

Common Sense Considerations for West Street

A position statement by the
Coalition to Save West Street

6 January 2003

Executive Committee

JOHN DELLAPORTAS, Chair

JOANNE CHERNOW

BENJAMIN HEMRIC

TODD HIRSCHBERG

MARILYN HOWARD

RICHARD JOFFEE

PAMELA LANGFORD

THORNTON LATHROP

BILL LOVE

EDWARD SHEFFE

NRITYA SUBRAMANIAM

JOANNE TAYLOR



www.SaveWestStreet.com

Introduction

The Coalition to Save West Street is a large and growing group of people who live and work in Lower Manhattan united in opposition to a proposed West Street tunnel. This document explains the reasons for our concern, and the alternatives we think can achieve the same objectives more quickly and easily, at far less public expense.

At the time of this writing, there have been press reports that the proposed \$3 billion "long" West Street tunnel (from Chambers Street to Battery Park) is no longer being seriously considered. Whether or not this is the case, many of the considerations discussed here are relevant to decisions regarding a proposed \$300-700 million "short" tunnel (from Vesey to Liberty Street), a park/promenade, and other alternatives for improvements to a surface (unburied) West Street.

We use the term "common sense" in the title above to emphasize that, while our arguments are not technical, they are serious and would be self-evident to anyone studying West Street, the way it is used, its impact on the neighborhood, and the challenges and opportunities it presents.

1 A West Street tunnel wouldn't solve problems — it would create them

Many people who favor a West Street tunnel seem to do so because they believe that in the end, after all the money spent and all the disruptions caused by construction, a "park/promenade" on top of a tunnel will help to unite Battery Park City and the rest of Lower Manhattan.

But would it really do that, or would it actually create a barrier instead? Moreover, are there better ways to more closely integrate Battery Park City and the rest of Lower Manhattan?

We advocate other approaches that are cheaper, less disruptive and, in the end, more likely to create the unified, vibrant, diversified Lower Manhattan that everyone wants.

The Coalition recognizes the need to improve pedestrian access between Battery Park City and the rest of Lower Manhattan, while maintaining easy access by bus, cab, car and emergency vehicle. We are also in favor of healthy parks, sound transportation planning and the wise husbanding of public resources. We would like to see Lower Manhattan become both home to a significant memorial appropriate to the events of September 11th and home to a thriving, diversified urban district of businesses, shops, residences and civic and cultural facilities.

For these reasons, we regard proposals that include a West Street tunnel as neighborhood-destroying plans all too reminiscent of the failed urban renewal schemes of the 1950s. We support serious consideration of alternative plans that would encourage the development of West Street as an urbane north-south boulevard to tie the neighborhoods of Lower Manhattan closer together.

The Coalition believes that a tunnel — especially one with a park on top — would divide Lower Manhattan rather than unite it, and would increase traffic congestion rather than reducing it. It would disrupt the lives of residents during construction and diminish neighborhood access by vehicle on a permanent basis. It would divert billions of dollars from more productive uses. It would harm existing businesses and diminish the attractiveness of the area for future businesses. It would lower property values in Battery Park City. In the following sections, we discuss these and other concerns in considerable detail.

2 Construction would disrupt the lives of Lower Manhattan residents for many years

The proposed tunnel project would have seriously detrimental effects on local residential neighborhoods during the construction phase. Residents of Lower Manhattan would face years of restricted access by foot and by vehicle due to blocked lanes and re-routed streets, as well as the resulting pollution and



noise from road and tunnel construction and relocation of utilities.

Residents of Battery Park City would be particularly vulnerable to this disruption. Since there are no subway stops in Battery Park City and the area is bounded by the Hudson River, West Street is the neighborhood's lifeline to the rest of New York City.

The New York State Department of Transportation projects that a "long" West Street tunnel will take up to 11 years to complete — 5 years for environmental impact, design and engineering studies, followed by up to 6 years of construction. In fact, a review of similar projects shows that construction often takes substantially longer than initial estimates. The infamous "Big Dig" tunnel project in Boston has been under way for over ten years and is currently on a 24-hour-per-day construction schedule. The construction phase of a West Street tunnel will impede local residents' access to the highway and mass transit, harm the character of their neighborhoods, and reduce their quality of life for many years to come.

3 A tunnel would seriously diminish vehicle access on a permanent basis

The potential harm to Lower Manhattan's neighborhoods from a West Street tunnel is not limited to the construction phase. When the project is completed, Battery Park City residents will have lost their current quick and easy vehicle access to the rest of the city, traveling north to the West Side Highway or south to the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and FDR Drive.

None of the tunneling proposals presented to date has attempted to make any provisions for necessary vehicle access ramps that might deal with this issue (even if such ramps were feasible, which is doubtful). Even if feasible, access ramps would present other problems (see analysis below). The local access roads to which residents will be relegated will be clogged with traffic, including tour buses

going to and from the World Trade Center memorial. Lack of quick access by emergency vehicles such as police cars, fire trucks and ambulances will also be a major threat to the health and safety of residents. In addition, local public school children in Battery Park City will bear a disproportionate burden, as a majority of them travel by bus to school.

4 A tunnel would incur high costs with minimal (if any) benefits

The New York State Department of Transportation has estimated the cost of a "long" West Street tunnel at \$3 billion. This is a wasteful extravagance at a time of budgetary crisis. It is a needless diversion of funds from projects (such as the Second Avenue subway) that can do much more for economic development than constructing a "problem park" over West Street. And it is counterproductive — heavily increasing auto traffic in an area where a major mass-transit facility is to be constructed.

It has been argued by some — who do not live in the neighborhood — that the West Street tunnel project is necessary to "unite" or "reconnect" Battery Park City to the rest of downtown. This rationale is paternalistic and completely specious.

Battery Park City was already well connected to the city, including downtown, both by foot and by vehicle prior to September 11th. The reopening of West Street restored vehicle access, and access by foot can be restored to its former state by the use of simpler alternatives such as pedestrian bridges.

As described in Section 7, we urge that a "boulevard" approach to West Street be given serious consideration — an approach that would make the street more pedestrian-friendly and help create a more vibrant and diversified downtown neighborhood.

Finally, it should be noted that a West Street tunnel could cost far more than the current \$3 billion estimate, based on experience with



similar projects. The initial estimate for the "Big Dig" in Boston was \$2.6 billion. That project's cost is now at \$14.65 billion — and the project is still uncompleted.

5 A "problem park" that would divide Lower Manhattan rather than uniting it

Consider West Street in this area as being made up of three sections; each would be affected differently by a tunnel and park/promenade.

- A South section: between Battery Park and Liberty Street
- B Center section: between Liberty and Vesey Streets, adjacent to the World Trade Center (WTC)
- C North section: between Vesey Street and Chambers Street

A) Analysis of West Street: Liberty Street to Battery Park

Think of the southernmost portion of West Street first. Would a park/promenade here further unite downtown or actually create a barrier? Would this park/promenade become one of New York's successful parks — or would it become one of New York's nuisance parks? Would it be a safe park or a dangerous one? Would people want to walk along it and across it, or not? Would it increase property values or depress them?

Let's look at these questions as urban planning critics Jane Jacobs, Oscar Newman or William H. Whyte might look at them — based on the way cities and city neighborhoods actually work. When we do, the prospects for a successful park do not look very good.

Where are all the people with leisure time to use this park going to come from?

Lower Manhattan south of Chambers Street is an area a little over a square mile where there are already numerous parks. Should we spend \$3 billion on another one?

Battery Park City itself has almost 30 acres of open space. There is also Battery Park, Liberty Plaza Park, Bowling Green, Hanover Square, City Hall Park, the South Street Seaport, Washington Market Park and the Trinity Church public grounds. And that's not to mention all the office buildings in Lower Manhattan that have indoor or outdoor plazas. Finally, a Memorial Plaza is being discussed for the WTC site.

The idea that tourists are going to populate this promenade and park in great numbers does not reflect the way tourists actually behave in New York. Tourists are more inclined to walk the streets of Lower Manhattan (where the action is), stroll the "canyons" of Broadway (a sight unlike anywhere else), or along the glorious, existing waterfront park, than to walk down a promenade which has no views of the Wall Street area or the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. It's certainly hard to imagine them hanging out there.

How attractive would this park be? Generally, at least 20 inches of dirt is required to grow grass properly, and much more is required for big trees. Due to the heavy weight that this would place on the concrete deck over a tunnel, economic considerations would inevitably dictate a layer of subsoil so thin that it would tend to dry out and/or freeze, resulting in plant deaths. The resulting sparse landscaping would not create the lush, green park envisioned by tunnel proponents. The waterproofing membrane beneath the subsoil that will be required for a concrete deck will also have to be dug up and replaced periodically.

The park would also have to have significant exhaust vents or grating which would concentrate emissions from vehicles in the tunnel below into a few areas. The surface environment near these areas would be degraded as a result.



Would any stores be able to survive adjacent to this park?

West Street is not a strong retail street now. It is difficult for long, linear parks to support successful retail and commercial establishments. Parks that support successful retail activity around them (e.g., Bryant Park and Union Square) have lots of people from high density buildings, mass transit stations and pedestrian cross traffic across a broad spectrum of the day. It is unlikely that a linear park in Lower Manhattan will get the heavy pedestrian cross traffic necessary to support successful retail stores along its flanks.

A linear park with few successful stores or businesses would not be able to compete with the riverside promenade to the west, with its grand views of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, and the world-renowned financial district streets to the east.

Look at the reality of existing parks and plazas in Lower Manhattan

Consider Battery Park as an example of an existing park in Lower Manhattan. Although the park is busy with tourists and lunchtime office workers in the daytime, even in good weather the park is deserted after the last boat from the Statue of Liberty leaves (except for the homeless residents who sleep on benches there). In the winter, when the sun sets before the end of the work day, the park is truly empty and forbidding.

This sheds some light on just how thin and unsubstantial the demand for park usage is among residents, visitors and workers in Lower Manhattan. Even with residential expansion and increased tourism, it strains credibility to imagine that there would ever be enough leisure-time users to populate all this additional parkland — especially in all four seasons during a broad spectrum of the day.

Furthermore, it's important to maintain a healthy skepticism about how much of an increase in tourism there will really be in

Lower Manhattan, at least as it pertains to parks. Lower Manhattan has always been a "must see" for visitors to New York anyway, so it is unrealistic to expect too many more visitors to this area. And visitors from elsewhere in the metropolitan area who might come to see the memorial are also unlikely to spend time in this promenade/park.

How safe would this park be without adequate stores, businesses and visitors?

Parks, like streets, depend on people — law abiding citizens — to maintain public order and safety. The less safe a park is or looks, the more likely people are to avoid it — making it even more unsafe.

Imagine what it would be like to cross through this deserted park after dark — a park that would likely act as a magnet for undesirable activities. Many residents, particularly in Battery Park City, would have no choice. Late night trips in or out of their neighborhood by foot would mean walking across this barrier park.

Late at night, when stores are closed and fellow pedestrians are rare, walking through a deserted park would be more risky than crossing a regular city street busy with cars. On a well-trafficked road, there would be more people to aid someone in trouble — especially since most drivers have cell phones.

How well maintained will this park be?

Successful parks in New York often rely on the support of community groups (e.g., Washington Market Park). This is especially true of problem parks that have been reclaimed (e.g., Bryant Park and Union Square Park). Businesses and building owners on the east side of this proposed park may not have the wherewithal to fund a park conservancy to maintain it. One goal of this promenade/park is to help downtown businesses — not to saddle them with additional burdens and expenses. Battery Park City residents already have many of their own parks to care for.



When it snows, the sidewalks in and around parks are the last ones to get cleared of snow and ice. Crossing this park would become particularly hazardous with winter snow and ice on the ground.

This is an unusually poor location for a park

How amenable to reclamation by a group of "friends" would this park be in any case? While both Bryant Park and Union Square Park were unsuccessful for many years, both have built-in advantages that this linear park would not have. Both are in high-density residential districts with few alternative parks, where there is a genuine need and purpose for them. A demand was not being met when those parks were dirty and unsafe. Since they are surrounded by high-density districts and above a number of subway lines, there is plenty of pedestrian cross use.

While West Street does have a busy business district a few blocks away to the east, Battery Park City to the west is, in terms of pedestrian cross use, practically a dead end. There are a few blocks of apartment houses, a hotel, riverfront parks and some museums, but pedestrian cross use is meager compared to the activity that surrounds Bryant Park and Union Square Park on all sides.

The prevailing west winds coming off the Hudson River, especially in winter, are another compelling reason to avoid creating a park along this stretch of West Street. Crossing this large open area with nothing to block a bitter winter wind would be a very unpleasant experience.

Disturbing similarities to the failed urban renewal philosophy of the 1950s will yield similar results — neighborhoods in trouble

The idea of replacing the automobile traffic of a "bad" city street (West Street) with a so-called pedestrian friendly park/promenade — thus creating a park-like superblock — has disturbing similarities to the failed urban renewal philosophy of the 1950s that tried to

turn cities into suburbs. The idea was to build apartment houses and a few townhouses, take away the "bad" city streets, and replace them with "healthful" parks and promenades. That philosophy didn't work then, and it will not work now. Healthy urban neighborhoods need healthy, "real" streets.

A tunnel/park would create a barrier, not eliminate one, between Battery Park City and the rest of Lower Manhattan

A park/promenade would not help pedestrians get in or out of this southern portion of Battery Park City. If anything, it would make things more difficult and unpleasant for them. Rather than more closely uniting the two sections of Lower Manhattan, it is more likely to create a barrier between them — a dead zone beyond the borders of the two sections into which few people will venture (also known as a "border vacuum").

**B) Analysis of West Street:
Liberty Street to Vesey Street**

The middle section of West Street (between Liberty and Vesey Streets) is adjacent to the WTC site. A tunnel with a park on top would not solve the problem of better accessibility for it or for the World Financial Center. Here too, a West Street tunnel — even a short one — would create rather than eliminate barriers.

Leaving the concourse stranded and creating a park with a dead, four-block long wall

In the World Financial Center, the elevator lobbies, connecting concourse and retail shops were built on the second floor to give pedestrians weather-protected access (via the North Bridge) from the WFC all the way to Church Street.

A park would instead lead to the ground-level entrance of the World Financial Center — to non-functional lobbies, loading docks and service areas, rather than the elevator lobbies one floor up.



The loading docks, service areas and elevator machinery that are underground in most office buildings are on the ground floor of the World Financial Center, possibly due to concerns over a high water table and potential high tide flooding. It would be extremely expensive to relocate the corporate elevator lobbies down to the level of West Street — and this would create new problems because the displaced loading docks and service areas would also have to be relocated.

For those people who did choose to access the World Financial Center via a street level route, the majority would probably hew pretty closely to crossing at the Vesey or Liberty Street intersections. After all, that is where the major cross town traffic will be; that is where there is the possibility of bus routes that will take people into and out of the area; that is where the office building entrances are. That means that the major interior portions of the park created by a short tunnel would be as empty and useless as the promenade/park that a long tunnel would create. And the buildings facing this park would be the dead wall of the World Financial Center street-level service areas.

Going three stories down and then three stories up — just to remain in place

A short tunnel would create special problems for the proposed underground passageway to the WTC transportation concourse. Given the likelihood that few people would choose to enter the World Financial Center via a street level park where they would be exposed to the weather, this passageway would probably be the main pedestrian access route to the World Financial Center from the WTC site.

Unlike the original WTC concourse, which was mostly at street level, this underground passageway would be truly underground. That means that it would have to cross West Street either above or below the automobile tunnel. If it crosses below the tunnel (which is most likely), people going to the World

Financial Center from Church Street would have to make the following incredible journey:

- 1 Go down one flight of stairs or escalators to get from Church Street to the same level as West Street.
- 2 Go down another flight of stairs or escalators to get below the new park over West Street.
- 3 Go down another flight of stairs or escalators to get below the West Street tunnel.
- 4 Go up two flights of stairs or escalators just to get back up to the street-level, non-functional World Financial Center lobbies.
- 5 Go up another flight of stairs or escalators to get to the World Financial Center concourse and passenger elevator lobbies.

How does this compare to the beautiful simplicity of the old WTC site plan? Previously, you could walk right onto the WTC Plaza from Church Street (a slight ramp, but no steps). You could then walk across the WTC Plaza and North Bridge — protected from weather, with no streets or traffic impediments — to arrive at the World Financial Center elevator lobbies.

Coming from the subway was just as easy. From the E train, you went up a slight ramp (the equivalent of four low-rise stairs) and walked across the weather-protected WTC concourse. You went up one bank of escalators and crossed the North Bridge to arrive at the World Financial Center concourse and elevator lobbies.

From this point, in either case, you could comfortably walk (weather-protected, no streets or traffic to cross) to the far reaches of the World Financial Center and into Battery Park City.

The Winter Garden and the waterfront plaza were just a short descent down one of the world's great staircases, which would be rendered pretty much useless — a stairway to nowhere — by a street-level park. And, of course, there are plenty of escalators and elevators throughout the World Financial Center concourse for those who prefer to avoid stairs.



In short, a maximum of two changes in grade were previously required to cross West Street easily and safely. By contrast, the tunnel plan would require as many as six changes of grade (e.g., from Church Street to the elevator lobbies of the World Financial Center).

These excessive grade changes would mean significant hardship for the mobility-impaired. A tunnel would replace the previously effective system of pedestrian accessibility to the World Financial Center with a nightmare of elevators, stairs and escalators. Visitors unfamiliar with the area would find it particularly confusing to navigate this underground maze.

All the talk about a Grand Central Terminal for Lower Manhattan overlooks an attribute that makes Grand Central one of the great achievements of the 20th Century — it is easily accessible without stairs or escalators. This remarkable achievement is due in part to the designers' creativity in working with (rather than fighting against) existing topography. Grand Central — like the World Trade Center — was built into the side of a hill.

In the former World Trade Center it was possible to walk in from West Street and cross the concourse to arrive one story underground in the E train subway station without going down any stairs — just as you can walk into Grand Central Terminal from Lexington Avenue, cross the concourse and arrive in a subway station one story beneath Vanderbilt Avenue without using stairs.

Previously, a wheelchair-bound person could use the downward slopes of Vesey Street or Liberty Street as natural ramps to enter the "underground" WTC concourse at Greenwich Street, where it was pretty much street-level — just as the downward slope of 42nd Street can be used as a natural ramp to enter the "underground" Grand Central concourse at Park Avenue, also at street level.

It would be a crime against sound planning and design to ignore the attributes of the original WTC design and substitute an incredibly awkward and dysfunctional system in its stead.

What about the exhaust from all those cars?

A "short" tunnel would probably require venting of vehicle exhaust by grates in the park in front of the World Financial Center. This concentration of pollution would likely mean an unsuccessful, unloved and unused park. In a larger public space (such as Battery Park), grates can be surrounded by fencing or benches to limit loss of usefulness of the park. That solution would not be possible here because the limited park area would not provide enough space.

Special needs of the area between the World Financial Center and the WTC site must be addressed

The area of West Street between the World Financial Center and the WTC site has special needs that cannot be met by simply making at-grade changes above a buried West Street. Provisions must be made to accommodate a large number of daily pedestrian crossings of West Street by World Financial Center office workers and shoppers, many of whom arrive via public transportation.

Here, a replacement for the destroyed pedestrian North Bridge should tie directly into the new WTC underground transportation concourse. This all-weather, 24-hour passageway to the Winter Garden would be a safer, more convenient and much cheaper means of delivering office workers and shoppers from subways to the World Financial Center than crossing West Street at grade level — or navigating an underground maze involving six grade changes.

A restored North Bridge would be preferable to an underground passageway for several reasons. Windows that afford views of the neighborhood would make it more aesthetically appealing. It would provide a greater sense of security at night, when the underground passageway might be deserted. And it would create an advertising venue to promote the World Financial Center's retail shops via overhead television monitors and other visual means.



C) **Analysis of West Street: Vesey Street to Chambers Street**

Any tunnel/park plan (even a “short” tunnel from Liberty to Vesey Street) would create many special problems for the area north of Vesey Street.

Entry and exit ramps would create barriers

Even a short tunnel would require ramps and tunnel entrances, which would render Battery Park City and the waterfront significantly less accessible. In either case, short tunnel or long, there would be a barrier-creating and blighting tunnel entrance/access ramp north of Vesey Street. In the case of a short tunnel, there would be a similar exit ramp south of Liberty Street producing the same detrimental effects.

Consider Park Avenue between 34th and 33rd Streets — and Park Avenue between 41st and 40th Streets. In both places are entrances and exits for an automobile tunnel. Do these ugly and blighting tunnel entrances and exits (to paraphrase a recent Listening to the City poll question) “eliminate Park Avenue as a barrier that separates the East Side from the rest of Manhattan”?

These entrances and exits — and the ugly but necessary fencing and signage around them — are a blight on Park Avenue, just as they would be on West Street. They are so dangerous that pedestrians are forbidden to cross in front of them. The 33rd Street intersection had 46 pedestrian accidents in 2001, making it the third most dangerous intersection in New York City. These two blocks are certainly not helped by any benefits a tunnel provides for the rest of Park Avenue.

The entry and exit ramps of a short West Street tunnel would be more of a barrier than the Park Avenue ones, because the southern ramp to the Park Avenue tunnel is relatively short — it is built into the side of a hill. A West Street tunnel would not be built into the side of a hill, so the entry and exit ramps would have to be longer — and therefore

would create more of a barrier than those for the Park Avenue tunnel. A tunnel built to today's standards would likely have a higher clearance requirement than the Park Avenue tunnel, thereby requiring even more space for its entry and exit ramps.

The ramp problem would be worse if a decision were made to put the automobile tunnel below the pedestrian passageway. The tunnel would have to be deeper (to get beneath the pedestrian passageway), so the entry and exit ramps would have to be longer.

Given the depth of such a tunnel and its relatively short length, this might also be quite a strange ride for the motorist.

A park north of Vesey Street would also be a “problem park”

If a tunnel entrance were to be placed north of Chambers Street, the park/promenade between Chambers and Vesey Streets would be just as much of a problem park and barrier as the rest of the park/promenade discussed earlier. It could be more problematic, as this section would not even get the stray tourist traffic to Battery Park from the WTC site.

6 Other considerations

A West Street tunnel wouldn't reduce traffic problems — it would increase them

A West Street tunnel would be of benefit only to those driving through Lower Manhattan, who may avoid a few intersections and traffic lights.

Though minor, this perceived benefit would likely induce more drivers to use this route, thereby increasing the exhaust emissions in Lower Manhattan each day.

This increased traffic would reduce the quality of life for residents and be of no use to local businesses, as drivers would be diverted away from retail shops on local streets.



Local FDR and Brooklyn-Battery tunnel traffic would burden other neighborhoods

Not only would a West Street tunnel attract more through traffic to Lower Manhattan, it would also increase congestion on local streets.

Traffic on cross streets that previously provided access to the main flow of West Street traffic would have to double back to a cross street that is a feeder for the tunnel to enter the main traffic flow. Consequently, local traffic would be diverted to adjacent streets in nearby neighborhoods such as Tribeca to go to and from the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel or the FDR Drive. They might also prefer such a route in order to avoid the congested local lanes above a buried West Street.

The extent of this happening depends to some degree on how long the West Street tunnel would be and how it would be designed. However, the more park/promenade (and therefore the less road) there is, the more likely it is that cars going to and from Battery Park City will have to access the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and the FDR Drive by going through other neighborhoods.

Greenwich Street would become a thoroughfare for displaced local traffic

Local congestion resulting from a buried West Street would be made even worse by traffic on a restored Greenwich Street through the WTC site. Eliminating West Street as a primary access road to Battery Park City and Lower Manhattan would divert a significant volume of traffic to Greenwich Street — making it the “new” West Side Highway.

Greenwich Street would be further congested by motorists using it for visitor access to the WTC site. It is likely that the WTC site will become a year-round, drive-thru, “must see” tourist attraction rivaling the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree. Drivers seeking to avoid the congested lanes above a West Street tunnel would likely flock to Greenwich Street in large numbers.

A tunnel adjacent to the WTC “bathtub” poses serious security concerns

In the immediate aftermath of September 11th, serious concerns were raised about the status of the so-called “bathtub” surrounding the WTC site. If this barrier were breached, a significant area of Lower Manhattan could be flooded by water from the Hudson River.

Since it would be immediately adjacent to the “bathtub” barrier, a West Street tunnel could be a convenient target for a terrorist’s truck bomb. This could represent a serious threat to residents and businesses throughout Lower Manhattan.

A West Street tunnel would harm existing small businesses in Lower Manhattan

Businesses in Lower Manhattan, especially those near West Street, would suffer great hardship from the disruptions caused by the construction of a West Street tunnel. Since September 11th, many local retailers have suffered revenue losses of 50% to 80% because of declining patronage from a reduced pool of office workers, and because of disruptions during the renovation of Greenwich Street and local subway stations.

While construction problems related to a West Street tunnel would be difficult for residents, they would be a life and death matter for small businesses. Small businesses, which are crucial to the development of a healthy urban district, could be dealt a finishing blow from the multi-year construction of a West Street tunnel.

A West Street tunnel would impair the business climate of Lower Manhattan

In the end, a park/promenade along West Street would not be a business booster for the area. Instead, it would create a business-killing border vacuum along the western edge of the business district. Rather than revitalizing the area east of West Street and making it a vibrant, diversified district, a



West Street tunnel would at best transform it into another dead downtown version of an office park, even worse than the empty streets now bordering Battery Park.

A West Street tunnel would lower property values in Battery Park City

Some people accuse tunnel opponents of focusing on the short-term problems and ignoring long-term benefits — the end results. However, if a tunnel creates a problem park and significantly reduces vehicular access to and from Battery Park City (including quick access by emergency vehicles) on a permanent basis, this will ultimately reduce the attractiveness of the area to residents and businesses — thus reducing property values.

The result would be creation of a new problem neighborhood. Rather than re-vitalizing the area, a West Street tunnel would de-vitalize it.

Obviously, such a problem is not short-term or parochial. Further, the enormous amount of money required for tunnel construction and the diversion of these resources away from alternatives that could meaningfully contribute to downtown's economic revitalization is perhaps the single strongest argument against a West Street tunnel. Lower Manhattan will be harmed, not helped, by such a colossal waste of scarce funds in a time of budget crisis.

7 The boulevard alternative

A better alternative — make West Street less like a highway and more like a boulevard

One alternative to a tunnel is to make West Street less like a highway and more like a boulevard. Making West Street more like a regular city street would make it less of a perceived barrier than at present. This could be achieved with simple expedients such as longer traffic signals sufficient for pedestrians to cross without rushing.

The following are examples of other measures that might also be taken to achieve the desired results with much less disruption, far fewer harmful consequences, and much less cost:

- Add crosswalks and eliminate concrete barriers to facilitate pedestrian crossings
- Widen sidewalks and add tall, shady trees
- Provide local bus service along West Street
- Foster retail activity along West Street
- Install synchronized traffic lights
- Enforce speed limits
- Discourage vehicle bottlenecks such as loading docks and entrances to parking garages

This approach would not involve a wide park/promenade for pedestrians down the center of West Street, since that would raise many of the “problem park” issues discussed above. It could involve a much narrower West Street median, similar to Park Avenue above 42nd Street. Banks of trees bordering the street rather than in the middle would help trap pollution, clean the air, dampen traffic noise and protect residential buildings.

In any case, it will be necessary for all parties to work closely with local residents in deciding on changes to West Street in order to preserve existing community amenities along the street such as community gardens, ball fields, playgrounds, general-use lawn space and the bike path. Recent proposals for a park/promenade down the center of an unburied West Street would result in the elimination of these amenities and all of the current buffer zone between West Street traffic and residential buildings in Battery Park City.

Given the high density of the area, the sloping grade of the WTC site (one story higher on Church Street than on West Street), and the special circumstances of a memorial for September 11th victims, the boulevard approach might also include covered pedestrian bridges (including creative utilization of the existing South Bridge at Liberty Street) linking the second-floor lobbies of the World Financial Center with the WTC site.



Any boulevard approach should also have at least one pedestrian bridge (similar to the previous North Bridge) tied directly into the new underground transportation concourse. This would restore the convenient, weather-protected access from the subways to the World Financial Center that existed prior to September 11th.

A boulevard can foster a lively, diversified downtown neighborhood — a park cannot

The simple and inexpensive boulevard approach outlined above would go a long way toward making West Street a more pleasant street to walk along and across. Pedestrians would have more reason to actually use this kind of street. Retail businesses would thrive on such a street. It would be a life-giving artery for bordering neighborhoods on both sides — not a deadening border vacuum. More businesses and more people would create a safer area than a park/promenade would. Such a boulevard would be a common seam that would more closely unite Battery Park City with the rest of Lower Manhattan.

If West Street were a regular city street that also served as the major local north-south artery, some retailers might remain open late at night, which would attract more pedestrian traffic. This would be a major factor in creating a more vibrant and diversified community. A 24-hour, major north-south artery would be safer than a park/promenade that will likely be deserted (except for undesirable activities) after dark. It would bring people into the area by giving them a reason to be there. It would then create ridership, for example, for local bus services along a rejuvenated West Street, thereby helping to generate pedestrian cross-use in Lower Manhattan.

In sum, the boulevard approach for West Street offers the best chance to enhance the quality of life of local residents and to produce real economic development in adjacent areas. It could be done for a fraction of the cost of a West Street tunnel and would involve much less disruption for local residents and businesses. It would be the best solution for Lower Manhattan — and for New York City.

