Ship to Shore:
Integrating New York Harbor Ferries with Upland Communities

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The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance works to transform the New York and New Jersey Harbor and Waterways to make them cleaner and more accessible, a vibrant place to play, learn and work with great parks, great jobs and great transportation for all.

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Executive Summary

Across the globe, from Vancouver to Istanbul to Sydney, ferries play an integral role in urban transit networks. In these world-class ferry systems, grand terminals function as the focal points of neighborhoods, and ferry riders can make seamless transfers across transit modes using just one universal fare medium.

Following decades of underutilization, the New York–New Jersey Harbor is now in the midst of a bona fide ferry renaissance. New ferry services whisk commuters and tourists alike across the Hudson and East Rivers, from DUMBO to Long Island City, Rockaway Park to Sunset Park, and the Jersey Shore to Wall Street. Thanks to these new routes, the New York region now boasts the highest ridership of any ferry network in the country and among the highest in the world.¹

However, in contrast to the world’s great ferry networks, New York’s operates in isolation from the upland communities it serves. With management responsibility fragmented across a variety of private and public entities, New York’s ferries rarely function in coordination with upland transportation modes, dissuading landside transfers and discouraging ferry ridership. Moreover, distinct payment systems complicate connections to other transit modes, while the inability to make free or discounted transfers limits ferries’ ability to serve low-income New Yorkers. Finally, frequently located in desolate areas originally developed for industrial uses, ferry landings can be difficult to reach either by transit, bike, or foot. As a consequence, New York’s ferries are often perceived as distinct from upland transportation, and transit users are unlikely to travel by ferry if their points of origin or destination fall outside the immediate vicinity of the water’s edge.

The ultimate goal for New York Harbor ferries must be their complete integration into the larger regional transportation network. This paper proposes 15 actionable steps toward forging stronger connections—both physical and psychological in nature—between ferries and the upland communities they serve. The common thread that will unite all 15 recommendations and facilitate their streamlined implementation is the consolidation of ferry transit operation, subsidy, and integration within the jurisdiction of one overarching, inter-agency governing authority, such as the MTA or the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The recommendations, categorized by mass transit connectivity, fare integration, and bicycle and pedestrian access, are as follows:

Mass Transit Connectivity

**Recommendation 1:** Physically integrate ferry landings with bus stops.

**Recommendation 2:** Extend bus routes to the waterfront to facilitate more seamless intermodal transfers.

**Recommendation 3:** Synchronize ferry schedules with buses and commuter rails.

**Recommendation 4:** Add all ferry stops and routes to MTA maps.

**Recommendation 5:** Install localized MTA transit maps at ferry terminals.

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Executive Summary (cont’d)

**Fare Integration:**

**Recommendation 6:** Fully integrate ferry fares with New York City Transit, allowing free, intermodal, MetroCard transfers.

**Recommendation 7:** Install MetroCard machines at ferry landings.

**Recommendation 8:** Incorporate ferries into MTA fare structure.

**Recommendation 9:** Accept MTA MetroCards on all inter-borough ferries.

**Recommendation 10:** Provide discounted fares to passengers transferring between ferries and NYC Transit.

**Pedestrian and Bicycle Access**

**Recommendation 11:** Extend bike lanes to the waterfront to facilitate more seamless intermodal transfers.

**Recommendation 12:** Install wayfinding signage for cyclists and pedestrians throughout ferry neighborhoods.

**Recommendation 13:** Open view corridors to the water from upland streets.

**Recommendation 14:** Prioritize pedestrian and bike access to ferries through traffic calming and streetscape improvements.

**Recommendation 15:** Site ferry landings within active public spaces.
Introduction

Once upon a time, New York’s waterways functioned as a primary means of transport throughout the City and region. A robust fleet of ferries populated New York Harbor, carrying more than 100 million riders each year across rivers and bays into the flourishing New York City business district. Largely owned and operated by well-established railroad companies—such as the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad or the New Jersey Midland Railway—ferries constituted an integral component of an extensive, interconnected regional transportation network. Fully integrated transit terminals offered seamless connectivity between river and rail and served as the primary gateways for travel to and from New York City—the JFK Airport terminals of the pre-flight era.

Beginning with the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883—and continuing through the first half of the twentieth century with the opening of a host of other vehicular and railway river crossings—ferry ridership in the New York region experienced a steady decline. By 1967, more than 100 ferry routes had disappeared, leaving the Staten Island Ferry as the sole operator of water mass transit in New York Harbor.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century. The bridges, tunnels, and railroads that superseded ferry service suffer extreme overcrowding. New road-and-rail infrastructure projects designed to increase passenger capacity experience chronic delays, budget cuts, or, in extreme cases such as the trans-Hudson ARC tunnel, complete termination. In addition, new residential and commercial neighborhoods develop on the New York and New Jersey waterfronts that lack sufficient access to public transportation. And from September 11th and the 2003 blackout to Superstorm Sandy, both manmade and natural disasters have crippled the regional transit system on multiple occasions, highlighting the need for a redundant transit network.

In tandem with these issues, a ferry revival has burgeoned in New York Harbor in recent decades. Ferries can quickly fill public transit gaps in underserved waterfront neighborhoods at a fraction of the capital cost of subway construction, with a new ferry landing costing between $2 and $7

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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
In addition, lacking the need for a fixed route, ferries are flexible for mobilization during and following emergency events, while offering a traffic-free—and often substantially faster—alternative to road- and rail transportation. And with almost a million additional New Yorkers expected by 2030, now is the time to plan for innovative, sustainable, affordable increases to transit capacity.\(^5\)

However, in contrast to the interconnected regional ferry network of the past that efficiently integrated multiple transit modes, modern ferries operate in a fragmented fashion. The current configuration of ferry service in New York discourages ridership by generally making ferry travel difficult to access, confusing, and expensive. Administered by a number of different private operators, today’s ferries almost always function distinctly from upland transportation modes—and from each other as well. As a result, connectivity to or from ferry landings is often limited, diminishing their ability to effectively serve potential riders who live or work away from the water’s edge.

This paper calls upon transit operators, policymakers, and elected officials to optimize ferries’ connections to upland communities and fully integrate ferry service into the regional transportation network. It puts forth fifteen actionable steps toward mass transit connectivity, fare integration, and bike and pedestrian access that will facilitate enhanced upland connectivity in the absence of the fully integrated, multimodal, waterfront transit terminals of yore. While each solution may be considered a best practice for ferry connectivity in the New York City region, this paper calls for the consolidation of system-wide ferry transit operation, subsidy, and integration under the jurisdiction of one overarching entity. This organizational structure will effectively weave ferries into the larger regional transportation network and disperse their benefits more widely across the region.\(^6\)

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Mass Transit Connectivity

Due to historical development patterns, many waterfront neighborhoods lack sufficient access to landside public transportation modes, with subways and buses often unlikely to provide direct access to the shoreline. As a result, reaching the water’s edge can be a time-consuming trip requiring multiple transfers and long walks. Even if a rider wished to travel by water, the lengthy journey to and from the dock might not make the ferry a viable transit option. While building new subway stations along the waterfront would be both prohibitively expensive and counter to resilient coastal planning, and creating new bus lines would be excessively time-consuming, a number of cost- and time-effective solutions can vastly improve ferries’ connections to landside transportation modes, and facilitate easier access to and from the water’s edge.

Recommendation 1: Physically integrate ferry landings with bus stops.

When different types of transit are not physically integrated within one structure, intermodal connectivity is dependent upon minimizing distances and maximizing visibility and wayfinding among all available modes. A number of simple design strategies applied to areas adjacent to ferry landings can effectively achieve this configuration. First, co-locating transit modes as closely as possible to one another makes intermodal transferring quicker and easier. For example, immediately upon disembarking the East River Ferry at Pier 6 in Brooklyn Bridge Park, all available transit connections are located side-by-side, including the B63 bus—which extends all the way to the street end—a north-south bike lane and greenway, a Citibike docking station, a car-free pedestrian plaza equipped with public seating, and automobiles and taxis on Atlantic Avenue (see Figure 2).

Second, it is important that clear lines of sight are preserved between water- and land-based transit such that it is immediately apparent to transferring passengers where they must go to embark on the next leg of their journey. According to the Transportation Research Board, “the ability to make a straight connection from one mode to the next improves the traveler’s perception of integration and allows the wayfinding system to be less complex.” For instance, while the East River Ferry at Pier 6 is located within Brooklyn Bridge Park, a clearly defined walkway connects the ferry to landside transit and provides reasonable visibility between the water and the street (Figure 2).

Finally, intermodal wayfinding can be maximized through the installation of physical infrastructure.

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that plainly directs transferring passengers between transit modes. For example, at ferry landings where land- and water-based transit are sited in close proximity to one another, sheltered walkways—whose designs respect the risks that climate change and rising sea levels can impose on landside infrastructure—can provide a physical linkage between modes, enhancing wayfinding and offering passengers a more pleasant transfer experience during inclement weather.¹⁰

Recommendation 2: Extend bus routes to the waterfront to facilitate more seamless intermodal transfers.

A quick glance at an MTA bus map reveals a glaring lack of service at many waterfront locations, deterring ferry ridership for those traveling to or from points more than just a few blocks inland. According to Ted Orosz, Director of Long-Range Bus Planning for New York City Transit, extending existing bus lines is comparatively the simplest and most cost-effective strategy for adding new bus service.¹¹ Many of New York’s ferry landings can become significantly more accessible through minor bus route extensions. For example, the B24 presently runs east and west along Greenpoint Avenue but terminates at West Street just before reaching the water. To provide direct access to the Greenpoint East River Ferry landing, the MTA can extend the B24 just two blocks further north to India Street—where the bus driver can announce a transfer to the East River Ferry—turn left to drop ferry passengers off at the water, then loop back to Greenpoint Avenue (see Figure 3). This slight route modification would minimize walking distance between the bus and the ferry and significantly enhance riders’ physical and psychological connections between the two modes.

Moreover, in late 2010, the MTA launched its first Select Bus Service (SBS) route on the East Side of Manhattan. Compared to regular local bus service, select buses travel at significantly faster speeds owing to off-board fare collection, dedicated bus lanes, all-door boarding, and limited stops.¹² In light of the overwhelming popularity of SBS among transit riders—with ridership increasing by ten percent on the first five routes¹³—the MTA plans to expand the service to new corridors across the five boroughs to provide rapid transit to underserved neighborhoods. In doing so, it is critical that the

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¹⁰. Ibid., 23.
MTA recognize the valuable role ferries can play in a multimodal, integrated transit network and prioritize waterfront districts with ferry service for new SBS routes. Providing rapid land-based transportation, SBS can serve as an ideal feeder to underserved coastal neighborhoods, while providing SBS riders easy access to presently disconnected ferry landings.

For instance, the M34 SBS spans the entire island of Manhattan, running across 34th Street from 12th Avenue to the FDR Drive. This route provides seamless connectivity to the 34th Street ferry terminal on the East Side and relatively close connection to Pier 79 on the West Side, with rapid access to the Midtown central business district in between. The ferry integration implicit in the M34 SBS should serve as a model for future SBS rollout.

**Recommendation 3: Synchronize ferry schedule with buses and commuter rails**

Reliability and convenience are key ingredients to successful ferry service. Accordingly, in many cities and towns served by ferry transit, ferry operators synchronize their schedules with those of bus and train services to allow passengers ample time to make multimodal connections. In New York, though, obstacles such as heavy traffic and road closures can make strict adherence to schedules difficult for New York City buses, while frequent bus headways obviate the need for overly precise synchronization. However, given that most of New York City's ferries terminate service at night, to make sure that passengers who traveled to a destination by ferry may return to their origin via ferry as well, boat operators can peg the final ferry run of the day to the schedule of the nearest bus route. As buses are less likely to experience delays in the late evening, they can more reasonably guarantee a reliable timetable to deliver passengers to the ferry before it terminates service for the night.

Similarly, schedule coordination between ferries and commuter rails can, in some instances, facilitate more reliable intermodal transfers and significantly reduce commute times. For instance, the Hunters Point East River Ferry landing is located just 1/3 mile from the Long Island City Long Island Railroad (LIRR) station (see Figure 4). With slightly increased service to the presently underutilized train station, this site can serve as a multimodal “East Side Access” transit hub for LIRR passengers looking to bypass Penn Station and travel directly to the East Side of Manhattan. If the East River Ferry departs approximately ten minutes after the LIRR arrives, passengers will have ample time to reach the ferry from the train station without fearing they may miss their connection.

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Recommendation 4: Add all ferry stops and routes to MTA maps

While the MTA subway map demarcates commuter rail stations, major streets, Staten Island and Hudson River ferry routes, and even heliports, East River Ferry and Rockaway Ferry stops and routes are conspicuously absent from the map. As a result, subway riders are not made aware of opportunities to transfer between subways and interborough ferries. Similarly, ferry riders would benefit from ferry landing designations on commuter rail maps in order to emphasize potential connection points such as Long Island City (as mentioned above). Incorporating ferry stops and routes onto all MTA maps would constitute a significant step toward changing New Yorkers’ perception that ferries and other forms of mass transit operate independently from one another.

Recommendation 5: Install WalkNYC maps at ferry terminals.

Most ferry landings, particularly those along the East River, offer no information regarding upland transportation, neighborhood attractions, or navigational guidance whatsoever. Complicating transfers from ferries to subways, buses, and commuter rail, this deficiency perpetuates the notion that ferries operate distinctly from landside public transportation and discourages riders from incorporating ferries into their transit trips.

To facilitate ease of travel to upland destinations, the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) can expand its new WalkNYC initiative by installing neighborhood maps at the exit of each ferry pier that identify locations of the nearest subway stops, bus routes, and commuter rail stations (see Figure 6). These maps will help orient disembarking passengers to the neighborhoods surrounding ferry landings, as well as encourage more efficient multimodal transit trips. In addition, the inclusion of nearby points of interest and neighborhood attractions on these same maps will promote interborough tourism—an activity in which New Yorkers and tourists alike participate—and advance local economic development.

Fare Integration

Distinct fares and payment systems constitute perhaps the most significant barrier to ferry ridership in New York Harbor. While transit riders may seamlessly transfer between subways and buses free of charge—and even use an MTA MetroCard to pay for non-MTA transit services such as the AirTrain to Newark and JFK Airports, the PATH commuter train to and from New Jersey, and the Roosevelt Island Tram—all ferries (with the exception of the Staten Island Ferry, which is free of charge) require a separate fare and a distinct payment method, precluding transfers to either New York City Transit or other ferry routes. These barriers to integration foster the perception that ferries and other forms of mass transit are meant to be used independently of one another. Moreover, the need to pay an additional fare makes ferries prohibitively expensive for many possible riders, limiting their potential effectiveness in the many transit-poor, low-income communities that comprise much of the City’s coastline.

Many of the world’s most extensive ferry networks offer some degree of fare integration with other modes of public transportation, whether through a shared payment method or discounted or free transfers. However, the ferries and upland transportation systems of the New York region are operated by a number of different entities, accounting for a variety of funding sources and inconsistent subsidy levels. Thus, in order to make ferry transit easier and more affordable, an inter-agency governing authority—such as the MTA or the Port Authority—must assume responsibility for operating and subsidizing ferry service. This way, fare payment technology and subsidy can be determined in a holistic, system-wide fashion in coordination with other transit modes.

As a means of encouraging ferry ridership and maximizing transit equity across the New York region, this section recommends complete fare integration—whereby ferry riders may transfer between ferries and New York City Transit free of charge using a MetroCard—as the ultimate goal for New York’s regional ferry network. However, it also puts forth a number of incremental, shorter-term alternatives that can foster stronger physical, psychological, and financial connections across modes. Moreover, while this section focuses primarily on enhanced fare coordination between ferry service and the MTA MetroCard, it is important to note that by 2020 the MTA plans to phase out the MetroCard in favor of a contactless payment system. To ensure the long-term success of ferry service in New York City, it is critical that this new technology incorporate ferry payment capabilities.

**Recommendation 6: Fully integrate ferry fares with New York City Transit, allowing free, intermodal, MetroCard transfers.**

Full fare integration—whereby, akin to local bus and subway service in New York City, passengers can make intermodal transfers free of charge using one payment method—is the key ingredient to a ferry network that serves as equitable commuter transit to all New Yorkers, as opposed to a premium or tourist service. In the New York region, though, jurisdiction over ferry service and landside transit is fragmented across a number of different public agencies and private companies, and fares, payment technology, and public subsidy levels vary widely across all transit operators.

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substantially complicating fare coordination. To create a fully integrated transportation network that provides the highest benefit for transit users, the region’s various transit authorities and ferry companies must begin by forging strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with one another.

Over the past few decades, a number of successful cross-agency, multistate coalitions have formed to collaboratively tackle region-wide transportation issues to maximize efficiency and equity. For instance, founded in 2008, the Metropolitan Area Planning Forum consists of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs)—the region-wide planning entities through which federal transportation dollars are channeled—from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Through this partnership, the five MPOs work together to coordinate transportation planning projects to ensure that transit initiatives take into consideration the needs and impacts of all affected areas.18 This type of cross-agency, multistate collaboration can serve as a precedent to ferry companies and MTA transit officials in the creation of a progressive coalition for fare integration. In doing so, they can work together to reach shared system-wide goals and maximize benefits and ridership for all parties involved.

**Recommendation 7: Install MetroCard machines at ferry landings.**

While full fare integration should be the ultimate goal for New York’s ferry network, immense political and financial barriers will unquestionably stall this process in the near future. Accordingly, short-term solutions can integrate ferries into the larger transit network in a more incremental fashion. For instance, the ability to purchase an MTA MetroCard at ferry landings will make transferring to local bus service quicker and easier—obviating the need to walk to a subway station to purchase a MetroCard—while fostering psychological connections between ferries and New York City Transit. Upon disembarking the Staten Island Ferry at St. George Terminal, for example, passengers almost immediately walk past a pair of MetroCard machines. While the Staten Island Ferry is fare-free, the availability of MTA machines encourages passengers to purchase MetroCards and transfer to the MTA Staten Island Railroad, which is easily accessible within the terminal.

Similarly, the MTA should install MetroCard machines at other ferry landings, with clear signage to eliminate confusion regarding which ticket machine vend passes for which transit system. While other ferry services lack the seamless physical integration riders enjoy at the St. George Staten Island Ferry terminal, the ability to purchase a MetroCard immediately upon disembarking a ferry will encourage multimodal trips that connect to upland destinations.

**Recommendation 8: Incorporate ferries into MTA fare pass options.**

Unlimited monthly fare structures offer an advantage to regular commuters vis-à-vis occasional riders by offering lower average one-way fares. For instance, at present, riders can purchase unlimited monthly ferry passes on the East River Ferry for $140. At this rate, passengers who commute roundtrip by ferry every weekday pay just over $3 per ride, compared to the $4 single-ticket fare. However, for ferry commuters who must transfer to New York City Transit to reach their final destination, the addition of an unlimited MetroCard increases monthly transit expenses to $252.

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To ease this burden for riders who regularly commute by both ferry and New York City Transit, the MTA should offer a discounted monthly “Rail, Road, & River” pass that offers unlimited ridership on subways, buses, and ferries at a reasonable average price point.

A successful example of joint fare structures can be found just across the Hudson river, where NJ Transit and NY Waterway offer riders a joint monthly pass for light rail and ferry service that provides discounts on select routes. For example, the total cost for two unlimited monthly passes on both the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail and the NY Waterway Ferry between Lower Manhattan and Weehawken runs $422. However, the joint light rail/ferry pass costs just $374, rewarding multimodal transit users with a $48 monthly discount. This integrated fare structure encourages ferry ridership by allowing riders to more seamlessly and affordably transfer between land- and water-based transportation and serves as a valuable model for New York City fare integration.

The MTA’s express bus transfer payment system also serves as a viable precedent for connections between ferries and upland transit. As with most ferries in New York City, the express bus fare is higher than the fare on New York City Transit subways and local buses ($6 per ride versus $2.50). When a passenger swipes a MetroCard to transfer to an express bus from a local bus or the subway, only the difference between their local and express fares is deducted ($3.50). When a passenger makes the reverse transfer (from an express bus to local transit service) the transfer is free, effectively capping express bus riders’ total journey fare at $6. Similarly, the MTA and the ferry companies can strike a cost-sharing agreement such that the fare for ferry riders’ full intermodal journey is limited to the price of a one-way ferry ride. This arrangement would reduce the fare burden on ferry riders and make water transit more accessible to all New Yorkers.

**Recommendation 9: Accept MTA MetroCards on all inter–borough ferries.**

The transition to a single fare payment system significantly enhances connections—both physical and psychological in nature—across all modes of transit. For example, though a number of agencies operate different modes of transportation in the four counties of Seattle’s metropolitan area, they are united in their universal acceptance of a singular fare payment system for all regional bus, rail, and ferry systems. While transferring to and from ferries does require an extra payment, using the ORCA (One Regional Card for All) card, passengers can load a declining balance (referred to as an “e-purse”) onto one versatile fare medium for easy multimodal travel across the region.

Transitioning to a single fare medium in New York City would require cooperation among various ferry and landside transit operators, but several successful examples of cross-agency, multimodal payment method integration already exist in New York City that can be used as a model for ferries. For instance, though operated by the Port Authority, the JFK AirTrain’s $5 fare is conveniently payable with a pay-per-ride MTA MetroCard. While riders may not transfer from New York City Transit subways or buses to the AirTrain for free, the ability to pay for both systems with one card simplifies travel for locals and tourists alike and encourages ridership on the AirTrain.

In a similar vein, New York’s ferries would be significantly more user–friendly if they transitioned to

an analogous payment system. The ability to pay for both New York City Transit and ferries with an MTA MetroCard—even if the fares are not the same—would reshape riders’ perceptions of ferries as distinct from public transportation and, in turn, encourage riders to take advantage of water mass transit.

**Recommendation 10: Provide discounted fares to passengers transferring between ferries and NYC Transit.**

To help relieve the cost burden for ferry riders requiring intermodal transfers—and maximize ferries’ ability to serve as a means of transit equity to low-income, transit-poor communities—the MTA and ferry companies can join forces to offer discounted transfers between water and landside transportation modes. For instance, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) and the Bay Area ferry companies have established a reciprocal relationship such that passengers transferring from a ferry to the Muni railway (or vice versa) using a Clipper card (San Francisco’s universal fare pass) receive a 50-cent discount from the operator of the mode to which they transfer.²¹ Though this discount only constitutes a small percentage of the total cost of the trip, it explicitly incentivizes intermodal transfers and helps facilitate connectivity to inland destinations.

In a similar fashion, the New York region’s private ferry companies can work to formulate a reciprocal relationship with the MTA and New Jersey Transit in order to share the cost of a transfer discount. According to a San Francisco ferry official, this arrangement more than pays for itself by promoting additional ridership on all involved transit systems.²²

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²². Gougherty, Michael, interview by Harrison Peck. Senior Planner, San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority (February 26, 2014).
Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

While ferry connectivity to bus and rail transit is key for passengers traveling to or from points located far inland—and will prove particularly important in New York should ferry service continue to expand to lower-density neighborhoods like Rockaway and the east Bronx—most passengers currently travel to ferries on foot. In fact, according to the NYC Economic Development Corporation, three out of four East River Ferry passengers walk to the ferry, using no landside mass transit whatsoever. However, decades of deindustrialization have left New York with a coastline largely fringed with underutilized (or completely vacant) land characterized by inadequate lighting, poorly maintained sidewalks, and minimal pedestrian or cycling infrastructure. Having to pass through these areas, especially at night, often makes ferry transit a less attractive option and discourages ridership.

According to Robert Cervero, professor of city and regional planning at University of California, Berkeley, “acceptable walking and cycling distances can be stretched considerably by creating attractive, visually stimulating corridors.” The installation of appealing “green connectors”—a network of safe and visually stimulating corridors designed to attract and guide pedestrian and bicycle traffic—can transform presently undesirable waterfront approach streets into inviting pathways that better link ferry landings and upland communities. Given the existing popularity of pedestrian and bicycle access to ferry landings, as well as the positive health and environmental benefits of non-motorized transit, the City should encourage increased ferry ridership through the implementation of a number of design enhancements to make biking and walking to ferries more attractive.

Recommendation 11: Extend the bike lane network to the waterfront to facilitate more seamless intermodal transfers.

In recent years, the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) has vastly expanded the City’s bicycling network, adding more than 200 miles of bike lanes, and the number of bike commuters has more than doubled since 2007. Moreover, with the launch of CitiBike in May 2013, bike travel is now easier and more accessible than ever. However, bike lanes often run parallel to waterfronts, failing to provide direct connection to ferry landings. Particularly given the widespread availability of bike infrastructure aboard many ferryboats in New York, the NYC DOT must embrace bicycles as valuable feeders to ferries in transit-poor waterfront neighborhoods and ensure that all ferry landings are directly connected to the City’s growing bicycle lane network. For instance, extending the Colonial Road bike lane north up 2nd Avenue will provide direct bicycle access.

to the Brooklyn Army Terminal ferry landing (see Figure 7). In addition, as it continues to expand the popular CitiBike network, the Department of Transportation should identify ferry landings and other waterfront destinations as priority locations for new CitiBike stations.

**Recommendation 12: Install pedestrian- and cyclist-oriented wayfinding signage throughout ferry neighborhoods.**

While a handful of ferry landings—such as Pier 11 in Lower Manhattan or Pier 1 in DUMBO—are sited in highly traveled neighborhood nodes, many are located in inconspicuous, inconvenient areas that receive minimal pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Removed from the residential, commercial and transit hubs of their surrounding neighborhoods, these landings—such as Schaefer Landing in South Williamsburg or West 39th Street in Midtown Manhattan—can be difficult to find for potential riders who are unfamiliar with the surrounding areas. The New York City Department of Transportation can vastly improve wayfinding to ferry terminals and increase ridership by installing clear directional signage throughout ferry neighborhoods (Figure 8), particularly at bus and subway stops, along bike lanes, and in heavily traveled neighborhood corridors. Doing so can raise awareness of local ferry service as well as facilitate easier transfers to ferries from upland transportation.

**Recommendation 13: Open view corridors to the water from upland streets.**

Visibility is important to public awareness of water mass transit; establishing clear view corridors from upland neighborhoods to ferry landings and to the water itself strengthens people’s connection to the waterfront, as well as their perception of integration between land- and water-based modes of transit.26 At Schaefer Landing in South Williamsburg, for instance, dense shrubbery and a narrow, winding walkway obstruct the view corridor to the river such that a pedestrian walking along Kent Avenue could easily fail to notice the water and the East River Ferry landing at all (Figure 9). Opening visibility to the river, by realigning the pathway to the water and clearing the view corridor of any obstructions, can reinforce the neighborhood’s maritime character and strengthen residents’ connection to their waterways. MWA’s recently launched *Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG)* program may offer opportunities to incentivize waterfront projects to exceed zoning requirements for public access. Projects that choose to enhance, enlarge, or add visual corridors would receive credits and receive a higher scoring within the WEDG program.

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Recommendation 14: Prioritize pedestrian and bike access to ferries through traffic calming and streetscape improvements.

While recent years have seen a surge of high-density residential and commercial development on waterfront land, much of New York’s coastline remains characterized by barren streetscapes, underutilized land, and vacant buildings. These areas tend to prioritize truck and vehicular traffic and, with minimal landside transit options, can discourage ferry ridership. However, a number of streetscape improvements can create attractive pathways, designed with pedestrians and cyclists in mind, that link ferry terminals to subways, buses, and central housing and commercial corridors in upland neighborhoods. Particularly in industrial waterfront neighborhoods with ferry service such as Greenpoint, Sunset Park, or Long Island City, streetscape improvements can forge stronger connections between ferries and upland neighborhood centers. As such, the New York City Department of Transportation should prioritize ferry approach streets for inclusion in its Complete Streets program in order to better orient streetscape improvements toward ferry landings.

Signed by Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2011, the New York State Complete Streets Act lays out a series of street design principles that facilitate safe access among all public street users. Complete Streets provide for the safe, multimodal use of street space that creates distinct separation between pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicular traffic while promoting slow and safe driving conditions. Though some of the physical infrastructure improvements for Complete Streets can be subtle, they create roadways that are innately attractive to pedestrians and bicyclists due to their prioritization of non–motorized transit modes and aesthetically pleasing, safe streetscapes.

If implemented with ferries in mind, the design principles that define Complete Streets can lead to easier access and increased ridership on ferries. For instance, wide, well-lit sidewalks with seating and attractive landscaping create visually pleasing corridors, while distinctly painted bike lanes separated from traffic by bollards or benches create a safer atmosphere for both pedestrians and cyclists. In addition, curb extensions lengthen the sidewalk to reduce crossing distances, benefiting elderly and disabled pedestrians and creating a streetscape that visually prioritizes non–motorized transit, while speed bumps and raised crosswalks demand slower vehicular speeds in order to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists. When implemented in conjunction with one another, these traffic calming tactics (among others) can create inviting pathways that innately guide pedestrians and bicyclists to ferry terminals from upland communities (and vice versa) and, in turn, can likely lead to increased ferry ridership.

Recommendation 15: Site ferry landings within active public spaces.

In most cases, transit hubs constitute the physical and symbolic nucleus of a neighborhood, surrounded by transit-oriented, high-density development and an active street life. While this can occasionally be said of ferry landings in New York City—at Pier 11 or the World Financial Center, for example—ferry landings are often an afterthought to existing development and exist on the fringe of community life, severing both physical and psychological connections between ferries and the upland communities they serve. Accordingly, ferries could likely see increased ridership if their landings were more deeply incorporated into existing community life.

According to Robert Cervero, “car-free, human-scale civic spaces adjacent to stations” are a key ingredient to attracting pedestrian activity and community life to transit nodes. In other words, designing moderately sized, inviting public spaces around ferry landings—replete with amenities such as seating, concessions, playgrounds, markets, athletic facilities, shaded areas, or public art—can make ferry landings waterfront destinations unto themselves that naturally draw foot and bike traffic to the waterfront and, in turn, the ferry. For instance, the North 6th Street East River Ferry landing in Williamsburg is sited within a scenic waterfront park offering comfortable seating, a grassy expanse, a shorefront promenade, a public pier, and unobstructed views of the Manhattan skyline. Moreover, on spring and summer weekends, the park hosts Smorgasburg, an open-air artisanal food market that attracts hordes of visitors from across the City and the world. As a result, the East River Ferry transports passengers directly into a hub of community activity, largely accounting for the fact that this ferry landing boasts the highest ridership—particularly on weekends—of any stop along the East River Ferry route.

This “ferry in a park” model should be a strong consideration as the City makes recommendations for sites for future ferry service—for example, Soundview’s Clason Point Park, a small waterfront park located in close proximity to a medium-density residential community, would naturally attract pedestrian activity and ridership—and it should be applied to existing ferry sites as a means of enhanced connectivity to upland neighborhoods. For instance, Figure 11 presents a visionary schematic, designed by W Architecture & Landscape Architecture, that reimagines the India Street approach to the Greenpoint East River Ferry landing as a car-free street that caters to pedestrians. In this rendering, the street end—whose current configuration can be seen in Figure 10—has been transformed into an attractive open space for pedestrians with the installation of green infrastructure, which provides both physical and ecological enhancement to the site. This design draws foot traffic toward the water in a way that would enhance community connections to the water and likely increase pedestrians’ desire to walk to the ferry landing.

30. Cervero, Green Connectors.
This paper has proposed fifteen individual recommendations for improving connectivity between ferries and upland communities. While each recommendation has strong potential to promote ferry ridership and help riders to draw both physical and psychological connections to ferry transit, if implemented in conjunction with one another they can create a truly integrated transportation system.

This final section illustrates the power of upland connectivity through a close examination of the Hunters point South section of Long Island City, Queens. While most recommendations in this paper can be applied across New York’s ferry system, Hunters Point is a particularly unique case, as, home to an East River Ferry stop, a Long Island Railroad station, several local bus and subway routes, a densely residential waterfront, and bike lanes, the neighborhood has the potential to act as a true multimodal transit hub. However, at present, the variety of transit options that converge on Hunters Point typically operate independently from one another.

Map 1 (on page 20) shows the existing transit conditions in Hunters Point. The East River Ferry landing is approximately 0.3 miles from the Long Island Railroad station and approximately 0.6 miles from the 7 train. Enhanced connectivity to the ferry could allow passengers quick access to the far East Side of Manhattan—a cost-effective form of “East Side Access”—which is home to major job centers such as NYU Medical Center, Bellevue Hospital, and the United Nations. However, though Hunters Point’s transit nodes are separated by easy walking or biking distances, the industrial streetscape, dearth of pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure or amenities, and lack of any transit or fare integration whatsoever explicitly discourages passengers from making transfers here.

For instance, upon disembarking the LIRR, the Q103 bus, or the Vernon Boulevard subway station, wayfinding signage or other visual cues to the ferry are extremely limited, while virtually barren streetscapes discourage pedestrian activity (Map 1 Images 4, 5, and 6). Moreover, existing bike lanes lack consistent connectivity to each other or to transit nodes and other destinations (Map 1 Image 3). As a result, the ferry essentially operates in isolation from neighboring transit modes, discouraging riders from making intermodal journeys.

Map 2 (on page 21) illustrates a re-imagining of the Hunters Point South streetscape. This design builds off of recent improvements, including the waterfront bike lane and the new Hunters Point South Park adjacent to the ferry landing, to foster stronger pedestrian and bicycle connections across the neighborhood’s transit modes. In conjunction with transit and fare integration, these improvements can transform the neighborhood into a more seamless multimodal transit hub to which the East River Ferry is an integral component.
Map 1

Existing transit conditions in the Hunters Point section of Long Island City.

1. East River Ferry
2. Waterfront bike lane/Hunters Point South Park
3. High-rise housing
4. Long Island City LIRR
5. Q103 bus terminus
6. MTA 7 train station
7. Vernon Blvd. bike lane
Map 2

Proposed multimodal access improvements across Hunters Point South.

1. East River Ferry
2. Waterfront bike lane/ Hunters Point South Park
3. High-rise housing
4. Long Island City LIRR
5. Q103 bus terminus
6. MTA 7 train station
7. Vernon Blvd. bike lane
First, at the exit to the Vernon Boulevard 7 train station, where a sign currently reads, “LIRR 3 blocks at Borden Av,” the MTA should install an adjacent sign that reads “East River Ferry 5 blocks at Borden Av” (Map 2 Image 6). This way, upon entering the neighborhood, riders would immediately be made aware of the option to transfer to local ferry service. Similarly, the Department of Transportation can install a WalkNYC sign at the exit to the ferry landing (Image 1) in order to orient disembarking passengers to the nearest landside transfer points.

Next, to minimize distance and maximize visibility among modes, the MTA should reroute the Q103 to turn right on Borden Avenue, right at the waterfront on Center Boulevard, and then right again on 50th Avenue back to Vernon. This route extension will create direct connectivity between the bus and the ferry, fostering both physical and psychological linkages between the two modes. If ferry and bus fares were integrated, and both accepted the MetroCard, this transfer would be particularly seamless.

Finally, the corridors highlighted with a dashed green line should be prioritized for streetscape and wayfinding improvements in order to provide enhanced pedestrian and bicycle connectivity among the neighborhood’s multiple transit modes. For example, Image 4, which shows the newly designed Complete Street at Columbus Circle in Manhattan,\(^\text{32}\) may serve as a model for how the Department of Transportation can redesign the street adjacent to the LIRR station. As opposed to the existing configuration (Map 1 Image 4), this layout separates a designated bike lane from vehicular traffic with a wide pedestrian plaza—that is equipped with a variety of seating options and tables—and landscaping in order to encourage non-motorized transit through safe and attractive streetscapes. Strategically applying these principles across Hunters Point (along the dashed green line on Map 2) will create an enhanced network of “green connectors” that provides a series of visual cues to direct pedestrian and bicycle traffic across transit modes, while providing safe and inviting intermodal access corridors across the neighborhood.

Conclusion

Fast, resilient to disaster, free from traffic, and relatively low on upfront capital requirements, ferries have experienced a revival in New York Harbor in recent years. However, the present configuration of ferry service fails to maximize the myriad benefits they can impart to New York City and its surrounding region. Lacking easy and affordable connectivity to upland communities, New York’s ferries operate independently from other modes of mass transit (and from each other as well), discouraging ridership and significantly limiting their ability to transport riders to and from points beyond the immediate vicinity of ferry landings.

Compared to most of the world’s extensive ferry networks, New York’s is singular in the degree to which its ferries and upland communities are disconnected. This paper puts forth fifteen recommendations to rectify this issue through improved coordination with landside transit, fare integration, and enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access to ferries. While the strategies herein are far from exhaustive, they are the most immediately actionable within the New York City context, and they can be most effectively implemented if an inter-agency governing authority assumes operation, subsidy, and integration responsibility for New York Harbor ferry service.

As New York’s ferry network continues to expand, it is critical that the City, transit authorities, and private ferry companies forge partnerships to redefine ferries as an integral component to the regional transportation network. In doing so, they can increase ferry ridership and truly maximize the potential of New York Harbor’s Blue Highways.
## Appendix: Summary of Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Entity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass Transit Connectivity</td>
<td>1. Physically integrate ferry landings with bus stops.</td>
<td>Physical integration enhances wayfinding and convenience for transferring passengers.</td>
<td>MTA, DOT</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Extend bus routes to the waterfront to facilitate more seamless intermodal transfers.</td>
<td>Direct bus access will enhance connectivity to ferries.</td>
<td>MTA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Synchronize ferry schedule with buses and commuter rails</td>
<td>Schedule coordination will allow passengers to make more seamless land-water transfers.</td>
<td>Ferry operators</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Add all ferry stops and routes to MTA maps</td>
<td>Integrated maps will foster physical and psychological intermodal connections.</td>
<td>MTA</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Install WalkNYC maps at ferry terminals.</td>
<td>Ferry landings presently offer no information regarding landside transit.</td>
<td>DOT, EDC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fare Integration</td>
<td>6. Fully integrate ferry fares with New York City Transit, allowing free, intermodal, MetroCard transfers.</td>
<td>Free transfers simplify ferry travel and make ferries more affordable to all New Yorkers.</td>
<td>MTA, ferry operators</td>
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<td>7. Install MetroCard machines at ferry landings.</td>
<td>The availability of MetroCard machines at ferry landings will encourage multimodal trips.</td>
<td>MTA, EDC</td>
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<td>8. Incorporate ferries into MTA fare structure.</td>
<td>Integrated fare structures incentivize multimodal transit journeys.</td>
<td>MTA, ferry operators</td>
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<td>9. Accept MTA MetroCards on all inter-borough ferries.</td>
<td>Universal fare media simplifies travel and fosters psychological connections across modes.</td>
<td>MTA, ferry operators</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. Provide discounted fares to passengers transferring between ferries and NYC Transit.</td>
<td>Discounted transfers incentivize multimodal transit journeys.</td>
<td>MTA, ferry operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian and Bicycle Access</td>
<td>11. Extend bike lanes to the waterfront to facilitate more seamless intermodal transfers.</td>
<td>Direct connectivity to the bike lane network facilitates safer and easier travel to ferry landings.</td>
<td>DOT</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>12. Install wayfinding signage for cyclists and pedestrians throughout ferry neighborhoods.</td>
<td>Increased signage at key neighborhood nodes will raise awareness of ferry transit.</td>
<td>DOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Open view corridors to the water from upland streets.</td>
<td>Visibility to ferry landings fosters stronger connections to the water and raises awareness of ferry service.</td>
<td>EDC, DOT</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>14. Prioritize pedestrian and bike access to ferries through traffic calming and streetscape improvements.</td>
<td>Enhanced streetscapes create safe, visually pleasing pathways for non-motorized transit, fostering local connection to the waterfront and facilitating easier ferry access.</td>
<td>DOT</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>15. Site ferry landings within active public spaces.</td>
<td>Public spaces bring ferry landings to the forefront of community life.</td>
<td>EDC, DOT, DPR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MTA = Metropolitan Transportation Authority
DOT = New York City Department of Transportation
EDC = New York City Economic Development Corporation
DPR = New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
Ferry operators = NY Waterway, Seastreak, BillyBey, New York Water Taxi


Gougherty, Michael, interview by Harrison Peck. *Senior Planner, San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority* (February 26, 2014).


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* Individuals listed do not necessarily endorse this report, and errors and omissions are not their responsibility.