

**Testimony to the  
New York City Council  
Select Committee on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment**

**February 25, 2002**

Thank you Mr. Chairman. My name is Robert D. Yaro and I am the President of Regional Plan Association, an independent not-for-profit research and planning organization. RPA is also the convener of the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York, a coalition of over 80 civic, business, academic, environmental, and labor groups that is working together to give the civic community a voice in the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan and the economic recovery of New York City and the Region. We invite all elected officials to participate as observers in the Civic Alliance.

Let me begin by thanking you for convening this committee and focusing the attention of the Council on this absolutely crucial topic. The participation of the City in the redevelopment process, through the Mayor's appointments to the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation Board, the appointment of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Reconstruction as the Mayor's point person on Lower Manhattan, and the Council's legislative oversight and advocacy, will be essential to ensuring that the redevelopment proceeds expeditiously and that the process considers the needs of people who live and work in Lower Manhattan, and the rest of the City.

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center inflicted a severe blow to our regional infrastructure that goes far beyond the tragic loss of nearly 3,000 lives and a third of Lower Manhattan's commercial office space. Hundreds of small merchants and businesses in the Financial District, TriBeCa, Chinatown, and throughout the City have already gone under, or are withering for lack of business. The attack severely disrupted our transit and transportation systems and our energy and telecommunications grids. Two subway lines were damaged and the PATH line running to the World Trade Center was completely disabled, stranding hundreds of thousands of riders from New York and New Jersey.

We hope that the City, through the Council and with the agencies under the direction of Deputy Mayor Doctoroff will work as a partner in the redevelopment process with the

Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the Port Authority, and the Federal Government. We also hope that you will partner with the Civic Alliance and other non-governmental groups to ensure that the voices of the community are also heard. As we proceed, we should recognize that there is a need to bolster the confidence of Lower Manhattan residents and businesses that the redevelopment will make Lower Manhattan a better place to live and work than we had before September 11. We must proceed with a sense of urgency, but at the same time we should not make hasty long term decisions that we will later regret. I would like to propose a few priorities.

First and most immediate is the need to stabilize conditions for downtown residents, businesses and workers, who are hanging on against enormous odds. The financial aid packages that are being proposed, if they are properly managed and distributed, will be an important financial bridge for businesses that hope to win back customers and for residents who wish to remain here. But the more important priority is to restore a sense of normalcy wherever possible, by reestablishing transit services, completing the reconstruction of utility grids, establishing a more orderly environment on the streets, and providing improved amenities for residents, particularly families.

I know that many Councilmembers are concerned about providing access to Manhattan from Brooklyn and Queens, but I urge you and the Council to proceed with caution on the Carpool rule. RPA believes that the Carpool Rule, while imperfect, nonetheless prevents almost certain gridlock that would paralyze Manhattan's streets, and likely spill back onto the bridge and tunnel approaches in Brooklyn, Queens, and New Jersey. I was at the corner of Broadway and Fulton Street this morning, watching bumper to bumper traffic moving at a crawl. I cannot imagine how we could accommodate any additional vehicles downtown and avoid a continual traffic jam. This raises particular concerns about providing emergency services, bus service, and deliveries to Lower Manhattan businesses. In the long run, value pricing and other demand management and intelligent transportation tools should give us greater flexibility to improve traffic flow in more creative ways.

The second priority is to have a coherent economic game plan that recognizes the need to restore Lower Manhattan as the premier financial services center, but also to develop a more diverse and sustainable economy that will continue Lower Manhattan's transformation into a vibrant 24-hour community. The Council can and should play an important legislative and oversight role on zoning, parkland, amenity, finance and other issues.

The third priority is to make sure we get the long term infrastructure decisions right. Most of our focus has been on transportation, including the need to restore the damaged subways and PATH station, build an improved "Fulton Central" subway complex that connects all of Lower Manhattan's rapid transit lines, expand ferry service to previously untapped interborough markets like Greenpoint and Staten Island's South Shore and to suburban markets along the Hudson River and both shores of Long Island Sound, and most importantly to build a Second Avenue Subway that can eventually provide service to Brooklyn, Queens, and The Bronx.

In the long run, it will be critically important to improve suburban access to Lower Manhattan, and we are investigating a number of ferry and rail options. However, we believe that such improvements should not come at the expense of reducing already overcrowded subway service across the East River.

I hope that these remarks are helpful as you embark on this process, and we look forward to working with you as we proceed. I would be pleased to answer your questions.

Questions or comments on this testimony should be referred to Robert D. Yaro ([yaro@rpa.org](mailto:yaro@rpa.org)).

Information on the Civic Alliance is available at our website: [www.civic-alliance.org](http://www.civic-alliance.org). Please contact Petra Todorovich ([petra@rpa.org](mailto:petra@rpa.org)) if you wish to attend Civic Alliance meetings.