

Inquiry-Based Research Essay Draft #1

The New York City subway system stands a behemoth of public transportation, being not just the largest consolidated subway system in all of the United States by station amount, but second largest in the world behind Beijing. As would be recognized by Joseph B. Raskin in his book “The Routes Not Taken - A Trip Through New York City’s Unbuilt Subway System”, the system was paramount in the initial expansion of New York City, with its pre-existing backbone in the IRT Dual Contracts and expansion by other companies working to bring populations to Queens and the Bronx. Even with that status, there are many areas of New York City that unfortunately go underserved by it, with these enclaves existing in many parts of Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island primarily. In days long past, there had been a number of plans set up to actually bridge these disparities, but were ultimately looked over or denied for any number of reasons, whether it be dire financial straits or simply being seen as too outlandish. Even with that in mind, there is still an intensive amount of demand in the areas that are excluded from the system, and for that, it may be of interest to brush back upon these scrapped ideas for consideration of their reinstatement. Then, let it be asked; what, of the old plans for expansion of the New York City subway, could have been the most beneficial for the city itself?

The majority of these cancelled plans were introduced through the 1929-1939 set of Mayor Hylan's IND Second System, which would have been an initial construction, then eventually considered expansion of the IND, or Independent Subway System. As this was during the time of the subway's youth, and its operation with three separate companies (the IND being one of them), there were many places to which the subway could have expanded. Aside from the already existing lines on the IND, plans to build out a subway under Second Avenue were heavily promoted, with planned extensions along certain existing right-of-ways of the other two companies, the IRT and the BMT.

As it would be written in the "History of the Independent Subway" by Mark S. Feinman, and corroborated by the February 29th, 1932 issue of the New York Times, the line would have received a number of connections to outer boroughs. In the Bronx, branches could have spurred along either the IRT Pelham Line's rough alignment (with an extension to Co-Op City), or via a line on Boston Road, with further provisions to run onto an extension of the IND Concourse Line that would have terminated on Baychester Avenue at Boston Road (known as the Morris Park Line), and a takeover of the IRT Dyre Avenue and IRT White Plains Lines. Of those proposed alignments, it is likely that the Boston Road via Morris Park alignment of the Second Avenue subway would have been the most beneficial, as the takeover of the aforementioned IRT Dyre

Avenue and White Plains Lines would most likely disrupt existing service, and the terminal used for the existing services on those lines has been long demolished.

In the area of Manhattan, subway extensions were least in their track mileage, with only around 11.9 miles of track according to Feinman. According to Travel In New York's "The IND's Second System, Explained", two primary forks off of subway lines were to travel towards the Long Island boroughs from Lower Manhattan under Worth and Houston Streets, converging on the planned South 4th Street Subway in Brooklyn. With that in mind, it is likely that both the South 4th Street Subway and the Worth/Houston Lines would not need to be built due to their immediate proximity to the already-existing BMT Nassau-Jamaica Line, although either the Worth or Houston subways could be built with an alternative connection to the Nassau-Jamaica line to provide further uptown connectability for services on that line.

The plans for Queens are much more extensive in the IND Second System, with specifically Queens receiving up to 52.4 miles of track, according to Feinman in his respective article. That was to see the extension of a number of existing lines, including the BMT Myrtle Avenue and Astoria Lines (which were to be "recaptured" by the IND as part of their expansion) eastward to about Cross Bay Blvd and the Rockaways respectively, the IND Fulton Street Line via Liberty Avenue, a line along 120th Street also spurring off from the IND Fulton Street Line, and the IRT Flushing Line (also set to

be recaptured by the IND) to College Point and Bayside. New lines were also to be erected, one along a right of way down central Queens known as the Winfield Spur, which would have connected to the extended Myrtle Avenue Line and run down to the Rockaways, and another along the Van Wyck Blvd down from the Nassau-Jamaica Lines. Both of these are generally corroborated by Feinman and Travel In New Yorks' media overall. If these were to be constructed, ideally all of the eastward extensions of the lines would be built, as they would all go out to areas that are not at all served by the subway. The Winfield Spur and especially would serve as a great crosstown connection in a set of boroughs where radial subway lines serve with few north-south or otherwise crosstown services.

The 1929-1939 Second System plans would fall through. According to Johnathan English in his text "Derailed: The Postwar End of New York City Subway Expansion", the breakout of World War II and subsequent inflation, incompatibility of the systems alongside a mounting debt of 18 million on the entire system led to a cessation of construction plans. Aside from a brief extension of the IND Queens Blvd Line in 1937 to the World's Fair, no new lines would be furnished. It wouldn't be until 1968 when a collective eventually came together to propose a new plan.

With the subway system now under the control of the MTA, a proposal was forwarded to Mayor Rockefeller seeking the construction, primarily, of lines in Queens,

with works to bolster the existing system in other areas. According to the agency's own proposal, "Metropolitan transportation, a program for action. Report to Nelson A. Rockefeller, Governor of New York", the reinstatement of the Second Avenue Subway plan with its NYB&W alignment, and a number of Queens and Brooklyn subway extensions were to be made. Returning were proposals for the IRT Nostrand Avenue and IRT New Lots Line in Brooklyn to be extended, and the construction of the Van Wyck Line in Southern Queens. New proposals included a tunnel via 63rd Street, the connection of the Queens Blvd Line and Nassau-Jamaica Line via Archer Avenue, more notably the construction of a line along the LIE where the BMT Astoria Line was to be built, and the fabrication of a super-express line along the LIRR's right-of-way. An extension of the BMT Canarsie Line was also considered.

Of those proposals, only the IND 63rd Street Line and IND/BMT Archer Avenue Line were built, and even then the latter was shorter than was to be projected. Most of the 1968 Plan for Action lines, according to Vanshnookenraggen's IND Second System Map, fell through due to a cut in urban development funding, as well as the bankruptcy of the city through the 1970s'. Even with that in mind, some plans were still being considered as late as the 1980s', where in 1985 the MTA and the USDOT conducted a joint Environmental Impact survey on the Plan for Action routes. Among them, most fleshed out but still unbuilt was the super-express running via the LIRR alignment. It would have branched off of the 63rd Street Line, and then reconnected to the subway

along the Queens Blvd Line, with an intermediate stop at Woodside-61st Street, connecting it to the IRT Flushing Line. Unfortunately, this wound up falling through, likely due to budgetary constraints on the subway or otherwise, as we do not see such an operation today. The Nostrand Avenue, New Lots, and Canarsie Line extensions would probably be ideal to construct, as both would serve areas that are either far from subway connection or have been unserved overall by it. The addition of any further lines spurring off the Queens Blvd Line would probably not be ideal, even the super-express, as the majority of the existing line with its junctions and service, is already at capacity and unable to handle the traffic from such new services.

Ultimately, none of these did come to fruition, and it is likely that they never could. Not only would it be with the development of New York City itself that the subway stayed behind, but the advent of things such as the car and associated urban planning led to a further stagnation of subway expansion. Still, the opportunities presented by these various plans have left a mark on the system. The 1968 Plan for Action's 63rd Street Line and Archer Avenue Lines have opened up, providing new connections for lines that previously barely intersected if at all. And, after about 100 years in the planning stages, the Second Avenue Subway has started construction, with one phase done as of 2017 and the remainder of it set to open in the near future. Even if slowly, the spirits of old expansions long gone have begun to take New York City back again. Ideally, these could be used as the stepping stones to returning some plans to

extend the system out again, and could potentially become the start of another transit revolution in a city already worthy of having the best system in the world.