



Statement by Ari Hoffnung
to the New York City Traffic
Congestion Mitigation Commission
at the Wednesday, October 31, 2007,
Bronx Borough Public Hearing

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Good evening. My name is Ari Hoffnung. I am the President of the *Riverdale Jewish Community Council* and former Chair of *Community Board Eight's Parks and Recreation Committee*. I am here tonight representing the "Riverdale Ferry Coalition", a group I recently founded to study the feasibility, and garner grassroots support, for providing high-speed ferry service from Riverdale to Lower Manhattan.

My own family's commuting pattern could help illustrate the challenges Riverdalians face. I own a car that I use mostly on the weekends, and commute daily to Manhattan's Grand Central Terminal using the Metro-North Hudson Line. I travel to the Spuyten Duyvil train station using the Hudson Rail Link Shuttle Service. I am fortunate to work in a building in Midtown Manhattan that connects to Grand Central Terminal. My door-to-door to commute is approximately 45 minutes each way.

My wife Annie, however, has a much longer commute because she works in Lower Manhattan. When she arrives at Grand Central Terminal, she still needs to take the 4 or 5 subway train downtown to the Wall Street station. Her dreaded "three-seat" commute is approximately 70 minutes each way.

This lengthy commute is what I believe prompts thousands of Riverdale residents who work in Lower Manhattan to commute to work by car instead of mass transit. Not surprisingly, a recent study conducted by the *Campaign for New York's Future* found that over 20% of Riverdale's residents who work in Manhattan, representing 3,300 people, drive to work.

While I oppose the current congestion-pricing proposal, I am deeply concerned about the impact congestion has on the economy and global warming. Moreover, I believe it is incumbent on opponents of congestion pricing, like myself, to offer viable alternatives rather than to merely poke holes at the proposal.

Following are several compelling reasons why establishing a ferry service from Riverdale to Manhattan offers one such congestion-reducing alternative:

1) Riverdale ferry service would offer shorter commuting times, thus reducing congestion. Ferry service in Riverdale would present a viable alternative to driving by offering commutes as low as 35 minutes to Lower Manhattan, compared with the current 70-minute-plus commutes offered through Metro-North, bus, or subway options.

2) Riverdale ferry service could be created by leveraging existing mass transit infrastructure. Hudson River ferry service linking Haverstraw and Yonkers to Lower Manhattan began operating in early summer 2007. There is potential to leverage this existing service by adding an additional ferry stop in Riverdale. Riverdale's two Metro-North train stations – Riverdale and Spuyten Duyvil – are both located adjacent to the Hudson River. While these stations offer limited parking, the majority of commuters arrive at these stations using a shuttle bus service that covers a significant portion of the Northwest Bronx. This existing shuttle bus service could be increased to offer transportation to ferry commuters.

3) Riverdale ferry service would require low capital investment. Compared to other forms of mass transit, minimal capital investment is needed to establish a ferry service. In Yonkers, a \$4.2 million grant from the *Lower Manhattan Development Corporation* helped jump-start the ferry service there.

4) Riverdale ferry service could be implemented quickly. While establishing a new ferry service would require the approval of multiple governmental agencies, it can be done quite quickly. In Yonkers, the ferry service went from the concept phase to being fully operational in only two years.

5) Riverdale ferry service would aid Lower Manhattan's revitalization. An April 2003 report, published by the *Lower Manhattan Development Corporation*, identified ferry service as a key means of linking Lower Manhattan to the region. Proving better transportation alternatives to Lower Manhattan would expand Lower Manhattan's labor pool and sustain its vitality for existing and future Lower Manhattan businesses.

6) Riverdale ferry service would be environmentally friendly. Recent advances in technology have helped create ferries that are designed with low-wake hulls to minimize impact on aquatic life and employ state-of-the-art low-emission technology. In fact, our estimates show that compared to car use, ferry use would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by over 25%.

7) Riverdale ferry service would provide area residents with an important safety net. The events of September 11th as well as the recent blackouts demonstrate the importance of having other methods of transportation that could be utilized in times of emergency. When subways or trains are not able to run, water transit becomes especially important.

While one could argue that implementation of the Riverdale Ferry proposal would only reduce a fraction of Manhattan's overall congestion, it is being offered within the spirit of "Think Globally, Act Locally..." and I am confident that commuters in other neighborhoods throughout the City and the Tri-State area will offer their own ideas on how to best reduce congestion in their areas. Collectively, these proposals will have a significant impact on congestion levels and raise the quality of life throughout the entire City.

In summary, I believe that high-speed ferry service from Riverdale to Manhattan would reduce congestion by providing a viable alternative to the 3,300 people from the Northwest Bronx who currently drive to Manhattan by car each weekday.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal and for donating your valuable time to serve on this historic Commission.

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