

Among behemoths of rail transit, New York City stands well on its own. Having a great backbone for not just any American city but a majority of metropolitans overall. Servicing 473 stations distributed across 28 services is no easy feat, and even if in its current state it services them in a less than optimal manner, it is nothing short of a marvel in engineering and operation. Even with that being the case, there are certain sections of the city that wound up getting left out of its service area, mainly across much of eastern Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. Additionally, no notable service that is not radial into Manhattan appears to exist between the outer boroughs aside from the Queens-Brooklyn IND Crosstown, which still operates quite close to the East River. This often means that commutes in the outlying boroughs and in crosstown applications utilize buses, which while still part of the major system, are slow and could be made efficient in some cases through subway lines operating in their stead. There were, however, plans spanning from the 1930s', to the 60s', even today that received traction, and would have served these applications which are now held up by the bus system. But, with the blockage of certain incidents in their own respective time periods, and most predominant above all, budget constraints, they were held back. So, then, that would beg the question of what could have been? What of these plans would likely have benefitted the city, and which specific application of them would have been better overall?

As mentioned beforehand, a section of these plans were brought up in the 1930s. Specifically via the IND Second System set of 1929, then revised 1939. By the time that these plans were implemented, a number of issues wound up contributing to their downfall, not bound to the outbreak of World War II in the year after their second revision, but also, according to Johnathan English in his article "Derailed: The Postwar End of New York City Subway Expansion", "...political leadership distracted by disputes over administration and unable to plan

for the long term; financial constraints imposed by construction and labor-cost inflation, the strained municipal budget, and declining ridership.” (English 832). Further stemmed in that text was the 1951 bond issue to the subway system, an amount estimated to be some \$500 million, which was ultimately used to fund disjointed repairs and minor projects that excluded expansion for the most part. A plan in 1968, known as the Program for Action, was created and then introduced to then-mayor Rockefeller for his review, and although studies were later conducted on the potential for their usage, they were ultimately shelved due to the impending 1970s’ budget crisis and failure to maintain the system, which itself is also stated by English on Page 838 of his study.

Both the 1930s’ and 1960s’ plan focused on the construction of the IND Second Avenue Line, which was one of the only parts put into construction, and even now is only 1/3rd complete with its current configuration running as a branch off the BMT Broadway Line to 96th Street-2nd Avenue. Plans would have foreseen it extending deeper into the Bronx, and promptly using a number of right-of-ways that were occupied by the IRT. For the 1930s’ plans, as stated majorly in Mark S. Feinman’s article “History of the Independent Subway”, a number of alignments would have been taken, such as along the existing IRT Pelham Line, overtaking the IRT White Plains Line, and a new line along Morris Park and Wilson Avenues, which would connect to an extended IND Concourse Line to terminate at Baychester (Feinman, The Independent “Second System” Proposal of 1929). There would not really wind up being any immediate demand for these new lines, as their planned catch areas would have either already overlapped with existing service, been made redundant due to the existence of another line, or simply wouldn’t have worked due to operational capacity being reached on a connecting service. The only reasonable concept likely would have been the extension of the Concourse Line to Baychester Avenue, as it

would have provided a new crosstown connection to the Bronx without disrupting existing service.

Furthermore, within Manhattan, plans to build branching subway lines to Brooklyn from existing trunk lines were in full swing. As stated by Joseph B. Raskin in his book “The Routes Not Taken: A Trip Through New York City’s Unbuilt Subway System, “One route proposed in 1929 was the South 4th Street/South Queens Trunk Line... The trunk line began in Manhattan as an extension of the 6th Avenue-Houston Street line... Running eastward across Brooklyn and Queens, three spur lines would branch off.” (Raskin, 14). This was intended to act as a feeder for multiple lines within Manhattan, and then later Queens, running along South 4th Street to a fork of three lines headed to Sheepshead Bay via Utica Avenue, Jackson Heights-Roosevelt Avenue via the also-proposed Winfield Spur northward, and to the Rockaways via that same line southward. It would have also paralleled the BMT Jamaica Line for most of its run until the split, but that would unfortunately rule it out in modern constructions. Not only would it overlap with that, but the majority of its planned connections would already have put it at capacity from the get-go, feeding multiple lines through one would likely prove to be inefficient (it was discarded in the 1939 revision), so the South 4th Street subway wouldn’t be ideal, but its spurs would likely be another story.

The Winfield Spur was likely the closest of all plans aside from the IND Second Avenue Line to be built, as it would not only throughput service into an area that sorely needed it (Central Queens and a direct link to the Rockaways) but also didn’t directly impact capacity as it would have terminated and operated on its own lower level upon reaching Jackson Heights, where it would connect to the IND Queens Blvd Lines. A second spur off from roughly 63rd Drive on the same line, as brought up in Travel In New York’s video “The IND’s Second System,

explained”, would have also gone off the Queens Blvd Line and connected to the Winfield Spur in Forest Park, before both lines would continue south and connect to then-LIRR controlled (and now abandoned) Rockaway Beach Branch to reach the Rockaways. Although the 63rd Drive branch may have affected capacity somewhat, it’d be a good connection to have since it would both be more direct and allow through running on trains from the Rockaways to the city. Further down the Rockaways, since that area had not yet been taken over by subway service, there were plans for the line, which ended at Beach 116th Street at the time, to extend further out to the bounds of the primarily inhabited peninsula to Beach 149th Street, again according to Travel In New York. Although this would be optimal, it would likely infringe on households existing in the area. Unless that section of the line nowadays were to be built underground, there would be no way to continue westward overall, so the spur and 63rd Drive branch would be ideal to build, but the extension to Beach 149th would not.

Further adding onto that is the fact that a number of extensions of lines outward into eastern Queens were considered. Extensions of the IRT Flushing, IND Queens Boulevard, IND/BMT Archer Avenue, and IND Fulton Street Lines, which already terminate in Queens, would have been considered all the way up to neighborhoods bordering New York City and Long Island. Additionally in consideration was an extension of the BMT Astoria Line, which terminates in northwest Queens as of current, eastward to the Cross Island Parkway in Eastern Queens, according to Vanshnookenraggen’s “New York City Subway: IND Second System Track Map”, although specific stations cannot be confirmed at this time. All of these would be beyond acceptable, especially the Flushing and Astoria Line’s case, as those extensions would bring unprecedented, and new service to the northeastern Queens area. Though, ironically enough, of these plans, the Astoria Line’s would likely be least likely to happen, as it would require

construction along the already built-up Long Island Expressway right-of-way. Further spurs off of those lines were also considered, but would likely be shelved due to their proximity to an already existing service in the form of those extended existing lines.

The IND Second System plans ultimately fell through, but that would not be the end of ambition. Come the 1960s, the subway was once again looking to expand, this time in the form of the 1968 MTA Program for Action. A set of coordinated studies that not only looked to boost the subway, but the complementary Long Island Railroad and Metro-North services. To shorten the objective of the plan as it were written to then-Mayor Rockefeller, The Program For Action looks to provide improvements to existing infrastructure, along with new means of linking not just the city with Manhattan's CBD through subway, but through rail and air, thus strengthening the system for an expectedly higher future population. While this plan mostly focused on the aforementioned LIRR and MNR, it did not leave the subway out at all.

Provisions within the Plan for Action also included the Second Avenue Subway, but to a much more truncated state without any of its previously planned extensions into Queens and Brooklyn. However, a new alignment was brought up for it in the Bronx, using the then-newly abandoned New York, Westchester and Boston Railroad's right-of-way to extend towards E. 180th Street, effectively linking up the White Plains/Dyre Avenue line. This would be a considerably effective connection, as its construction likely wouldn't affect any major or already existing sections of subway trackage, aside from the IRT Pelham Line, which the new alignment was shown to intermingle with in Vanshnookenraggen's track map (although this is mostly speculative). Brooklyn and Queens also took on extensive extension works, as stated in the MTA's 1968 "Metropolitan transportation, a program for action. Report to Nelson A. Rockefeller, Governor of New York." with the "Extension of the Nostrand Avenue subway in

Brooklyn along Flatbush Avenue to a modern terminal at Avenue U to serve the growing Mill Basin area.”, and “Extension of the New Lots Line in Brooklyn to a modern terminal at Flatlands Avenue and Linwood Street in the developing Spring Creek area.” (MTA, 4). These two extensions would still be fairly relevant and without issue, as they would extend into areas underserved by existing transit.

Additionally, for Queens, a number of extensions and branches were planned out, especially along the Queens Boulevard Line, which would have seen a new line built along the Long Island Expressway to Springfield Blvd, and the demolition of a section of aging el on the BMT Jamaica Line before placing it back underground and connecting it to the Queens Boulevard via a branch that would come to be known as the BMT/IND Archer Avenue Line. Furthermore, a direct express connection from the Queens Boulevard Line to Manhattan was considered, with no immediately known connection point aside from what is speculated on Vanshnookenraggen’s map. What was known was that the line would operate via the LIRR’s trackage from Sunnyside to about Forest Hills, and would then allow for additional capacity to be pushed onto the line. Of these lines, the Long Island Expressway line would still be far-fetched in the same way the original plan had the Astoria Line extend along it due to the highway’s being constructed over its expected right-of-way, but it would also be the only means of getting transit up through northeastern Queens if all else fails. If anything, the subway should either run in the median or via an elevated structure similar to that of the modern AirTrain via the Van Wyck.

The majority of plans under the 1968 Program for Action unfortunately fell as casualties to the 1970s bankruptcy of New York City, and although a few of them were already under way, they would only be completed in the 1980s-90s’ after a series of delays related to that

bankruptcy. But, even up until the 80s', it would seem as though one part of the Program for Action was ready to be set into motion; the Direct express line via the LIRR for Queens Boulevard. This is evidenced through a joint environmental study performed by the USDOT and the MTA in 1985, which reviewed the various options of alignment that the line could have taken. It cited up to four options, including one without construction of the line, but the most notable one would have been connection to the 63 Street Tunnel, which by that time had finished construction up to 21st St-Queensbridge without connection to Queens Boulevard. As it were written in the environmental study, "These trains provide exceptionally fast service to Manhattan for Queens Boulevard Line reuters east of 71st-Continental Avenues... This alternative provides the best ridership balance between the East River tunnels and maximizes 63rd Street Tunnel utilization at 69 percent." (USDOT, MTA 4-5). This would have been the more optimal option prior to the connection of the line to the Queens Boulevard express, and even now it would provide great utility in freeing up capacity along it. The only roadblock would be working around the LIRR's mainline, which the super express would run along regardless, as all tracks from Sunnyside to Forest Hills are heavily used. In that case, and with the express on Queens Boulevard still running a fairly high frequency service, the super-express proposal would likely stay better as history.

With the exception of a few segments of track, many of these extensions never did wind up coming to fruition. Over time, any plethora of reasons would wind up degrading the state of the subway from the expansions that never were, again due to deferred maintenance, low ridership, but also the introduction of the automobile. In place of many of the proposed lines, highways wound up being built en masse, especially in Queens and Brooklyn, where the anticipated right-of-ways of new subway lines were built over before they could even break

ground. That being said, it still isn't impossible for expansion to continue. There are new sections of subway and transit overall being built, with the Second Avenue Subway currently in its second phase of construction, and the Interborough Express plan being put together and finalized to create a second crosstown connection between the Long Island outer boroughs. It may be difficult, but not impossible, for this already expansive system to expand further. With that, and some more maintenance in areas of dire condition, the New York City Subway could return to being world-class, once more.

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