

If You Build It ... by Dan Jacoby

A new stadium in the right place can be a huge moneymaker for New York City.

Under the current proposal, with the stadium over the Hudson Rail Yard, there is neither the desire to build, nor the money to pay for, the transportation upgrades the far west side really needs. Without proper transportation upgrades, the whole development becomes useless, since people won't be able to get to work. Furthermore, the stadium itself will cause massive traffic problems every time the Jets play there. This will end up as a multi-billion dollar disaster.

On the other hand ...

Put a multi-use stadium over the Sunnyside Rail Yard, bring the New York Jets back into the city, and move the Mets into the stadium as well. This will add tens of millions of dollars a year in direct tax revenues, plus uncounted extra revenues from the jobs created, as well as the ancillary retail, parking, tolls, etc.

The Sunnyside site already has four subway lines, and stations for Long Island Railroad, New Jersey Transit and Metro North can be built without laying miles of track or digging even an inch of tunnel. Since no major transportation upgrades would have to be made, the stadium could pay for itself without even considering consequences.

But let's consider the consequences anyway.

One major consequence is that Shea Stadium can now be torn down, paving the way (literally) for development of a much-needed manufacturing complex in Flushing, along with the attendant retail, housing, and even some commercial development. What's more, there's room – and demand – for affordable housing right on an express stop on the #7 subway line.

Developing the Shea Stadium site in Flushing opens the way to put up more high-end commercial and residential buildings on the far west side, especially on the valuable waterfront property that would be wasted with a stadium. Since affordable housing would be built elsewhere, this site can be reserved for high-cost, high-revenue development. Because the development will all be high-revenue, turnkey agreements can then be reached with developers in order to help pay the cost of upgrading the transportation infrastructure.

And the transportation infrastructure needs far more upgrading than the current proposal suggest. Merely extending the #7 subway line two stops doesn't add capacity. It does nothing to mitigate the crush that will occur when thousands more people try to use an already overcrowded line. We need to think big.

Continue the #7 extension past the current proposal and down the west side, with stops at Chelsea Piers and the meat market area, finally connecting to the L subway line. Converting the #7 to BMT service (for which it was originally designed) expands capacity by 18% – without adding a single train. Connecting the 7 with the L, thus removing two stub ends that limit capacity, opens the line for more trains during peak hours, expanding capacity even more. This, combined with increased use of the L line, solves most, if not all, of the increased transportation problems caused by commercial development on the far west side.

And without what the New York Times called a “hulking box” of a stadium taking up the most valuable location, developers can help pay for it.

Which means that money becomes available to finish the Second Avenue subway line, relieving the desperate overcrowding on the Lexington Avenue 4, 5 and 6. By the time we’re done, in thirty or forty years, New York City will have the infrastructure to continue as the greatest center for commerce, information and urbanization in the world. And it all starts by building a stadium in Sunnyside.

Or we can put the stadium over the Hudson Rail Yard and louse it all up.

Copyright 2004, Dan Jacoby