

BOB's REBUTTAL TO THE "DERAILED" RED HOOK STREETCAR STUDY,
PERFORMED BY URS AND NYC DOT, APRIL, 2011

Before we begin, I've received some fascinating "feedback" on NYC DOT's *SABOTAGE* of the Red Hook streetcar project today. You can find these on the last page of this document.

Recently, NYC City DOT has dashed the hopes of the residents and businesses of transportation deprived Red Hook, by issuing a "Streetcar Study" incompetently executed at best, and openly sabotaged at worse.

Red Hook, a body of land just south of trendy Carroll Gardens, is surrounded on three sides by water. Many young people would want to move to Red Hook, if only it had viable public transportation. The one bus serving Red Hook, the B61, has an average waiting time of 45 – 60 minutes!

To understand how and why this travesty was perpetrated against the isolated residents and businesses of Red Hook, we need to understand why the City DOT scuttled its own Red Hook streetcar project- AGAIN (the first time was in 2002). However, in order to understand DOT's motives, we must first understand how our local government approves projects, and awards lucrative contracts- how they spend our hard earned tax dollars.

Our preparatory "case in point", is the way New York City Transit (NYCT), a part of the MTA, purchases Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) fuel for its fleet of nearly 5,000 buses. NYCT let a bus fuel contract to a firm called "Trillium USA". This contract provides that **NYCT will pay Trillium USA a "Bonus" of 25% OVER THE ACTUAL COST OF THE FUEL!** Who is Trillium USA? The money goes to ex-President George W. Bush's Midland, TX political cronies, Wagner & Brown, LTD, so-called "Bush Pioneers".

This open GRAFT still continues to this day. No wonder the MTA is constantly trying to raise fares- look at the way they "do business"!

Since we now have some insight as to what's going on in our local government, lets take a look at the actual City DOT nixed Red Hook streetcar plan: without any form of selection process, the DOT hired west coast engineering consultant URS.

The justification, was URS carried out the successful new streetcar line in Portland, OR. Bear in mind, URS didn't come into this study as merely a consultant, but rather as a "super turnkey project". This means URS would itself design, construct, and operate the streetcar project.

The reason new streetcar lines are highly desirable, is a unique form of urban revitalization phenomenon, know as "**Transit Oriented Development**" (TOD) opportunities, all along the streetcar route.

In Portland, OR, for example, this private community re-investment or "TOD" amounted to roughly \$1 Billion per mile along the streetcar route!

NYC DOT's consultant, URS, did the Portland streetcar project, and therefore knows all about "TOD"- then why did URS ignore any form of "TOD" along the Red Hook streetcar line, sloughing off blame for this "oversight" on the NYC Department of City Planning?

Further, when URS did the original section of the Portland streetcar line, construction costs were **\$12 million per track mile- INCLUDING 7 NEW EUROPEAN MADE STREETCARS, TRACK, AND THE “ELECTRIC POWER SYSTEM”**. Original Portland “start up” route length: roughly 2.4 route miles, or roughly 4.8 track miles.

SOURCE: The American Public Transportation Association.

See: <http://heritagetrolley.com/artcileBringBackStreetcars7.htm#Post11>

TOTAL PORTLAND (START UP) STREETCAR PROJECT COST: \$56.9 MILLION (2001).

SOURCE:

Portland Streetcar Transit Oriented Development Report (TOD), 2008, See pg 7:

http://www.portlandstreetcar.org/pdf/development_200804_report.pdf

Further, **“When [Portland] Streetcar initially opened in 2001, the projected ridership target was 3,500 weekday rides”**. Again, see pg 7 of **“Portland Streetcar Transit Oriented Development Report” (TOD), 2008:** http://www.portlandstreetcar.org/pdf/development_200804_report.pdf

Why did URS and CITY DOT purposely, and grossly, UNDER ESTIMATE projected ridership for the Red Hook streetcar line, by EXCLUDING "TOD", and then blaming it on the NYC Dept. Of City Planning?

Note: The Portland report cited directly above, WAS NOT written by URS. Rather, it was written by City of Portland DOT, in partnership with the “Portland Streetcar Co., Inc” (non profit). As in all other successful streetcar projects in the U.S., it was spearheaded by a non-profit group, in partnership with a local “City DOT”. What is NYC DOT’s problem with streetcar projects?

Another, more realistic, example is at **Little Rock, Arkansas**, where a new 2.1 route mile streetcar line (in the street) was built (by a company other than URS) for **\$7.1 million per track mile (circa 2004)**. This line **utilizes three new American made streetcars**.

Source: American Public Transportation Association.

See:

<http://heritagetrolley.com/artcileBringBackStreetcars7.htm#Post11>

AND ALSO SEE

<http://www.cat.org/rrail/index.html>

Keep in mind, inflation has only been running on average 2.48% (under two and a half percent per year) for the PAST DECADE.

See:

http://www.inflationdata.com/inflation/inflation_rate/currentinflation.asp

Using our simple compound interest formula on the original Portland streetcar construction cost of \$12 million per track mile (circa 2001), **the same Portland streetcar line (in 2011)**, using the URS “design/construction paradigm”, should cost a little over **\$15 Million Per TRACK MILE** (\$15,331,068), **INCLUDING 7 NEW EUROPEAN MADE STREETCARS, TRACK, AND THE “ELECTRIC POWER SYSTEM”**.

See:

http://www.moneychimp.com/calculator/compound_interest_calculator.htm

Using our mathematical tools, let's now calculate what the TOTAL CURRENT (2011) construction cost of the original, URS "design/build", 2.4 mile Portland streetcar line (including 7 new european made streetcars and the "electric power system") would be:

UPDATED TO 2011, URS PORTLAND STREETCAR PROJECT TOTAL COST: \$72,694,814 .

NO WHERE CLOSE TO THE \$176 MILLION URS has demanded in their current (2011) Red Hook, Brooklyn, streetcar study!

Clearly, this number recently cited by URS to the City of New York, is absurdly high. Let's look at another, MORE REALISTIC, example:

In the case of the newer, circa 2004, Little Rock, AR, streetcar line, the current (2011) construction cost (considering inflation since 2004) would be under \$8.5 MILLION PER TRACK MILE (\$8,428,148). This line utilizes three new U.S. Made streetcars, NOT European made streetcars.

Why then does URS claim that a new Red Hook, Brooklyn, streetcar line would cost a total of \$176 million. The URS cost breakdown "pie chart" cites \$26 million for an entirely unnecessary "start up" track length of almost 7 track miles, NOT INCLUDING NEW STREETCARS, NOR THE "ELECTRIC POWER SYSTEM", OR ANYTHING ELSE!

I think URS is trying to be somewhat deceptive as to their actual "Cost Per Track Mile", I believe this is in order to try making it difficult to do a cost comparison, or in plain English, URS wants to prevent us from "shopping it around".

However, after analyzing the full URS Red Hook streetcar construction cost "Pie Chart", URS's "asking price" per track mile is roughly \$26 Million PER TRACK MILE- \$11 million per track mile MORE than the updated (to 2011) Portland streetcar project cost of \$15 Million per track mile! WHAT A HUGE RIP OFF ON THE CITY OF NEW YORK!!

I'm sure URS would not have complained, if in Red Hook, Brooklyn, they got paid \$176 million for an approximately \$35 million job, that should have really been a simple "start up line", of only about 2 route miles, or roughly 4 track miles in length, at a cost of about \$8.5 Million per track mile (as per Little Rock, AR, figures updated to 2011), including three new U.S. Made streetcars, track, and electric power system.

Please bear in mind, that \$25 Million of the total Red Hook streetcar project cost of roughly \$35 Million, would have come from a Federal "TIGER II" FTA streetcar grant. The real cost to Brooklyn, would have only been about \$10 Million, that sum could have easily been raised locally, from a combination of public and private sources.

Clearly, the URS "Red Hook streetcar paradigm" is highly "gold plated", roughly 50% above true market value when compared to their own Portland streetcar job, AND DOUBLE THE COST of the Little Rock, AR streetcar, which was built by another firm.

URS's "business practices" are "not uniform" from place to place- they "take what ever they think they can get"!

This is a propitious moment to mention that URS HAD NO RIGHT to include the Philadelphia “rebuilt Girard Avenue streetcar line” (8.5 route miles long, or rather 17 track miles) as a “Case Study” in the Red Hook, Brooklyn, Streetcar Feasibility Study.

WHY? Using a streetcar line of this extreme length as a "case study", is like “mixing apples with oranges”, when compared to the URS 2.4 mile Portland streetcar line, and what the Red Hook "start up line" actually needs to be - about 2 route miles in length, or roughly 4 "track miles".

Further, the Philly Girard Avenue line is the only new streetcar line in the U.S. to ever FAIL to meet its planned objectives!

URS callously tried to peddle an example of a “super-sized”, improperly designed and executed, "gold plated", behemoth of a FAILURE to the people of Brooklyn!

These facts further support our conclusion, that the URS/ City DOT Red Hook Streetcar Study, was "set up for failure" from the very start.

Let's further analyze DOT's “questionable” study, in particular, their claim that the line would cost over **\$7 million per year to operate- NOT TRUE AT ALL !** Let's look at some real numbers: Compare the following figures, with the current NYCT bus operating cost of \$160 per hour, per bus (as per the National Transportation Database):

Philadelphia Streetcar Hourly Vehicle Operating Cost: \$47 per hour per streetcar .

Source: SEPTA 2010 Service Plan, 2009. See page 58 at the following link, look under "Subway Surface":

<http://www.septa.org/reports/pdf/asp10.pdf>

Let's now use some simple arithmetic for our Red Hook Streetcar line:

$\$47/\text{Hour} \times 3 \text{ streetcars (on a 2 mile start up route)} \times 12\text{hours/day} \times 365\text{days/year} = \mathbf{\$617,580 \text{ PER YEAR Operating Cost.}}$

Where the Heck did DOT/URS get their totally OFF THE WALL (+\$7 million per year) operating cost numbers from? Could it be- DOT and URS have purposely sabotaged this Red Hook streetcar study- or maybe they just cant do 2nd grade arithmetic?

But why the City DOT sabotage to the streetcar study? I say because of the "vested interests" within City DOT itself. DOT is committed to "Bus Rapid Transit" (the phrase itself is an oxymoron) and "nothing else".

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), is a failure in the U.S. According to the April 2011, award winning, Washington, DC streetcar study by Boston consulting firm Goody Clancy, and I quote:

"In terms of taxpayers dollars, the streetcar offers a better ratio of benefits to costs compared to Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or Light [Rail] Transit. While BRT is less expensive to implement, it does not generate the real estate investments to the same degree that streetcars can. While light rail can produce similar benefits to streetcars, implementation costs are many times more than that of streetcar".

Read:

<http://newurbannetwork.com/article/wow-study-says-dc-streetcar-could-add-10-15-billion-value-14461>

Recall that until 2004, City DOT handed out hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Federal "bus operating subsidies" to several mob run private bus companies. After the mobbed up private bus operators were finally legislated out of business by a new City charter, City DOT's "Federal bus subsidy mechanism" (formerly City DOT's Office of Passenger Transport) had to go somewhere... Now they've become the "Bus Rapid Transit" or rather "BRT" clique (BRT group) within City DOT.

Why then does City DOT and the MTA spend \$9 million per mile on building a failed technology such as Bus Rapid Transit? Look no further than Bruce Schaller, DOT's current Deputy Commissioner for Planning and Mobility, the "right hand" of City DOT Commissioner Sadik-Khan.

Acting as a "private consultant" back in 2002, Bruce Schaller (then sole owner of *Schaller Associates* of Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn), wrote a report for the private NYC bicycle lobbyist group *Transportation Alternatives*, promoting "Bus Rapid Transit" for the City of New York. Read: https://www.transalt.org/files/newsroom/reports/BRT_for_NYC.pdf

What is current NYC DOT Deputy Commissioner Bruce Schaller's and lobbyist organization *Transportation Alternatives* "Transit Design Paradigm" for New York City: a **Bogata, Colombia, style bus line!**

It needs to be noted, that just last month, City DOT was forced by objections from local businesses (including NYC mega landmark Macy's Department Store), to cancel a planned Bus Rapid Transit line on Manhattan's critical 34th street corridor. On the other hand, Red Hook's residents and merchants are on record, as wanting a new streetcar line. City DOT's response to this outcry: scuttle the Red Hook streetcar plan.

City DOT is currently advocating a failed, Third World transportation technology for the City of New York- capitol of the world ! One might ask the question, what private firm is supplying this "third world bus technology" to the City of New York?

As an aside, it should be noted that bike lobbyist group Transportation Alternatives, has another highly placed "rep" inside City DOT: NYC DOT Deputy Commissioner Jon Orcutt, formerly the bike lobbyist group Transportation Alternatives Executive Director.

I think this explains why, here in NYC, we get plenty of bike lanes, and some "Bus Rapid Transit", **but no streetcars!** City DOT needs its own, internal, "streetcar advocate".

It needs to be further noted, that City DOT has no professionally licensed Civil, Traffic or Transportation engineers. How can this be allowed to go on?

To understand, we need to consider "**NYC DOT, And How It Got That Way**":

City DOT is completely reliant on outside "consultants", many of whom worked at DOT prior to 1998, when the Agency was wrecked by then Mayor Guiliani, when he appointed "known sex offender" Wilbur L. Chapman as City DOT Commissioner.

Chapman had no qualifications at all for "serving" as NYC DOT Commissioner- he was the first of

several...

Chapman had just been forced out of another NYC City Agency, where he had been "Chief of Patrol". Once at City DOT, Chapman immediately "obsoleted" City DOT's professionally licensed engineers, and replaced them with ill prepared, formerly low level people from the Agency. Chapman also brought into CITY DOT, other unqualified people from the Agency he had just "resigned" from.

Once ensconced at NYC DOT, Chapman immediately "continued in his old ways". [Please read attached PDF file on Wilbur L. Chapman](#), very carefully.

DOT Commissioner Chapman was quickly followed by "Mrs. Chuck Schumer", Iris Weinshal- another person uniquely *unqualified* to be a NYC DOT commissioner. During her "DOT acceptance speech", Weinshal stated her only qualification for being NYC DOT Commissioner was "**my father was a cab driver**".

Mrs. Schumer's many unqualified, strictly political DOT appointments, largely still work at City DOT.

Finally, let's now debunk City DOT's final excuse for no streetcars: The "Street Geometry Excuse"...

In reality, (something City DOT apparently knows very little about), all of the Brooklyn streets comprising DOT's own "Optimal Red Hook Streetcar Route", as per their consultant, URS, ALL HAD TROLLEYS ON THEM ORIGINALLY! They were foolishly removed in 1951.

While its true that a certain European made brand of over length, over weight, energy pig of a streetcar, of the identical type currently being "peddled" here in the U.S.A. by none other than DOT's "consultant", **URS**, DONT REALLY FIT ON AMERICAN STREETS.

However, this ill concocted, self serving "problem" can simply be **ELIMINATED BY BUYING AMERICAN!** New, American made streetcars, have NO STREET GEOMETRY PROBLEMS at all, and costs about the same as a new hybrid bus- roughly \$800,000.

The City DOT has once again wasted \$300,000 of taxpayer money on scuttling the Red Hook streetcar plan. The first time, was in 2002, when City DOT threw away \$350,000 of Federal funds, by scuttling a nearly completed and operating streetcar demonstration project in Red Hook, near the current Fairway supermarket.

City DOT's actions flies in the face of Mayor Bloomberg's self proclaimed "mission" of promoting green forms of transportation to foster a sustainable community.

BTW- who's been supplying DOT's pavement marking paint and street signs? The pavement marking paint washes off the street in the rain, and the writing peels off the street signage.

NYC's centuries old problem of "corruption as usual" still exists, under the very noses of Mayor Bloomberg and our purported "Reform" DOT Commissioner Sadik Khan.

Bob Diamond, Brooklyn, NY

Here is some fascinating "feedback" on NYC DOT's *SABOTAGE* of the Red Hook streetcar project we

received earlier this week:

“...As I mentioned yesterday, the URS consultant Stephen Gozillo spoke at a Vision 42 meeting on light rail. I know from discussions with him, URS was directed to ignore the most pertinent factors which could have led to a more positive outcome [of the Red Hook streetcar study]...I would only hope that our Congresswomen will make a public statement of rebuttal of the study results, and that NYCDOT wasted \$300,000 of Federal Funds...I might suggest you look at today's American Lung Association's report "State of the Air 2011" which tells how we are poisoning ourselves with polluted air, Automobiles, trucks and BUSES being the prime culprits”.

Ray Howell

CAC Board Member, Red Hook Streetcar Study

“The good news: This country can send people to the moon, orbit Mars, and capture and kill Osama Bin Laden. The bad news: New York City cannot build a simple light rail line in Brooklyn. Terrorism will be reduced, air pollution in New York City increased”!

Ray Howell

CAC Board Member, Red Hook Streetcar Study

"Bob, I guess I was wrong about something. I always felt that the DOT had a grudge against you, for whatever reason, but that once they got you out of the picture they would go full-speed-ahead with the Red Hook project with a different operator. Now I see I was wrong".

Name Temporarily Withheld

Whats the solution to this City DOT Created DEBACLE?

I think what's needed to “Debunk” the SABOTAGED Red Hook streetcar study issued by City DOT and URS, is a credible analysis of the likely land development benefits along the “The Optimal Red Hook Streetcar Route”, as now identified by the City DOT and URS “study”.

I feel Boston consulting firm Goody Clancy should be approached to do it, as they recently completed the excellent, award winning Washington, DC streetcar land use report.

- Bob