a minimum of transfers.

##### B. Second Avenue Proposal

The Second Avenue route south of East Houston Street takes advantage of "the best corridor through the area both to relieve the Lexington Avenue line of intolerable overcrowding and to attract the maximum number of passengers at the most economical construction and operating cost."

1. Basic Second Avenue Route: "The best alignment is clear. A connection with the Chrystie Street complex (2nd Ave) is essential to provide flexibility and maximum service through ties to existing lines."

a. 32,000 passengers per day would be able to transfer free at Grand Street to Second Avenue trains for the Upper East Side and Wall Street. (The majority of these passengers would be from Brooklyn).

b. At East Houston Street 20,000 weekday passengers from the Bronx and Manhattan could transfer free at the existing Second Avenue Station to the Second Avenue line for the East Side and Wall Street areas.

c. The need to serve the "burgeoning easterly section of the downtown business district" is clear.

## 2. Rejection of Alternate Routes

### CHPC Determination

On June 25th the Board of Directors formed a Committee to study and make recommendations on a proposed Second Avenue Subway spur. The Committee will inspect the area on July 10 and convene to make its determination. Some of the many questions to be explored have been presented in this memorandum; some others that warrant the committee's attention are:

1. The consequences of increased land value along the shuttle route (Most of the area is presently zoned R-7-2), in relation to Lower East Side renewal and rehabilitation.
2. Access to publicly aided housing for families of low- and moderate incomes.
3. Allocation of resources in terms of housing and transportation planning policy in the City of New York.
4. CHPC's responsibility as a city-wide Civic group in dealing with housing and planning questions.

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Attached to this memorandum are:

1. Traffic Analysis Breakdown of the Second Avenue proposals
2. Cost Analysis of the Second Avenue proposals

Various alternative routes are shown, but the only two of relevance are the Basic Second Ave. Route and Alternate C. All of the routes other than Second Ave. Subway Alternates C and D are diversions of the Basic Second Ave. Route. These diversions are untenable and this is recognized even by Mr. Lippman, in terms of transfer connections at the Grand-Chrystie St. Complex. Alternates C and D are shuttle lines. D would serve only 12,000 additional passengers, while C would serve 18,000 additional passengers. For these reasons the enclosed map only shows the Basic Second Avenue Subway and Alternate C.

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(and going to get worse)

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530 Municipal Building, New York, N.Y. 10007  
 President of the Council—Francis X. Smith,  
City Hall, New York, N.Y. 10007  
 Borough President, Manhattan—Percy E. Sutton,  
2050 Municipal Building, New York, N.Y. 10007

- Borough President, Bronx—Herman Badillo,  
851 Grand Concourse, Bronx, N.Y. 10451  
 Borough President, Brooklyn—Abe Stark,  
21 Borough Hall, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201  
 Borough President, Queens—Sidney Leviss,  
120-55 Queens Blvd., Kew Gardens, N.Y. 11424  
 Borough President, Richmond—Robert T. Connor,  
120 Borough Hall, Staten Island, N.Y. 10301

New York needs the new Second Avenue subway . . . needs it *now*. I urge you to take immediate action to bring it into being.

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