**Time for a New West Harlem Train Station**

Daniel Marks Cohen

The wait for the 1 train for morning commuters on the Upper West Side often requires letting a few trains go past, so packed that they cannot accommodate another passenger. And there is not a single station between 96th Street and 168th Street along the same line that is accessible to the disabled. 125th Street and Broadway has an escalator, but no elevator, which is of little use to someone in a wheelchair.

But there is a potential solution that would ameliorate both of these challenges in one MetroCard swipe – if the MTA were to construct a new Metro-North train station in West Harlem, close to 125th Street at St. Clair Place and 12th Avenue. Located south of Harlem’s Fairway supermarket and local restaurants, a long stretch of flat land emerges from the Riverside Park tunnels where a new platform could be constructed. This Amtrak line, with a stop at 125th Street, could bring commuters to Penn Station in 10 minutes, while reducing pressure on the 1 train line and with a new station, be fully ADA compliant. To top it off, the downtown platform entrance to the new station could be accessed by a MetroCard.

A new station at 125th Street would increase capacity on the 1 train, and ease pressures on the congested express line at 96th Street. Many downtown-bound commuters living near the 125th Street would switch to the faster Amtrak line to travel to midtown, rather than crossing the platform at 96th Street to catch an express downtown. Similarly, in the evening rush hour, commuters are frequently stranded at 96th Street with overcrowded 1 trains or worse, as train after train skip stops to go directly to 137th Street, bypassing stations in between as platforms at 96th Street grow thick with frustrated straphangers trying to get home.

The Regional Planning Association has raised this issue before – most recently at the 4th regional plan released last summer – with proposed new stations at 125th Street and further north in Washington Heights. The MTA itself also raised expectations in five years ago about a possible new station at 125th Street to open in 2019, but nothing has happened since the announcement. However, after that burst of attention the first phases of Columbia University’s $6 billion Manhattanville campus are almost completed – auguring the daily arrival of more than 6,000 people – commuting to and from the new campus will put an unimagined strain on an already overcrowded subway station.

Access to the Hudson line would also facilitate cross-interaction between residents of northern Manhattan and Hudson River communities – which includes access to employment centers and affordable housing further north and access to the educational institutions and medical facilities in Manhattan. Incoming commuters would also be able to connect to the intermodal network of buses that crisscross the 125th Street thoroughfare. Currently a trip from north of the city involves traveling to midtown and a U-turn back uptown, or a stop at the 125th Street and Park Avenue Metro-North station and then a crosstown commute. This wastes valuable time, squanders precious passenger seats, and is not optimal for commuters or the transportation network.

New MTA president Andy Byford has a Fast Forward plan for the subways, and there is much to commend it. Adding new Amtrak stations will be complimentary to his vision of a 21st century transportation system, the new 125th Street stop would reduce the current strain, increase capacity, and provide swift access to midtown from northern Manhattan, all for the price of a MetroCard swipe.