

Trolley Cars to Roll Again in Bklyn

By Doug Loffredo

Bemoaning the lack of reliable and user-friendly public transportation in downtown Brooklyn, advocates of bringing back a light rail and trolley car system to Brooklyn streets believe that they have a viable answer to the city's downtown needs.

It is argued that electric powered rail cars will not only be able to carry more passengers with greater efficiency than currently used city buses, but will be more environmentally friendly compared with the noise and exhaust fumes that city buses emit.

A trolley system would also help to cut down the number of automobiles that jam the borough's downtown shopping and business district on any given workday, says Robert Diamond, the president of the Brooklyn Historic Railway Association (B.H.R.A.).

"Downtown Brooklyn chronically suffers from air pollution, noise and daredevil motorists," he says. "A light rail line is a viable alternative."

According to Diamond, a realistic rail line would link Brooklyn's major tourist and business attractions in a five mile loop, including the Brooklyn Museum, Botanical Garden, Public

Library, Grand Army Plaza, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Fulton Street pedestrian mall, the Atlantic Avenue L.I.R.R. terminal, MetroTech Center and the heart of downtown.

Leave the Driving To Us

Traveling down Jay Street to Fulton Landing, the streetcars would ride under the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, alongside the proposed waterfront pier park, where Diamond suggests a trolley maintenance barn could be placed. Diamond also believes that the barn could double as a museum and acts as an attraction for the new waterfront park.

The train would continue along Furman Street to Atlantic Avenue where it would enter an existing tunnel, resurfacing on Atlantic Avenue at Boerum Place for the return to Grand Army Plaza after a cut to Fulton Street and then Vanderbilt Avenue.

Original Tracks Still Usable

According to Diamond, the project would cost \$50 million, including track work, the construction of a car barn, the buying of new or refurbishing of old street cars and trolleys, electric substations and other

equipment.

Diamond says that the actual cost could be a lot less if the Department of Transportation (D.O.T.) uncovered the original trolley tracks that are still embedded under the street. "It is estimated that as much as a third of the line could be salvaged from already existing tracks.

Currently, B.H.R.A. is restoring three vintage streetcars. A fourth car dating back from 1897 has already been restored and is "ready to roll," Diamond said.

According to Diamond's calculations, the design capacity an eventual fourteen car system is 1,512 passengers seats per hour or 17,388 per day. Absolute capacity, including standees, is 4,400 per hour or 51,060 daily. During rush hour, the trolleys would be spaced five minutes apart.

Tunnel Draws Tourists

The brick and stone tunnel under Atlantic Avenue was built in 1844 and used until 1861, but was soon forgotten as other priorities and as well as the popularity of the automobile took over the attention of city planners. Due to investigative leg work and poking around in several subterranean crawl spaces, Dia-

mond rediscovered the tunnel and has since opened it to tours.

The tunnel stretches from the waterfront to just past Court Street, according to Diamond.

Tunnel tours are available and reservations are recommended. The number to call is (718) 941-3160.



mond, the president of the B.H.R.A., points out that the tunnel is still in good shape — perfect for use in the proposed trolley line.



Nearly 50 people took time off recently to tour the underground trolley tunnel under Atlantic Avenue. The entrance from the street is through a manhole.

Photos by Doug Loffredo



Josh Karpf (left) and Kevin Boyle examine the entrance to the long forgotten trolley tunnel under Atlantic Avenue.