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COMMUNITY BOARD**C.B. 1 committee skeptical of tunnel plan**

By Jane Flanagan with Josh Rogers

Still unable to come to a consensus over whether or not a West St. tunnel is a good idea, a Community Board 1 committee postponed a vote on it last week.

Instead, it passed an interim resolution, informing the state Department of Transportation that it has “serious reservations” about the tunnel proposed for West St. near the World Financial Center and the World Trade Center. But before they can vote, committee members said they need more information.

“We are not convinced the tunnel is the right solution,” said board member Bob Grassi, reading aloud from a resolution he drafted at last Monday’s meeting. Grassi is a member of Community Board 1’s World Trade Center redevelopment committee. The resolution passed by a vote of 8 to 1, with 1 abstention.

The precise wording of the resolution, which is to be voted on Tuesday by the full board, was still being reviewed as of Monday’s deadline. Paul Goldstein, C.B.1’s district manager who is helping to write the final version, said that it states that C.B. 1 “has serious reservations about the West St. bypass and its costs.”

Among the questions committee members pose are the following: how will pedestrians cross near the tunnel entrances? Will local traffic be able to maneuver safely and efficiently around it?

Committee members also want answers to questions not under the purview of the state D.O.T, which presumably, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation would address. For instance, the estimated cost: \$860 million. Several board members wondered where the money could be spent if not on the tunnel.

“Two middle schools and two high schools?” asked board member Catherine Hughes. “We need to know that.”

Tunnel supporters include Gov. George Pataki and Tim Carey, president and C.E.O. of the Battery Park City Authority. Dep. Mayor Daniel Doctoroff and Madelyn Wils, chairperson of C.B.1, say the tunnel would improve pedestrian connections but they are not sure if it is worth the cost given other transportation priorities such as new rail connections to Downtown.

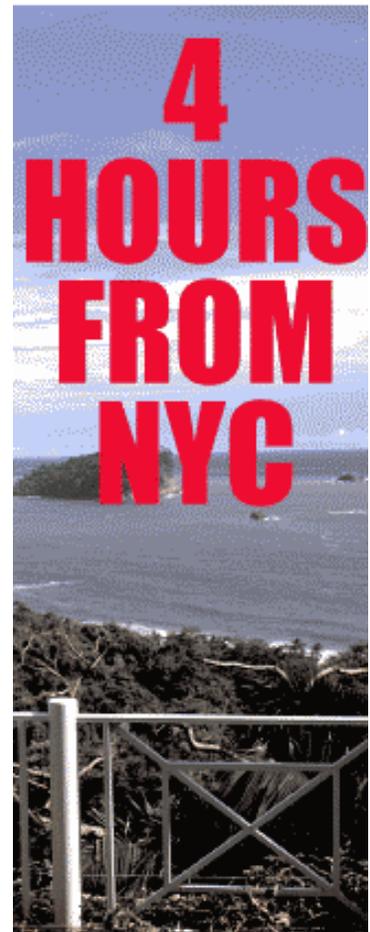
Doctoroff told Downtown Express last week that he wants to see what the cost estimates are after D.O.T. does more detailed engineering studies and that a decision on the tunnel should take about six months.

C.B. 1 committee members are hoping that the answers to their questions may, at least partially, narrow the deep division that exists both on the board and in the community over how to make West St. safer.

The tunnel’s exit and entrance ramps would begin at Murray and Albany Sts. There would be four lanes for local traffic above ground and four lanes of through traffic below.

The D.O.T. estimates that the tunnel would reduce the number of vehicles on West St. from 60,000 to 18,000 during a heavy traffic hour.

The tunnel would take two years to design and 2 1/2 years to build. Most of the work would be done underground with the roadway open, and officials said they would not reduce the number of lanes during rush hour through the construction period. They also said they

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would consider running free shuttle buses to help pedestrians circumvent the construction.

“I take my kids over to Battery Park City and it is very difficult,” said Hughes. “My kids are on scooters and bicycles. You cannot get a bicycle up to the bridge.”

Hughes was referring to a pedestrian bridge scheduled to be built at Vesey St. and expected to open in late November. While plans are to make it handicapped accessible, it’s not clear how quickly that will happen.

Goldstein reiterated the concern about schools and the quality of life downtown.

“Unless we do something about schools and open space, all we will have is great transportation and nothing else,” he said.

Marc Hsiao, a board member who lives in the south end of Battery Park City, said he likes the idea of a tunnel but not at \$860 million.

But board member Pat Moore, who crosses the highway to grocery shop in Battery Park City, said she doesn’t see the need.

“I have no trouble crossing at all. There is no reason to spend that kind of money,” she said.

Hughes said that if the tunnel is vetoed, serious consideration has to be given to construction of the Vesey St. bridge. Right now it’s being called a temporary bridge to be used for at least five years while construction at the W.T.C. site proceeds. But it’s possible it could become permanent, according to state D.O.T. spokesperson Jennifer Nelson, depending on what happens with the tunnel.

The state D.O.T. earlier proposed several alternatives for West St. They were recently whittled down to two: the tunnel, which is referred to as a “short by-pass” to distinguish it from an earlier, longer tunnel that is now out of the picture. The by-pass short tunnel would extend from Murray Street down to Albany Street. The second proposal being considered is an at-grade-level boulevard with shade trees, benches and retail shops.

The grade-level plan would entail rebuilding the roadway and adding traffic-calming measures and better pedestrian bridges at a cost of \$200 million. That is considered close to the minimum investment needed in the roadway since it would replace the short-term temporary street that was built last year.

Whether the short tunnel or the at-grade improvement options are chosen, the plan is to spend \$120 million for a grand boulevard on West St. south of Albany St. In some sections the east side of West St. will be widened to as much as 40 feet to allow for sidewalk cafes, plazas and more trees. There is also a plan to build a deck over the entrance to the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, which would add a new park and a better connection to historic Battery Park.

The resolution, already approved by the W.T.C. Redevelopment Committee, will be presented to the full board for a vote July 29. The meeting will held at 6 p.m. at Pace University, 1 Pace Plaza, in the Multi-purpose room on the B level. The entrance is on Spruce St.

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