



A Bumpy Ride

Cultural trolleys hold great promise in raising the profile of arts institutions outside of Manhattan—but infrequent service and limited marketing keeps most routes from boosting attendance at local venues

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A BUMPY RIDE

Cultural trolleys hold great promise in raising the profile of arts institutions outside of Manhattan—but infrequent service and limited marketing keeps most routes from boosting attendance at local venues

GETTING TO CARNEGIE HALL MAY TAKE PRACTICE, PRACTICE, practice—but luring visitors to the cultural institutions and performance venues in the four boroughs outside of Manhattan can take even more effort.

The boroughs are home to cultural jewels from the Brooklyn Children’s Museum in Crown Heights and the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona to Pre-gones Theater in the South Bronx and Snug Harbor Cultural Center on Staten Island. But with so many of the boroughs’ cultural destinations and tourist attractions located in neighborhoods that are difficult to access by public transportation, plagued by negative perceptions shaped long ago or under the radar of many visitors, institutions have struggled to attract greater numbers of tourists and culture-loving New Yorkers.

In recent years, cultural leaders and local officials around the city have responded to this challenge by establishing nearly a dozen ‘cultural trolley’ routes. More may soon be on the way. However, as this report finds, the city’s cultural trolleys have been a mixed bag of successes and failures.

While some of the trolleys have had an undeniably positive impact in raising the profile of cultural institutions and puncturing old perceptions of neighborhoods, most of New York’s trolley routes have failed to boost attendance in a meaningful way. Ridership generally has been low, and on some of the routes, a significant number of riders are local residents who primarily use the trolley for a free trip to the subway or supermarket. In many cases, the trolleys have significant potential but just don’t run frequently enough to be effective. Another concern is that trolleys are some of the worst gas guzzlers on the road, making them expensive to operate and maintain in today’s era of rising oil prices.

This report, based on six months of research and more than 50 interviews, provides the first major assessment of cultural trolleys in New York City. It focuses primarily on three major cultural trolley routes in the city—the Heart of Brooklyn (HOB) Trolley, the Bronx Culture Trolley and the Queens Culture Trolley—but also examines several other cultural trolleys that have operated in New York and other cities. The report was originally suggested by Heart of Brooklyn, the nonprofit organization that runs the HOB Trolley, as part of the group’s ongoing effort to better understand what makes an effective cultural trolley system and how it can improve its own program. But while our study includes an in-depth look at the successes and failures of the HOB Trolley, its focus is a broader examination of what has and hasn’t worked with cultural trolleys throughout the city. The report also points out several steps that could be taken to improve New York’s cultural trolleys and suggests other ways to increase attendance at arts institutions outside of Manhattan.

The Bronx is home to three cultural trolley routes. One shows off the emerging cultural cluster in the South Bronx; another connects the Bronx Zoo, New York Botanical Garden and Arthur Avenue; and the last conveys visitors to the remote but charming neighborhood of City Island. The Heart of Brooklyn Trolley winds its

way through Prospect Park, linking five cultural institutions in central Brooklyn. In Queens, another trolley shuttles people along the Queens Jazz Trail. A number of other trolleys have come and gone in recent years, including a route that connected the Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) temporary home in Queens with other venues in Long Island City, one that linked cultural attractions in and around Flushing Meadows Corona Park and another that served the Brooklyn Children’s Museum.

Cultural trolleys clearly have the potential to improve access to museums, zoos, galleries, concert halls and shopping districts that are located outside the city’s main cultural and tourist districts. They offer a convenient and safe way for tourists and New Yorkers to explore cultural treasures outside Manhattan that aren’t very well known or easily accessible by public transit. In doing so, they help bring in new customers to neighborhood shops and restaurants. They can also provide a highly visible marketing tool for local institutions.

Unfortunately, trolleys have not been the magic bullet that some cultural leaders envisioned. The Queens Culture Trolley was discontinued in 2005 after woefully low ridership and the Heart of Brooklyn organization has recently embarked on a broad rethink of its own trolley program in hopes of averting the same

The Three Trolleys We Feature In This Report

The Bronx Culture Trolley, widely considered the most successful of the city’s trolley routes, is unique in that it runs just one night each month. On the first Wednesday evening of each month, the trolley meanders through the cultural cluster that has come to define the new South Bronx—allowing visitors to explore the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Artisans Boutique at Hostos Community College, Pregones Theater and a growing number of art galleries that have recently opened in the neighborhood. The trolley features programming at several different sites along the trolley route, so riders can experience the flavor of this emerging cultural hub. Experts interviewed for this report say that the time and money that the Bronx Council on the Arts has put into planning and marketing the trolley are key reasons for its success.

The Heart of Brooklyn Trolley connects several cultural institutions in and around Prospect Park—the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Prospect Park Zoo and the central branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. Operating with just one vehicle, modeled after

an old-fashioned trolley, it runs all day on weekends, making stops at each of the participating institutions along its hour-long loop. The trolley provides a pleasant experience for visitors to Prospect Park, but leaders of the partner institutions say it’s done little if anything to increase attendance.

The now-defunct Queens Culture Trolley linked the institutions in and around Flushing Meadows Corona Park, including the Queens Museum of Art, Queens Theatre in the Park, the New York Hall of Science, the Queens Zoo, and the Queens Botanical Garden. The trolley also stopped at the Louis Armstrong House Museum, several hotels and shopping districts in Jackson Heights and Corona along its 90-minute-long loop. Despite great initial promise, planners realized after months of low ridership—just 32 people rode the trolley on an average weekend—that the route was too long to serve as an effective transportation system and that attendance gains at local institutions were too small to justify the project’s high cost. In 2005, the trolley was discontinued.

fate. Only two of the city's major cultural trolleys are considered truly successful—the Bronx Culture Trolley and Flushing Town Hall's Queens Jazz Trail Trolley.

While the HOB Trolley is fairly successful as a marketing symbol for Prospect Park and provides a pleasant and convenient service for many families in the neighborhoods that surround the park, there is little evidence that it substantially boosts attendance at the five cultural institutions that are on the route. In fact, the leaders of all five Brooklyn cultural sites served by the trolley expressed disappointment with the program. "The trolley's impact has been marginal at best," says a leader at one HOB institution.

"Cultural trolleys have had a mixed track record of success in New York City. Flushing Town Hall's Jazz Trail Trolley and the Bronx Culture Trolley do very well at attracting audiences because both have strong programming as part of the experience. Trolleys that serve more as a means of transportation tend not to be as effective in drawing audiences to cultural destinations because the city's strong public transportation system provides a viable means of traveling around the city quickly and easily."

The Brooklyn trolley rarely exceeds a handful of passengers per trip, and few of the passengers actually get off the trolley and walk through the doors of one of the HOB institutions. Even the Bronx Culture Trolley, while considered successful, typically has no more than 100 riders on the nights when it runs. And the trolley serving City Island, a sleepy fishing village in the Northeast Bronx that has great potential as a tourist attraction, sometimes has had as few as one rider.

A big part of the problem is that service is often too infrequent for riders to consider the trolleys reliable forms of transportation. The HOB Trolley runs once an hour; the now-defunct Queens Culture Trolley made one circuit every 90 minutes. By comparison, thriving trolleys in Philadelphia and San Diego show up between three and five times an hour at each stop. The result is that many New Yorkers use the trolleys opportunistically, jumping on when it shows up to catch a ride to the subway station or wherever they do their shopping. Meanwhile, tourists are hesitant to hop on if they could be stranded in an unfamiliar neighborhood with an hour-long wait to be picked up.

Interestingly, the most successful cultural trolleys in the city have gotten around this problem not by increasing the frequency of service but by limiting the number of days in operation. Understanding that they don't have

the resources to pick up visitors frequently enough to make them attractive as transportation systems, both the Bronx Culture Trolley and Flushing Town Hall's Queens Jazz Trail Trolley have opted not to offer regular service on weekends. Instead, their trolleys run one day a month—and those rides are well-publicized and carefully programmed. In essence, the trolley becomes a special event in its own right, not merely a means of transportation. And local residents and tourists know exactly when they need to show up and what they can expect.

"Cultural trolleys have had a mixed track record of success in New York City," says Kate D. Levin, commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Af-

fairs. "Flushing Town Hall's Jazz Trail Trolley and the Bronx Culture Trolley do very well at attracting audiences because both have strong programming as part of the experience. Trolleys that serve more as a means of transportation tend not to be as effective in drawing audiences to cultural destinations because the city's strong public transportation system provides a viable means of traveling around the city quickly and easily."

Another problem is that most of the city's cultural trolleys simply aren't well known. Promoting these routes is vitally important—but it isn't cheap, and most of the trolleys don't have significant marketing budgets. The exception is the Bronx Culture Trolley, and experts interviewed for this report say it's not a coincidence that the huge amount of time and money the organizers have put into planning and promoting it has led to the most successful trolley venture in the city. The Bronx Council on the Arts (BCA) spends upwards of \$150,000 to plan and promote each year's set of trolley nights, and its investment has paid off: 84 percent of riders surveyed by BCA said they would ride the trolley again, and more than half reported that they spent money at local restaurants and cafés the nights the trolley ran.

For most of the other trolleys in New York, however, marketing has been an afterthought. None of the HOB institutions advertise the trolley on the home pages of

their websites, though HOB and several of the Brooklyn institutions do list the trolley on the pages of their sites that provide directions. By contrast, Gray Line New York, a private tour bus company that shuttles tourists to different parts of the five boroughs, prints three million brochures a year and sends them out all over the world.

To be fair, the trolleys aren't getting much help in this regard from the two agencies that can do the most to promote attractions in the boroughs: NYC & Co., the city's convention and visitors bureau, and I Love New York, the state's tourism agency. Currently, the only

neighborhoods that are a considerable distance from public transit and are hard to access without a car. Trolleys can help solve both problems, raising awareness of these attractions and bringing potential visitors to the front door. The success of the Bronx Culture Trolley is a case in point.

But without a clear focus on either goal, and with inadequate marketing, the trolleys are falling short on both. The HOB Trolley offers perhaps the clearest illustration of this identity crisis: is it an attraction in its own right? A marketing tool for the institutions it serves? A transportation system for local residents?

"We didn't have a clear definition of the difference between a special events trolley and a transportation system. A transportation system has to run every 10 or 15 minutes, it has to run every day of the year, year after year. A special events trolley, you can do it once and it can be a success. And we were successful only when it was used as a special events trolley."

local trolley that is mentioned on either government website is the Bronx Culture Trolley. Both entities, as well as other city and state agencies, could help by providing publicity, advertising tie-ins and assistance in getting borough-based trolleys on the radar of tour operators.

Adding to the difficulties is the fact that the high costs of gas and insurance render trolleys very expensive to run. The replica old-time trolleys may be charming, but they also guzzle gas and are prone to breakdowns.

We believe there is a place for trolleys in New York City. Dozens of cultural institutions lie out of sight and mind for tourists and locals alike, located in

All of the above?

That lack of clear purpose already proved to be the undoing of the Queens Culture Trolley, which tried to be too many things to too many people. "We didn't have a clear definition of the difference between a special events trolley and a transportation system," says Tom Finkelparl, executive director of the Queens Museum. "We didn't have a clear enough sense that you had to be one or the other. A transportation system has to run every 10 or 15 minutes, it has to run every day of the year, year after year. A special events trolley, you can do it once and it can be a success. And we were successful only when it was used as a special events trolley."

CULTURAL TROLLEY VS. PRIVATE TOUR BUSES

The cultural trolleys highlighted in this report shouldn't be confused with the popular double-decker buses and motor coaches run by private companies like Gray Line New York, City Sights NY and Big Apple Bus Tours, which offer a wide range of tours through Midtown, Harlem and other Manhattan neighborhoods, as well as new routes through Brooklyn. Those for-profit tours cater almost exclusively to tourists who are willing to pay up to \$50 to hop on and off at a variety of the city's most popular cultural, shopping and dining destinations. By contrast, the trolleys we highlight in this report are run by nonprofit cultural organizations and elected officials in the boroughs looking to bring visitors to institutions that are off the beaten path, not to Rockefeller Center, the Empire State Building and other world-famous landmarks. With one exception—the Queens Jazz Trail Trolley, which charges \$35—they cost little or nothing to ride.

The Bronx is Booming

Trolleys in the Bronx are bringing visitors to well-known attractions like the Bronx Zoo and emerging galleries and museums alike—and are helping to change long-outdated perceptions of the borough

In the Bronx, seeing is believing. The borough has undergone an incredible transformation, but even most New Yorkers, let alone tourists, aren't aware of the emerging cultural hub that lies just minutes from Midtown Manhattan. To show visitors just how much is going on in the Bronx—and address deep-seated fears about safety and accessibility—borough leaders have developed three trolley routes. All three routes use the same vehicle (owned by the Bronx Tourism Council), but each shows visitors a side of the Bronx they may have never seen before.

The fires that ravaged the South Bronx died out decades ago, but their unfortunate legacy—the neighborhood's reputation as an unsafe area—remains. Though statistics indicate that the neighborhood is safer than it's ever been and the area has become home to a vibrant cultural community, it remains a challenge to get people to visit.

BRONX CULTURE TROLLEY

The Bronx Council on the Arts (BCA) is trying to change that with a red trolley that shows off the new South Bronx. Since 2002, BCA has run the trolley on the first Wednesday night of each month, bringing visitors to what it calls the South Bronx Cultural Corridor. This stretch of the Grand Concourse is home to a critical mass of cultural organizations in and around Longwood Gallery at Hostos Community College, including

Hostos Arts Center, just steps from the 2, 4 and 5 trains. The Bronx Museum of the Arts and Pregones Theater are within two blocks, as are a number of up-and-coming galleries and performance spaces.

Given the South Bronx's rebirth as a cultural cluster, organizers decided to use the trolley to help people connect to different institutions one night a month. "I believe in the South Bronx as an emergent force and cultural magnet," says Bill Aguado, executive director of the Bronx Council on the Arts. "The trolley is more of a metaphor for the revival of the Bronx than anything else. It's letting the world know: this is what's happening in the South Bronx, come and join us."

The trolley makes four loops each evening, starting its route at Longwood Gallery at Hostos Community College, which is also home to the bustling Artisans Boutique where local entrepreneurs sell a variety of arts and crafts. The trolley then makes a number of stops around the neighborhood, including the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Pregones Theater, Haven Arts Gallery, Ironworks Gallery, the Yankee Tavern and the Downtown Bronx Bar and Café. But it doesn't just drop visitors off at neighborhood hotspots, it offers an experience in its own right. Each month, the cultural institutions work closely with BCA to develop a rich itinerary of events for the evening and provide an engaging and entertaining experience for riders—a much easier task

for one orchestrated ride per month than for a trolley service that traverses the same loop ten times each weekend. Visitors are treated to something different each time; recent trolley riders have gone to gallery openings, listened to traditional Puerto Rican music and toured the studios of local artists. BCA has also featured

BRONX CULTURE TROLLEY			
HOURS OF OPERATION 5:30 – 9:30 pm, first Wed. night of each month, 10 months/year	FREQUENCY Once an hour	COST Free	RIDERSHIP 821 riders in 2006, average of 82 riders a night
ROUTE Longwood Art Gallery at Hostos Community College, Artisans Boutique at Hostos, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Pregones Theater, Haven Arts Gallery, Ironworks Gallery, Yankee Tavern and the Downtown Bronx Bar and Café			

performances onboard the trolley itself.

The trolley's ridership ebbs and flows, but there are signs that a loyal audience is building despite limited capacity. Overall ridership continues to grow each year, from 630 riders in 2003 to 821 in 2006, and trolley-goers have shown up despite rain, snow and hundred-degree temperatures. BCA often has many more 'walk-ins' than actual reservations: in April 2006, 20 people made reservations in advance, but 103 people showed up to ride that night's trolley.

Riders range from international tourists to long-time Bronxites who live in other parts of the borough, sometimes stepping foot in the South Bronx for the first time in years. "People always say: 'I never knew the Bronx looked like this, I had no idea how close it is, how clean it is,'" says Ellen Pollan, director of BCA's South Bronx Cultural Corridor initiative.

BCA recently surveyed 232 riders over a seven-month period and found some compelling results. Two-thirds of riders said it was their first time on the trolley, but among the repeat riders, half indicated they had ridden it five or more times. 88 percent of all riders described the trolley experience as "extremely" or "very" engaging, 85 percent said it was convenient, and 84 percent said they would definitely ride the trolley again.

Three quarters of visitors said they take the trolley to visit multiple destinations. BCA's ridership data corroborates this: in November 2006, 106 people rode the trolley; virtually all of them went to the Longwood Gallery, 68 visited the Bronx Museum and 50 headed to Haven Gallery.

More than half the riders surveyed said they spend money the night the trolley runs, mainly at local restaurants and bars. In 2006, an average of 51 people visited the Downtown Bronx Bar and Café, which often features poetry readings on trolley nights.

The survey also gave BCA a glimpse into the demographics of their riders: 72 percent of riders were women, and 9 out of 10 riders lived in the U.S. Two-thirds were from the Bronx, with 25 percent from Manhattan and Brooklyn. Only a handful of people were from Queens or the larger metro area.

Planners are interested in expanding the trolley to shuttle people from other points, like El Barrio, and recently organized a trolley ride for Fordham University students. They've also piloted several daytime trolley trips with particular audiences—like a senior center in the South Bronx—that offered programming similar to the monthly rides. Twice a year, the trolley makes standing-room-only trips to Hunts Point, where riders can visit the Bronx Academy of Dance, Mud/Bone Studio 889, a working artists' studio, and The Point, a

community-based organization that works with dozens of artists and performers.

The trolley is a priority for the Bronx Council on the Arts, which expends a tremendous amount of staff time programming and managing the monthly event. BCA staff estimates it costs up to \$150,000 a year to run the trolley, primarily in staffing and advertising costs.

Successful marketing efforts have helped power the trolley's success: BCA aggressively promotes the trolley through their website and local media, and has developed promotional materials available at local cultural and civic institutions like libraries and courthouse jurors' rooms. BCA also entered into a sponsorship agreement as a cultural arts partner with WNYC, a local NPR affiliate, which entitled them to 25 public service announcements over 10 months. Their investment paid off: the target audience of young families and art lovers are riding the trolley in growing numbers.

"We have staff all over the place monitoring, coordinating, dropping by different sites, meeting with other sites," says Aguado. "We don't just show up once a month—this is a month-long planning process. There is a lot of time involved but it also increases the profile of BCA and increases the profile of the Bronx, so it is a win-win."

BRONX TROLLEY

Every weekend from April to October, the same vehicle that makes the monthly route through the emerging destination spots of the South Bronx Cultural Corridor is used to connect three of the borough's signature attractions: the Bronx Zoo, New York Botanical Garden and Arthur Avenue. But the Bronx Trolley doesn't just encourage people to see the Bronx, it helps bring them there.

The Bronx Tourism Council, which runs the trolley, hopes to tap into the market of out-of-towners on their second or third visit to New York—tourists who have explored the most famous sights in Manhattan and are now looking to venture into the boroughs. On weekend mornings, the trolley picks up riders at the NYC & Co. visitors center in Midtown Manhattan and brings them to the Bronx, stopping at the West Farms Square subway stop and Fordham Plaza Metro-North train station along the way. After making a series of loops between the institutions, the trolley does an evening dropoff back in Midtown. Some people ride the trolley for the whole day and use it to return to Manhattan; others take it to get to one destination and then return via Metro-North or the subway. In 2006, about 3,500 people rode the trolley, at a total cost of \$15,000 for the year, shared by the zoo, garden and Arthur Avenue merchants.

The trolley's itinerary has changed since it started running in 2001. Planners recognized that its original 90-minute-long loop, which included stops at Van Cortlandt Park and Jerome Avenue, made it untenable as a transportation system, and they tightened the loop in 2006 to include a smaller number of stops. This pared-down route nonetheless provides visitors with many options: they can go from watching tigers at the Bronx Zoo to sampling Italian delicacies on Arthur Avenue before finishing with a stroll through the 250 acres of the New York Botanical Garden. "Because it's a whole tourism product, it gives you a nice variety," says Margaret Price, assistant director of marketing operations for the Bronx Zoo. "If someone wants to do a quick taste test of what we have here, it gives you a quick flavor of these destinations."

The trolley has gone through several iterations—the Manhattan pickups and dropoffs only began last year—and awareness is still fairly low among tourists. Additionally, a large segment of riders are locals who use the trolley as free ground transportation. The institutions aren't certain how the trolley affects their attendance, though Arthur Avenue merchants see the impact most vividly. The Bronx Zoo is planning a study that will examine how visitors found out about the trolley, which should provide some insight into how much impact it has made.

Project officials think it's critical that the trolley visually stands out, for two key reasons. First, they believe that its role as a roving billboard is just as important as its capacity as a people mover. Every weekend, thousands of people see the large ads on the side of the vehicle advertising the institutions and their upcoming events. For example, the trolley recently featured ads to promote the reopening of the zoo's sea lion exhibit.

Second, when it comes to attracting tourists, the trolley's unique look sets it apart from the sea of vehicles that crowd city streets. "The trolley is really visual shorthand, and in a market as competitive as New York City for tourists' attention, we think it is important to be able to communicate that very quickly when it pulls up in front of the visitors center," says Doris Quinones, executive director of the Bronx Tourism Council.

All in all, the investment seems worthwhile. "It's a way of branding the borough as a legitimate tourism destination and doing a cross-promotion of sorts," says Quinones. "It may create a comfort level or plant an idea. It gives us something to talk to the hotel concierge about and validate their leap of faith to tell a somewhat skeptical hotel guest that, yes, the Bronx is a place you can visit."

CITY ISLAND SEASIDE TROLLEY

Since 2005, on the first Friday of each month, the City Island Seaside Trolley has been bringing people to one of the most unique—and remote—neighborhoods in New York City. City Island is jam-packed in the summer, but in the cooler months, people are wary of making the trip, especially without a car. The trolley provides visitors an easy way to eat, shop and see the sights of the city's only state-designated maritime community.

Five times each night, the trolley picks up riders at Pelham Bay Park, the last station on the 6 train, and makes its first stop at the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, a 19th century historic house. It then takes riders to City Island, where they can explore by foot or hop on and off the trolley along the 1½-mile-long main drag to stop at galleries and shops, which stay open late when the trolley is running and frequently offer discounts.

The trolley is welcomed in City Island since it brings in new visitors without increasing car traffic or congestion. "We want to make City Island a unique destination. We need to make something of interest to attract people to City Island and this is a great advertising vehicle," says Paul Klein, vice president of the City Island Chamber of Commerce and a local business owner.

But many New Yorkers don't know about City Island, let alone the trolley service. The MTA's subway map didn't even include City Island until March 2006; an information box on the map had obscured the area. The trolley isn't widely known either. Often, riders get off the subway at Pelham Bay Park to be met by a trolley they didn't know existed. "It's a surprise to most of the people that see it. They don't see that it's available, they take the train or are driving here and see the trolley go by, and they all ask about it," says Gerard Giacco, owner of Lickety Split, an ice cream shop on the island.

Ridership has been erratic, with as many as twenty people and as few as one solitary rider. "Is it really working as a way of getting people here?" asks Giacco. "I don't know. But it's certainly working as an advertising tool. The people who see it think it's wonderful."

Despite low ridership, the project's organizers are optimistic, especially since the quaint-looking trolley fits in nicely with the neighborhood landscape. "It is certainly in its infancy," says Klein, "but I think it has potential. If we could do it every Friday or run it on the weekends as well, we could use it to supplement bus service and get people moving back and forth easier." And regardless of who rides the trolley, the economic impact on the island can be significant. "Whether they're tourists or Manhattanites, it's all spending dollars," he adds.

Missed Connections

The Heart of Brooklyn Trolley through Prospect Park is popular with many local families and has considerable potential, but it hasn't yet had a meaningful impact on attendance at participating cultural venues

Brooklyn approaches trolleys with a different set of wants and needs than does the Bronx. The borough's decade-long renaissance is hardly a secret to people living throughout the region, and the Brooklyn Museum and the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) are already two of the city's better-known cultural institutions. Yet, Brooklyn is far from realizing its full potential as a cultural and tourist destination. Large institutions like the Brooklyn Museum and BAM could easily attract more out-of-towners, while smaller cultural institutions and venues—particularly those that aren't located on a major subway line—still struggle to attract people who live outside of the borough.

Brooklyn also has the difficult task of competing with much higher-profile cultural institutions and tourist sites in Manhattan. To do so effectively, many borough officials believe that they need to raise the visibility and enhance the image of their own attractions. "There had been a feeling that the institutions in Brooklyn were second-rate—dusty and musty," says Joan Bartolomeo, president of the Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation. "We want to change that. We have world-class institutions and if we were anywhere but New York City, people would recognize that."

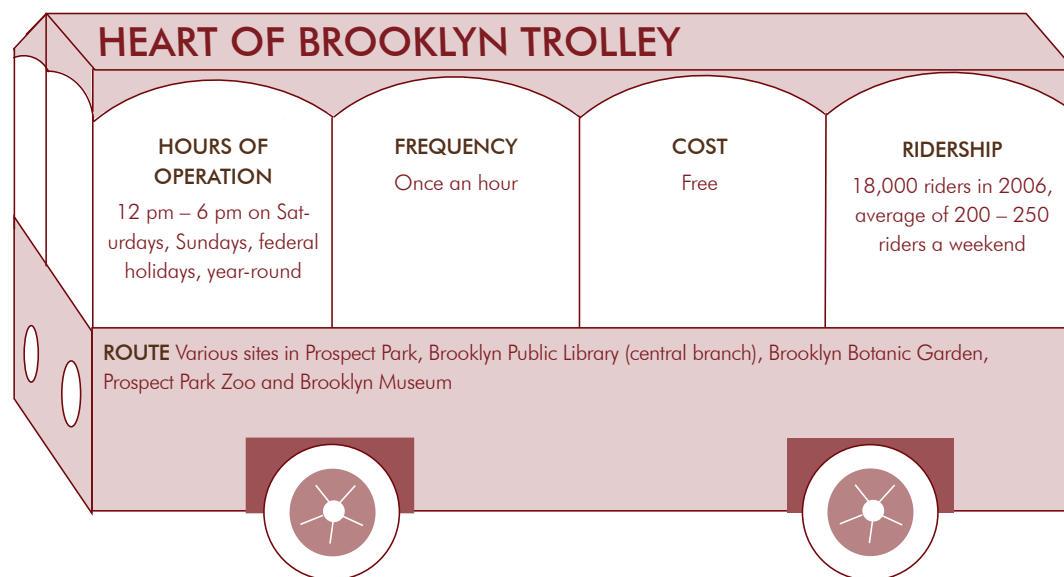
It isn't too surprising that the borough has looked to trolleys to help achieve that change. Trolleys are deeply embedded in Brooklyn history—the borough's baseball team was originally named the Brooklyn Trol-

ley Dodgers, after the fleet of streetcars that traveled around Brooklyn in the 19th century.

THE BASICS

In 2001, six central Brooklyn institutions—the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Brooklyn Public Library, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Prospect Park and the Prospect Park Zoo—formed an organization called Heart of Brooklyn (HOB) to encourage both locals and tourists to take advantage of the area's unique mix of cultural destinations, help shift some of those outdated perceptions and improve attendance at each institution. The Heart of Brooklyn Trolley soon emerged as a symbol of that partnership. On weekends, the old-fashioned replica trolley runs between five of the institutions in or near Prospect Park, picking up riders at various stops throughout the park on its free, hour-long loop. (A separate trolley which ran from Grand Army Plaza to the Brooklyn Children's Museum was recently discontinued. See "Brooklyn Children's Museum Trolley," page 13) The trolley provides a convenient way for individuals and families to navigate the 585-acre park and get to each institution. It also makes it easy for those visiting one of the institutions to head to another site on the same day. It's not hard to understand why many adults and children seem to love the quaint-looking trolley. It offers a scenic journey around Prospect Park and one

of the borough's key cultural hubs at no charge. The trolley provides great visibility for Prospect Park itself, offering a fun way to get to Wollman Rink, the Picnic House and everything in between. For years, the park has been closed to vehicles on the weekends, so the HOB Trolley fills a



gap for riders looking to go to the carousel or take a relaxing tour of the park grounds. “It’s a really nice way to introduce people to the park, especially when they have kids,” says Tupper Thomas, administrator of Prospect Park. “The kids like it, they get on that little bus and they have a good time.”

The trolley route has also brought the HOB institutions closer together, and the vehicle serves as a visible reminder of the collaboration. “The trolley helps in the perception that these six institutions are together, as an organization, and that these institutions make up a real cultural district,” says Arnold Lehman, executive director of the Brooklyn Museum. “The presence of the vehicle shows visitors that there is a way to from A to B to C and back to A, and that is very important.”

THE PROBLEMS

Despite all of the trolley’s strengths, HOB member institutions share a sense of disappointment with it. In interviews conducted for this report, the leaders of all six institutions affiliated with HOB expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the program in its current form, particularly that it hasn’t lived up to its great potential. “For [the trolley] to become true transportation, there would have to be more of them, they would have to be more consistent, run more often and they would have to hit the streets in more places,” says one of the cultural leaders.

Some of the member institutions believe that the trolley simply isn’t providing the benefit they had initially envisioned. “I think it needs to be significantly revamped because we have absolutely no idea if it’s helping us at all,” says the head of one HOB member institution. Similarly, several local businesses say that they don’t see much of an impact from the trolley, largely because few of the riders have been from outside the neighborhood.

HOB trolley riders don’t appear to provide much of an attendance boost at the sponsoring sites. Most riders live in the area, and many simply use it as free ground transportation to go shopping or save themselves a walk across the park rather than to visit the HOB partners. “If you talk to the trolley drivers, it’s the same lady and her three kids every Saturday at 3 pm and they’re going from ballet on the west side of the park to something else on the east side of the park,” says Ellen Salpeter, executive director of Heart of Brooklyn. “They love the ride through the park, but it serves just as much their own personal need to get from A to B as it does our needs to have them enjoy the trolley.”

In 2006, an estimated 18,000 people rode the trolley, with average weekend ridership of 200 to 250 people. The trolley’s highest ridership—280 people in one

weekend—came during the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Cherry Blossom Festival in April.

A 2006 HOB survey found that 78 percent of visitors to the six institutions were drawn from within Brooklyn, with 17 percent from a single zip code in Park Slope alone. Only 10 percent of visitors came from the other boroughs and just 7 percent from outside the New York metropolitan region.

A major impetus for the trolley’s creation was cross-pollination of the audiences that support the HOB member institutions. But the possibilities in that regard are limited, especially for families. On a recent trolley ride, a father with two young children explained, “The kids let you have one institutional visit a day, if you’re lucky.” A more realistic concept of how riders use the trolley might be that people spend time in the park and then hop on the trolley to visit one of the cultural institutions.

Just as the trolley has disappointed HOB as a means of sharing institutional audiences, it’s also done little to nothing in support of local stores and restaurants. Since the trolley doesn’t connect to local commercial strips, riders looking to grab a bite to eat or browse local boutiques must disembark to do so. Although there are bustling commercial corridors nearby, such as Seventh Avenue and Flatbush Avenue, non-locals who ride the trolley aren’t likely to know about them. They often just take the trolley back to a subway stop and head back to Manhattan, minimizing the economic impact of their Brooklyn visit.

The trolley also faces a chicken-and-egg issue: the institutions don’t promote the trolley on a widespread basis, which is understandable if they don’t think they are getting much out of it. Among the six institutions, none advertise or mention the HOB trolley on their website home pages and only half mention it on their directions pages.

MARKETING AND AWARENESS

In recent years, Brooklyn has taken major steps to raise its profile as a tourist destination—from creating the only borough-level destination marketing organization (DMO), opening a tourism and visitors center in Borough Hall and participating in international tourism trade shows from London to Anaheim. HOB is also making a name for itself, thanks to its well-designed materials and aggressive leadership around promoting central Brooklyn. But it doesn’t appear as if HOB’s marketing approach has had a meaningful impact on the trolley. Although the trolley has been around since 2001, a recent HOB survey found that awareness of it actually decreased in recent years, with 45 percent of respondents aware of the trolley in 2003 and just 39

percent in 2006. For institutions that are well served by transit, like the Brooklyn Museum, the HOB Trolley might offer the most value as a marketing tool. But in its current form, the trolley falls short in that respect as well. The trolley's exterior has only a small sign with the partner institutions' logos, and the interior rarely features any advertising: a major exhibit being staged just feet away from a trolley stop generally isn't even promoted to riders. The lack of onboard narration (live or recorded) also detracts from the potential experience, even for native New Yorkers. Often, the only sounds riders hear come from whatever radio station is being played by the driver.

Currently, there isn't enough signage in the neighborhoods around Prospect Park to guide people from public transit to trolley stops and, once riders leave the trolley, towards the institutions. Fortunately, help is now on the way. HOB recently secured capital funding for the planning and implementation of a pedestrian wayfinding system. The system will incorporate trolley stops, public transit and other locations of interest in large, easy-to-read signs and kiosks, with potential to incorporate a digital technology component.

Of course, improving awareness of the trolley only helps if the impressions are positive—and many of those who are familiar with the HOB Trolley perceive it as unreliable, with long waits or delays between pickups. One weekend that the Center rode the trolley this spring, the vehicle showed up to its scheduled stop nearly 15 minutes late. Another time it didn't show up at all.

MOVING FORWARD

It's clear the trolley isn't working in its current incarnation, since none of the HOB institutions think it is having a substantial impact on their attendance figures. But all six think it still has great potential, and seem committed to keep trying to get it right.

The ideal option might be to run the trolley more frequently, thereby making it more reliable, and simultaneously embark on a major marketing campaign similar to what has been done for the Bronx Culture Trolley. "If the perceived reliability factor was addressed so that it was very clear where the trolley started and stopped and where it went, so that people actually began to use it to reach the institutions, then I think it could be very beneficial," says Denise McClean, assistant director for administration at the Wildlife Conservation Society, which runs the Prospect Park Zoo. "Then I think financially it could be worth something because it would get people to and past our door."

It is also worth considering shifting from hourly pickups on weekends to a once-a-month or once-a-week service, along the lines of the Bronx Culture

Trolley. Under this model, each trolley ride would be publicized and linked with a variety of scheduled programs or special events, such as the "Target First Saturdays" at the Brooklyn Museum, which already attract thousands of visitors. The HOB Trolley currently offers extended service on those nights, taking museum visitors to Washington, Vanderbilt, Flatbush and Seventh Avenues. Yet, only a fraction of those who attend First Saturdays even know about the trolley, let alone hop on board. (See "HOB Trolley and Special Events," page 13)

Dionne Mack-Harvin, executive director of the Brooklyn Public Library, says her institution currently doesn't benefit much from the trolley but believes it could be a useful tool to help grow their audience. The central branch regularly features special events, from poetry readings to lectures, and a trolley that picks up visitors from different parts of the borough could add value to the event and bring in users who normally stick with their local branches. "People tend to go to their neighborhood libraries but if we had a program here, they would be more willing to come if there was a vehicle," she says. "People would appreciate that service and it would bring them to central Brooklyn."

Mack-Harvin also suggests that the trolley could be used to build on the popular First Saturday events. "It would be great if that first Saturday was a kickoff and then at the event, we were talking about what you could do on the second, third and fourth Saturdays at the other institutions," she says. "People would understand that at the HOB institutions, there is something happening each weekend." Another possibility is to revise the trolley route to connect HOB institutions with other parts of Brooklyn, such as creative hubs like Williamsburg and Greenpoint or tourist-rich areas like the mouth of the Brooklyn Bridge. The Gray Line New York bus tours of Brooklyn are growing in popularity, and the company had to upgrade its vehicles to handle increased demand.

HOB member institutions are now taking a careful look at how to reinvent and rebrand the trolley. Heart of Brooklyn's staff and board say that they are committed to revamping the trolley, and are working to develop a new and improved trolley system. HOB has secured funding for a new vehicle system, which could take many forms. But before progress can be made, HOB leaders must answer some key questions about the future of their trolley. Chief among them: what is its main goal? Is it to serve as an attraction, to carry families around the park while kids enjoy the ride, or to function as a transportation system that gets more people to each institution? The stakeholders need to make some hard decisions about the best use for this potential asset.

HOB TROLLEY AND SPECIAL EVENTS

This past winter holiday season, tourists and locals alike flocked to central Brooklyn for “Prospect Park in Lights,” a series of temporary lighting displays throughout the park. Hundreds of those visitors hopped onboard the HOB Trolley for a tour. The heated trolley ran three loops each Saturday and Sunday evening; departing from Grand Army Plaza, the trolley took visitors on a thirty-minute-long tour of the park’s unique lighting installations.

The trolley tours were immensely popular, which planners believe was due to the short-term nature of the lights. “It’s interesting what happens when you limit something and make it special,” says Eugene Patron, press director for the Prospect Park Alliance. “With the holiday lights, I had people who would come for the special trolley tour and I’d tell them: ‘This ride is full.’ And they’d say: ‘I missed it last night, so I came back again. Since there are a limited number of tours, I need to ride tonight.’”

HOB planners think the success of these tours demonstrates the trolley’s potential for use in future special events. “I think that something like Prospect Park in Lights is telling us that if it’s properly marketed, people will use it to go do something, whether as an attraction or a component of a larger day,” adds HOB’s Ellen Salpeter.

The trolley is also a great asset for events that HOB organizes through its online “Meetup” group, which cur-

rently boasts more than 350 members. Using the web-based Meetup tool helps HOB develop new audiences and promote upcoming events without spending too much of its limited marketing budget. Members receive emails about the special events that HOB is planning, and can go online to RSVP, post comments and photos, and see who else is attending. Arts consultant Alan S. Brown, who conducted audience analyses for HOB, believes that these kinds of events are critical for developing new audiences and getting information out to a wider group. One of his recommendations for HOB in general is to “explore online social networking as a joint marketing resource.”

In January, more than three dozen Meetup members came to Heart of Brooklyn for a Trolley Ride and Winter Mixer, which promised “after-hour office mingling, trolley riding, and hot cider & mulled wine sipping.” The trolley made two loops through the Prospect Park in Lights display, and the evening was considered a great success. One member commented that “the event was carefully planned and I had a fun time. Even though I am a native Brooklynite I learn[ed] a few new things about Prospect Park and the surrounding area.” The January event is the only one that has used the trolley, but it could fit nicely into future plans. Other recent HOB Meetup events include a happy hour at the Brooklyn Museum, an electric boat ride in Prospect Park and a private tour of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

BROOKLYN CHILDREN’S MUSEUM TROLLEY

The Brooklyn Children’s Museum is the oldest children’s museum in the world and the largest museum geared towards kids in a borough of nearly 2.5 million residents. While it is just over a mile from Prospect Park in the Crown Heights neighborhood, the museum is perceived as cut off from the other institutions and faces different challenges than its HOB counterparts.

The museum is a fifteen-minute walk from the closest subway, and families in the area express frustration at how hard it is to get to the museum, especially with young children in tow. “We’d definitely go to the Children’s Museum more often if it was easier to get to,” said one mother riding the HOB trolley with her two small children. “We live nearby, but we still have to take two buses to get there.”

To improve access, the Children’s Museum ran a trolley from Grand Army Plaza and back for several years. The bright yellow trolley, which connected with the HOB trolley, cost more than \$20,000 a year to

run, and averaged 150 riders per weekend. “The trolley helped to ease the physical ability and comfort of coming to a new neighborhood for some people,” says Children’s Museum President Carol Enseki. But the greatest benefit seems to have gone to Crown Heights residents who used the trolley to get to Grand Army Plaza and back, according to those involved with the trolley. Museum leaders concluded that the high cost and unchanged attendance failed to justify continued investment in the trolley, and discontinued it in 2006.

The museum is slated to double in size as part of a \$43 million expansion, so improving accessibility and awareness is a high priority. A revived trolley could help with this, but would require a significant commitment to marketing the trolley. Alternatively, museum officials and borough leaders should work with the MTA to improve public transit access to the museum, perhaps by extending bus routes that currently stop several blocks short of the museum.

Service Interruptions

Infrequent service doomed the Queens Culture Trolley, but other routes—especially the Queens Jazz Trail—suggest that there is a place for trolleys in the city’s largest borough

There’s no shortage of cultural destinations in Queens, yet attractions like the Louis Armstrong House, the Hall of Science and Flushing Town Hall remain largely unknown by tourists and locals alike. “Anyone in the outer boroughs, we all know how to get to Symphony Space, to Webster Hall, to the Beacon Theatre, to all of the places in Manhattan,” says Jeff Rosenstock, executive director of Queens Theatre in the Park. “But we don’t know how to get to the other boroughs. We have got to break that barrier.”

Getting sightseers into Queens is only the first step, however. Since several of the borough’s attractions are quite a trek from the subway, they struggle to attract individuals and families who aren’t coming by car.

QUEENS CULTURE TROLLEY

To solve these problems, a consortium of the borough’s cultural leaders created the Queens Culture Trolley in May 2004 to better link the institutions in and around Flushing Meadows Corona Park. The trolley’s 90-minute-long loop included stops at five cultural venues in and around Flushing Meadows-Corona Park: the Queens Museum of Art, the New York Hall of Science, the Queens Zoo, Queens Theater in the Park and the Queens Botanical Garden, which is located in nearby Kissena Park. Coordinated by the Queens Museum of

Art, it also made stops at the Louis Armstrong House in Corona, Northern Boulevard’s “restaurant row,” historic Jackson Heights, ethnic shopping districts on 74th Street and Roosevelt Avenue, and hotels near LaGuardia Airport.

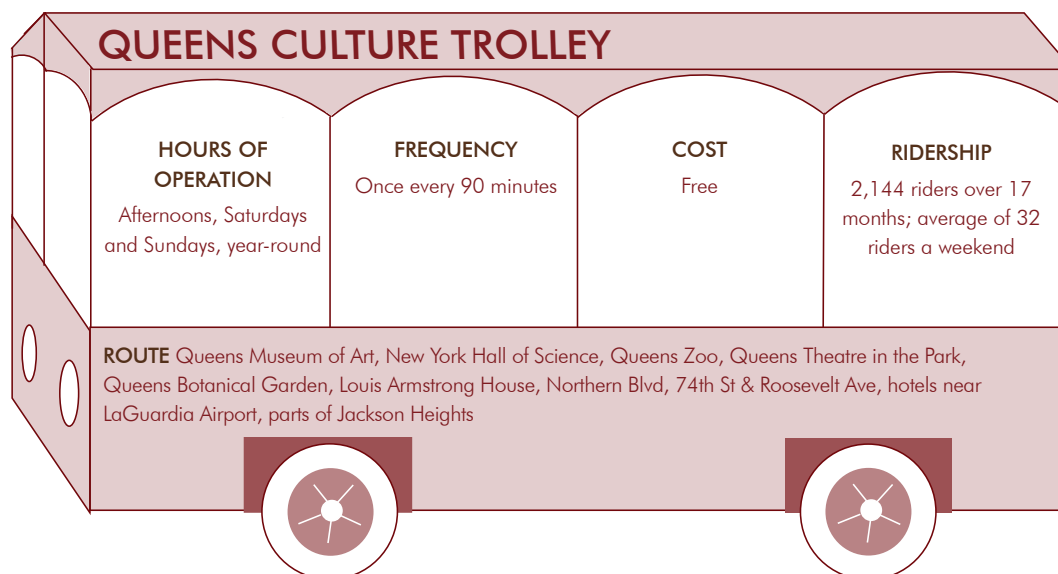
The free trolley debuted to high hopes and a slew of press coverage. But the sponsors realized that very few people were actually riding it and, as has been the case in Brooklyn, most of the institutions felt the trolley had no impact on their attendance. The sponsoring institutions discontinued the trolley in October 2005.

In the project’s 17 months of existence, it drew just 2,144 riders. Capacity was 40 passengers per trip, so with six loops each weekend, it had the potential to transport 240 riders. But average weekend ridership was a mere 32 people, far too few to justify continuing the investment.

The Queens Culture Trolley failed to live up to its promise for several reasons. First, it was woefully infrequent: the sole vehicle made a ninety-minute-long loop, so if a rider missed it by just a couple of minutes, he or she could be stranded in an unfamiliar neighborhood for upwards of an hour. “If it’s going to take longer to get from Point A to Point B waiting for a trolley, people aren’t going to use it,” says Michael C. Savino, marketing consultant for the New York Hall of Science. “It’s like a bus or subway. If the bus only showed up every

hour, you would figure out another way to get there.”

Another problem sponsors quickly discovered was that there are limits to what most visitors want to do in a single visit. “What person would go to both the Hall of Science and the Queens Museum in the same day?” asks Queens Museum Executive Director Tom Finkelpearl.



“It’s not practical to think our audience is going to do that. That’s an eight hour extravaganza.”

Planners realized that many riders viewed the trolley as a tour rather than a means of transportation. “What we found was that the vast majority of people took the subway out to the museum, visited us, then took the trolley to Jackson Heights where they either stopped for some shopping and eating or caught the train,” says David Strauss, director of external affairs for the Queens Museum. “On the other hand, 423 peo-

But they encountered extraordinarily long delays in getting the city’s Parks and Transportation Departments to approve the signage. As a result, the trolley had been running for 16 months before the signs eventually went up. By then, dismal ridership and concerns over cost had put the project’s future into doubt.

The trolley also missed the mark when it came to serving its core audience. Specifically, it failed to offer any benefits for local visitors who could get to the institutions on their own. For example, more than half

While the trolley ride may have introduced first-time visitors to Queens, it didn’t lead to significant spikes in attendance at any of the local attractions on the route. The Louis Armstrong House in Corona was one of the more popular destinations—but just 146 riders took the trolley to visit that site. The number of people who hopped onboard at LaGuardia airport hotels could literally be counted on two hands—just nine riders in the span of a year and a half.

ple got on the trolley at the museum, stayed on for the full route and then got off at the museum upon completion.”

While the trolley ride may have introduced first-time visitors to Queens, it didn’t lead to significant spikes in attendance at any of the local attractions on the route. The Louis Armstrong House in Corona was one of the more popular destinations—but just 146 riders took the trolley to visit that site. The number of people who hopped onboard at LaGuardia Airport hotels could literally be counted on two hands—just nine riders in the span of a year and a half.

While ridership may have been low, the trolley’s price tag was anything but. The Parks Department covered the gas and insurance costs, but the Queens Museum had to pay an annual salary of \$23,000 to the trolley driver, and cover administrative, marketing and design costs. Strauss says that for the two-year period of launching and operating the trolley, costs to the museum neared \$175,000.

Despite the cost, insiders say that inadequate or ineffective marketing efforts were a big factor in the trolley’s demise. Most tourists and area residents simply weren’t aware of the route. “Nobody knew that there was a trolley,” says one person familiar with the program.

Local officials initially had a detailed plan to install signs and decals advertising the trolley at strategic locations, including the seven partnering cultural institutions, in front of hotels and at preexisting bus stops.

of visitors to the Queens Museum drive or walk to the museum. One possible niche might have been to connect with visitors coming via public transit—but with the 90-minute loop, service was far too infrequent to serve that purpose.

“Where there is a need, is to get people back and forth between the subway and the park. You would need four or five trolleys, and it would have to run every 10 to 15 minutes,” Finkelpearl adds. The heads of several Flushing Meadows Corona Park institutions said the trolley could be valuable in that less glamorous role.

Oddly, the Queens Culture Trolley has seen more success in its afterlife than during its formal existence. The trolley is still used for special events throughout the park, and since 1999, the Queens Theatre in the Park—which draws 110,000 visitors annually—has rented the trolley 42 weekends a year to shuttle theatergoers to and from the subway—the very purpose Finkelpearl suggests.

The rationale? “Most of my audience already drives to the park. But the new audiences I am trying to build—which is a diverse constituency and a younger demographic—use public transportation,” says Jeff Rosenstock, the theater’s executive director. “It’s about providing public access, showing that you don’t need a car to get to the theater.” In fact, Rosenstock’s organization is so committed to developing new audiences that they have partnered

with Sovereign Bank to give free tickets to all first-time visitors. Once the trolley shuttles people to the facility, he and his colleagues are confident that they'll be sufficiently bowled over by what they find that they'll come back. Another valuable legacy of the trolley is the long-term partnership it helped foster among institutions in Corona that had rarely collaborated before.

As the park undergoes a strategic planning process with a focus on branding it as a tourist destination, there is some interest in resurrecting the trolley—but only if it has a clear purpose. If its job is just to ferry people from the subway to the institutions, it would need increased frequency and a regular schedule, which would require more vehicles. The trolley could also focus on bringing visitors to local commercial strips, like downtown Flushing.

Another option could be to develop specific trolley tours that highlight the unique sights and heritage of Queens (similar to Flushing Town Hall's Queens Jazz Trail Trolley described below). Given that the trolley's greatest successes have come when it was used for special events, this approach might make sense. The borough's diverse sights mean there is no shortage of potential itineraries—the trolley could bring visitors to ethnic shopping strips on one weekend and offer a tour for World's Fair buffs the next.

FLUSHING TOWN HALL'S QUEENS JAZZ TRAIL TROLLEY

New Orleans may be where jazz was born, but many people don't know that jazz greats from Louis Armstrong to Count Basie have called Queens home. For those who do, one successful trolley is capitalizing on the borough's unique place in the history of jazz.

Among all the city's nonprofit trolleys, the Flushing Town Hall's Queens Jazz Trail Trolley is unique in that it charges money—\$35, to be exact. But the first Saturday of each month, visitors from around the globe happily shell out the cash to take a guided trolley ride through the streets of jazz history. Since 1998, Flushing Town Hall has been using an old-fashioned replica trolley to carry riders along the Queens Jazz Trail, a swath of the borough that was home to a large number of jazz greats. Each month, riders visit the Louis Armstrong House in Corona, and travel through the borough to see the former homes of Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, and other giants of jazz. Ridership fluctuates throughout the year, with tours in the summer often packed. The Jazz Trail does bring in revenue, but the costs of running the trolley are significant: liability insurance costs about \$10,000 each year.

Locals may be put off by the high price tag, but many visitors are more than willing to pay for the

unique opportunity to see the homes of their idols. "If you are a diehard jazz fan and looking for something no one else has, you will want to come visit all those jazz legends where they used to live," says Cathy Hung, deputy director of Flushing Town Hall.

Kate D. Levin, the city's Cultural Affairs Commissioner, highlights the trolley as "one of the signature programs for tourism that's not in Manhattan." But, she adds, riders are mostly out-of-towners: many New Yorkers don't even know about the jazz legends that lived in their backyard. "People come from Germany, from France, from all over the place and go to it, and New Yorkers don't."

In all, about 170 riders took the Flushing Town Hall Trolley in FY 2007. Organizers are certain that number—and their revenues—could be much higher, if they had the budget and staff resources to more aggressively promote the experience. For now, however, the Queens Jazz Trail is as little known as the jazz landmarks it celebrates.

QUEENS ARTLINK

In 2001, when the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was preparing to close up shop for renovations in Midtown Manhattan, they knew some visitors would have a hard time crossing the East River to visit the temporary MoMA site in the Queens neighborhood of Long Island City. To make it easier for them, MoMA created the Queens Artlink shuttles. Modeled on shuttle buses that had run to the neighborhood in the late 1980s and the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum's van service that made trips from Midtown to Long Island City (see page 17), the Artlink shuttles, which ranged from small buses to full-size motor coaches, had two routes that ran on Saturdays and Sundays.

The first one, which organizers referred to as the "Link," picked up visitors in Midtown every hour, brought them to MoMA QNS, the museum's temporary home in a former staple factory, and then made a return trip. At its peak, a constant stream of four vehicles made the half-hour-long trip eight times each day. In this capacity, the shuttle flourished. "Artlink was hugely successful in helping first-time visitors get over that barrier of the water. The numbers definitely bore that out," says Peter Foley, MoMA's director of marketing, who oversaw the shuttle.

The second route, the "Loop," made a circuit within Long Island City and was designed to expose Manhattanites, tourists and other out-of-borough visitors who may have ventured out from MoMA Queens to the many nearby cultural attractions of the area. The shuttle made seven daily circuits between MoMA QNS,

P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, the Noguchi Museum, Socrates Sculpture Park, the American Museum of the Moving Image, SculptureCenter and the Museum for African Art, several of which aren't easily reachable without a car.

The Loop had a lot of promise—walking from one institution to another can prove tough: Socrates Sculpture Park is three miles from P.S.1—but never hit its stride. Ridership was often a fraction of what was seen on the Link: one typical Saturday in December 2002, 234 people rode the Link, but just 34 took the Loop. And some passengers used it only for the purpose of going to Costco, which is located across the street from the Noguchi Museum. Only 18 percent of all riders took the Loop to the other museums.

Average weekly ridership on the two routes increased from 134 in Fiscal Year 2002 to 507 in Fiscal Year 2003, and total annual ridership rose from 5,876 to more than 15,000 during the same period. According to an independent study about Artlink, 31 percent of riders said they would not have come to the participating Queens museums without the shuttle. The same study estimated that MoMA QNS gained 10,000 visitors because of the shuttle.

Half of all Artlink riders were international visitors, primarily from Western Europe and Japan, according to the ridership study. A quarter of visitors bought food or beverages in Queens, 13 percent did some shopping and 10 percent ate at a restaurant. That helped make the case for supporting the project, which wasn't cheap. In 2003, the project's annual budget totaled nearly \$175,000, with hard costs for the vehicles totaling \$130,000 and another \$34,000 allocated for marketing. The bulk of the financial support came from foundations, city and state funding and the local partners.

MoMA contracted with private companies, including Gray Line New York, to run the shuttle, a move that one project official thinks was critical to its success. "It's not in your core business. It's running a business that cultural institutions don't have the business knowledge to do," he says. "You don't know how to schedule a bus, you don't know how to monitor traffic, you don't know how to communicate between the bus driver and your visitors. There are professionals that do that." Terri Osborne, the director of culture and tourism for the Queens Borough President, adds, "I don't think not-for-profit cultural organizations should be in the trolley business. I think we should leave trolleys to trolley people and buses to bus people."

While the Loop struggled, the Link was often full. But after 18 months of service, both were discontinued. Planners knew all along that the barrier to visiting MoMA QNS was largely psychological; the location was well served by public transit and just minutes from Midtown, and a growing number of people became comfortable making the trip to Long Island City on their own.

MoMA is back in Manhattan now, but the impact of its time in Long Island City continues. Just as the Flushing Meadows Corona Park trolley spurred a partnership in Corona, collaboration around the Artlink shuttles helped create the Long Island City Cultural Alliance (LICCA), a nonprofit organization that promotes local institutions in Long Island City much as Heart of Brooklyn does for its Prospect Park sites.

NOGUCHI SHUTTLE

The Noguchi Museum is certainly one of a kind. Set in a former photo engraving plant in Long Island City, the museum showcases an incredible mix of works by sculptor Isamu Noguchi. But the museum shares similar concerns with other cultural institutions in the boroughs: it's not near a subway, has limited name recognition and people are hesitant to visit without a car.

In the past, the museum ran an informal van service from the Asia Society at Park Avenue and 70th Street, to its Long Island City location, and was part of the Queens Artlink Loop. When Artlink ended and Noguchi reopened in 2004 after a renovation, the museum formally established its own weekly shuttle: every Sunday, a shuttle bus makes several half-hour-long trips between the Asia Society in Manhattan and the museum's site in Long Island City. The goal of the shuttle is "to educate and simply eliminate the 'fear factor,'" says Amy Hau, administrative director of the Noguchi Museum. "We often get callers thinking that we are way out on Long Island or crossing the East River is the equivalent of crossing the ocean."

The Noguchi shuttle faces an uncertain future. The ride costs \$5 each way, but the bus can only seat 25 passengers and revenues don't sustain the cost of operations; as ridership has steadily decreased over the past couple years, the gap between income and expenses has widened. Noguchi officials estimate that the current ridership is made up of half international and half domestic tourists. But only a fraction of the museum's visitors use the shuttle. "Of the approximately 30,000 visitors—not including group tours and education workshops—I dare say we have about 3 percent ridership," says Hau.

RUNNING OUT OF GAS

The old-fashioned replica trolleys in operation around the five boroughs have an undeniable charm, but they also guzzle gas, an increasingly expensive problem given today's oil prices. They're also prone to costly breakdowns. Replacing traditional trolleys with hybrid-electric buses or vans that run on alternative fuels could save trolley operators money over the long run and be better for the environment.

The current trolley used by Heart of Brooklyn, which is nine years old and runs on regular gasoline, averages just six miles per gallon in fuel efficiency. The vehicle is also plagued with mechanical problems. On top of \$4,000 in annual maintenance costs, the trolley regularly needs repairs on its air conditioning and heating units. Trolleys in the other boroughs encounter similar problems.

Fortunately, a new generation of trolleys, buses and vans are being manufactured today that get better gas mileage and are more durable. There are some hybrid-electric and biodiesel trolleys on the market today, but hybrid vans or shuttle buses that run on biodiesel, compressed natural gas, propane and hydrogen fuel cells might offer an even more cost-effective and environmentally-friendly option—even if they don't look as quaint as the old-fashioned trolleys.

Several local nonprofit groups are already making use of alternative fuel vans and buses, which get as much as 9 miles per gallon. For instance, the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (BOEDC) recently purchased several hybrid electric shuttle buses to transport workers to

and from the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center.

Alternative fuel vehicles also generally require less maintenance. "Compared to gas-operated trolleys, the repair needs are far less," says Dwayne Jacobs, director of transportation services for the Downtown Alliance, a business organization in Lower Manhattan that recently purchased six shuttle buses retrofitted with diesel particulate filters.

Purchasing an alternative fuel trolley or shuttle bus cost more than similar vehicles that run on gas. Stillman Bradish, president of Molly Trolley, a Maine-based manufacturer, says that their standard front-engine biodiesel trolleys cost approximately \$135,000, versus \$120,000 for gas-engine trolleys. He says that a compressed natural gas (CNG) trolley would run about \$170,000. Meanwhile, an executive at Azure Dynamics Corporation told the Center that its hybrid electric shuttle buses cost roughly \$200,000 each, compared to \$80,000 for a conventional model.

The good news is that the high upfront costs can be reduced over time through lower gas bills and maintenance costs. Trolley planners also may take advantage of several government-run incentive programs that offset the costs of buying alternative fuel vehicles. Under the New York City Private Fleet Alternative-Fuel/Electric Vehicle Program, which is run by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and uses federal funds, businesses and nonprofits can receive grants that cover up to 80 percent of the difference in costs for going hybrid.

Alternate Routes

For new thinking about how to make trolleys work, cultural leaders in New York should look to the success stories in Philadelphia and San Diego

Of the various cities that have given trolleys a try, Philadelphia and San Diego have been among the most successful in integrating trolleys into the tourist experience. Neither provides a perfect parallel to New York: for one thing, both have just one major cultural corridor, while the cultural institutions in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island are often competing with higher-profile attractions in Manhattan. But both the Philadelphia Phlash and San Diego's Balboa Park Tram offer lessons about what makes a trolley system effective, popular and worthwhile.

Both have invested a great deal of time and money in designing, marketing and implementing their own trolley systems. Philadelphia's experience is particu-

larly relevant, as it shows that planners must be flexible and willing to revise or even drastically change a route if things aren't working.

PHILADELPHIA PHLASH

For the last decade, visitors to the city of Brotherly Love have been hopping on and off the Philadelphia Phlash to see all that Philly has to offer. Created in the late 1990s by then-mayor Edward G. Rendell, the trolleys have been wildly successful, carrying more than 161,000 riders in 2006.

The five-vehicle fleet of trolleys—all painted a distinctive bright purple—shuttles visitor around Philadelphia during prime tourist season, from Memorial Day

to Labor Day. Seven days a week, the Phlash's half-hour-long loop connects the city's cultural and historic districts, making 20 stops at places like Penn's Landing, Independence Hall and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with new trolleys arriving every eight to twelve minutes. In the past, the Phlash ran for nine months each year, but was scaled back to three in 2007.

Unlike most of New York City's cultural trolleys, the Phlash isn't free—riders pay \$1 for a single trip and \$4 for an all-day individual pass. Discounted all-day passes for families are also available, and small children and senior citizens ride for free.

With Mayor Rendell leading the charge, planners devoted a great deal of time and money in branding the Phlash. They worked with a design firm on everything from choosing the bold purple color—which has resulted in them sometimes being dubbed 'the Barney buses'—to choosing their logo, a wheel with wings. "We had a vision of creating something that was physically distinctive in the landscape from other modes of transport but was not a tourist tour," says Denise L. Goren, the city's former deputy mayor for transportation. The route design and size of the fleet were carefully chosen as well. "We wanted to come up with some concept that linked downtown's major destination areas, was a continuous loop, had an entire circuit that stayed within an hour and would be frequent enough that you didn't need a schedule," Goren adds.

As the weather heats up, so does the Phlash's ridership. In 2006, monthly ridership ranged from 14,000 riders in March to more than 29,000 in July, the Phlash's busiest month, with an average monthly ridership of 19,000 over nine months of operation. The majority of riders buy single ride passes, though more than 1,000 people purchased an all-day

pass each month last year. On average, 415 paying riders board the Phlash each day. In 2002, when it ran for nine months rather than the current three-plus, the Phlash carried more than 221,000 riders.

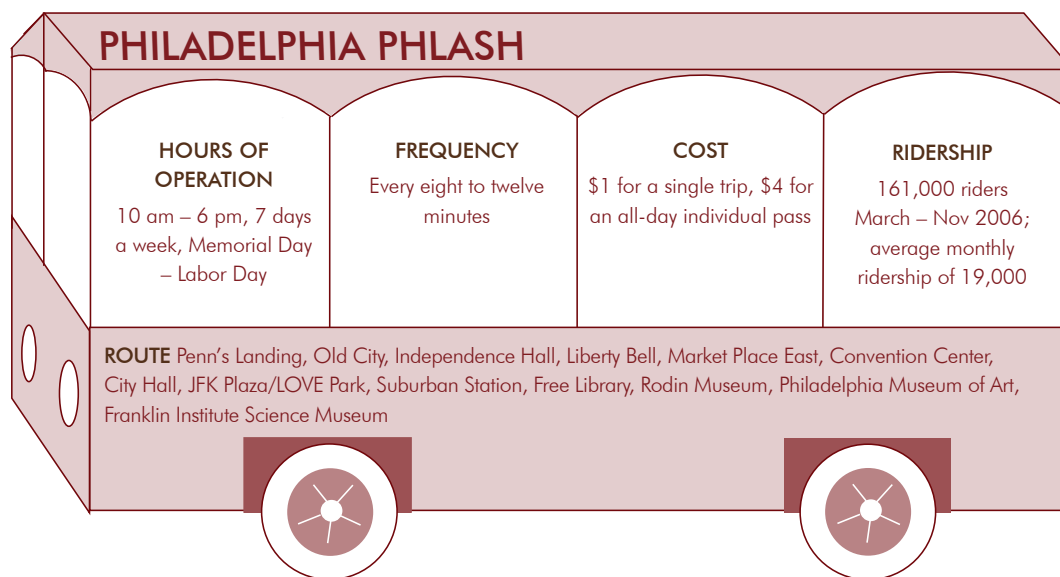
And more riders means more revenue: the Phlash brought in nearly \$37,000 last July, and another \$28,000 in August. Over the Phlash's nine months of operation in 2006, it carried more than 161,000 riders and collected nearly \$200,000 in revenue. The Phlash also generates revenue from advertising on the interior and exterior of the vehicles, mainly for events like the Philadelphia Flower Show. The Phlash is widely promoted to tourists throughout the city; riders can buy tickets online and at local hotels as well as onboard. The institutions on the route do their share to promote it as well.

Despite its successes, the Phlash has gone through some major growing pains. The original buses broke down regularly and passengers complained about noxious diesel fumes. But the most challenging problem was dwindling city support for the Phlash.

The Phlash was long seen as Rendell's pet project, and the millions of dollars in city funding attested to the then-mayor's commitment. "This simply was a big priority in terms of economic development and jobs and wanting to reinforce that the city was more than just seeing the Liberty Bell," says Goren.

But Rendell's successor, Mayor John F. Street, eliminated city funding for the fleet in 2003. The nonprofit Central Philadelphia Transportation Management Association (CPTMA) took over the project. They quickly scrambled to keep the Phlash running, and were able to secure \$2.5 million, most of which came from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program. Rendell, who became governor of Pennsylvania in 2003, also provided some state tourism funds.

Armed with new funding, Phlash project managers made some major changes. Rather than re-up with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), which had run the Phlash since 1994, CPTMA contracted with TrolleyWorks, a private



company that operates the fleet for half the price SEPTA charged. TrolleyWorks replaced the troublesome buses with a set of historic-looking trolleys that were painted the Phlash's signature purple. Phlash planners also scaled back the original loop, which took more than an hour to wind its way through the city. "The original route was so long and circuitous," says Nancy Goldenberg, vice president of planning for the Center City District, which runs the CPTMA. "It needs to be a very simple route where tourists can get from destination A to destination B easily and quickly. So now it runs from Penn's Landing to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and back."

Phlash is now facing an uncertain future: federal and state funding is about to run out, and planners have already scaled back the months that the Phlash is in service this year. Many of the cultural institutions along its route are concerned about losing the Phlash and have called not just for restoration of the existing service but expansion, with new routes connecting downtown Philadelphia to the Philadelphia Zoo, Independence Hall and other attractions. "The Phlash has been hugely positive in terms of branding and tourism," says Goldenberg. "For a city the size of Philadelphia, filled with historic sites, Independence National Historical Park, and world renowned cultural institutions, a recognizable tourist loop is extremely useful. We've branded Phlash as a bright purple historic trolley, and tourists love it. I think it's a very positive thing for Philadelphia."

SAN DIEGO BALBOA PARK TRAM

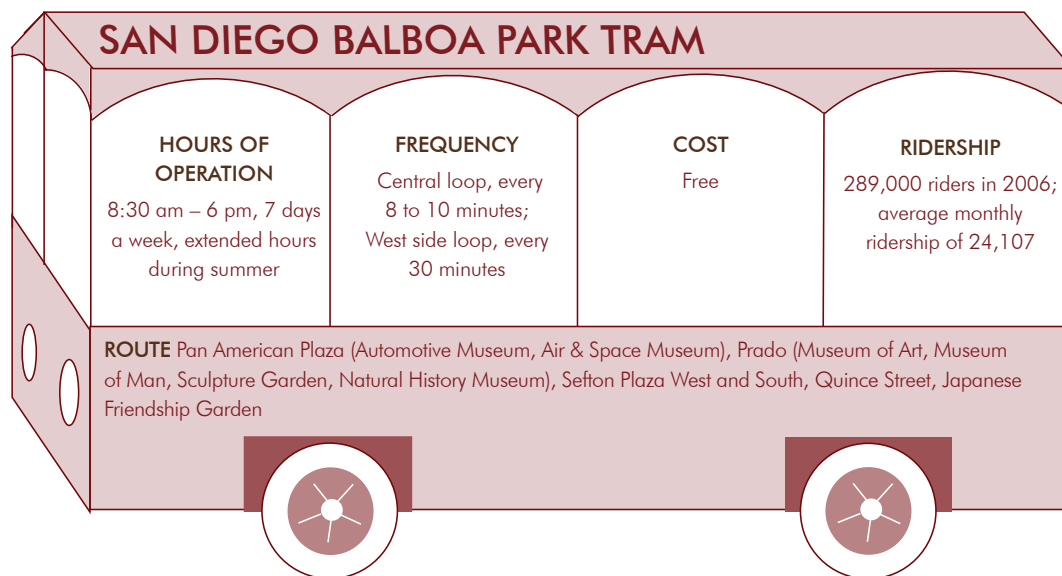
San Diego's Balboa Park is the largest urban cultural park in the country, so it's not surprising that it boasts an extensive trolley system to move visitors around its 1,200 acres. Since 1999, the free trams—the park's term for the vehicles, though they are virtually identical to the replica trolleys discussed throughout this report—have been picking up riders every eight to ten minutes, seven days a week.

Park leaders created the tram to solve an enviable problem: the park's core attractions draw more visitors than there are easily accessible parking spaces. Balboa Park has several satellite parking lots, but the challenge was bringing users from those more distant areas into the park's 800-acre core, which is home to most of its fifteen museums and the San Diego Zoo. From those challenges, the Balboa Park Tram was born.

Depending on demand, two or three of the red, propane-powered trams run each day, on two separate loops. The loop in the central area of the park is ten minutes long, with five stops. The longer loop, on the park's west side, takes twenty minutes and runs twice an hour. Both loops feature a tour given by tram drivers. In 2006, more than 289,000 riders took the tram, with average monthly ridership topping 24,000. July was the busiest month, with more than 37,000 riders.

Old Town Trolleys, a private company hired by the park to run the trams, charges about \$375,000 each year. These are the actual costs incurred: rather than charging an operating fee, Old Town Trolleys bargained for an exclusive agreement to include Balboa Park in their advertising package and sell tickets inside the park for their commercial trolley tours. San Diego taxpayers foot the bill through the city's Transient Occupancy Tax, a type of hotel and room tax.

The tram is heavily promoted throughout the park and beyond. Tram stops are well marked, the visitors center advertises the service and Balboa Park Tram maps are distributed to local hotels.



Recommendations

For trolleys in New York City to capitalize on their initial promise and enduring potential, probably the single most important task for trolley organizers is to determine what exactly they hope to gain by running the service. If the priority is promotion, the focus should be on how to raise awareness of both the trolleys and the sites they serve. If planners feel their institutions are sufficiently well known and the real challenge is to get visitors from Point A to Point B, the emphasis should be on ensuring frequency and quality of service. Below, we offer more specific suggestions for both these avenues.

Trolleys must be aggressively marketed in a variety of venues. Partner institutions should promote the trolleys heavily at their physical locations, on their websites, in local media and throughout the MTA system. They must do more to get on the radar of tour operators, international tour companies and hotel concierges, particularly in Manhattan. For context, Gray Line—the New York affiliate of a for-profit tourism attraction serving 125 worldwide destinations—prints 3 million brochures about its New York tours each year, and distributes them all around the world. Trolleys could also forge partnerships with taxis, car services and the city’s fleet of Zipcars, as well as buy advertising on websites tourists frequent like HopStop and MapQuest. This won’t be cheap for nonprofits—but funders must recognize that a commitment to marketing, both in terms of hard costs and staff time, requires additional funding for the investment that is needed to really get the word out.

The trolleys have to set themselves apart and serve as mobile advertising. Wrapping or painting the vehicles, as with the purple conveyances of the Philadelphia Phlash, creates a “visual shorthand” that helps potential riders distinguish the trolleys from commuter vans or airport shuttles. A wrapped exterior is also a great opportunity to highlight the sponsoring institutions, so even if people aren’t onboard the trolley, they see and feel its presence in the community and the institutions feel more ownership of the project. More can be done as well to generate revenue by selling advertising on the vehicles’ interiors.

Better capitalize on existing audiences. In Brooklyn, thousands of people flock to the monthly “First Saturdays” at the Brooklyn Museum, and while the HOB trolley does run on those nights, ridership has been

low and many visitors don’t know about the service. If awareness of the service increases, the trolley could help connect families with the Prospect Park Zoo or Children’s Museum before the event, or take visitors to local restaurants and bars afterwards. Planners could take this concept a step further, borrowing from the Bronx Council on the Arts model to develop regular programming that links to the other institutions and local commercial strips, so visitors would come to central Brooklyn and ride the trolley on the second, third and fourth Saturdays, as well.

Do more to engage young people, local residents and tourists. This could include shuttling people from different parts of the city or targeting events to specific audiences: families, seniors, shoppers, college students, and so on. In Brooklyn, several HOB institutions told us it would be more worthwhile to use the trolley to bring in new users from neighborhoods like Red Hook, Bay Ridge and Canarsie rather than give existing users an alternative mode of transportation. As far as tourists, the trolleys could increase their pickups in Manhattan, as the for-profit companies do, or position themselves at high-density tourist sites in the boroughs, like Shea Stadium or the mouth of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Market the trolleys as a kid-friendly attraction. Some of the trolleys’ biggest fans are children, many of whom simply enjoy riding the old-fashioned vehicles. Yet, few of the city’s trolleys are marketed aggressively to parents with young children. It makes sense to ramp up promotion of the trolleys as a kid-friendly attraction in and of itself, like a carousel or zoo. Officials could target their marketing to parents by advertising in magazines like *Time Out New York Kids* and *New York*.

Use the trolleys to develop guided itineraries around New York’s unique sights. Trolleys could tap into specific elements of New York’s history and local flavor by offering tailored trips—everything from giving World’s Fair buffs a tour of the fair grounds to bringing hipsters to Brooklyn’s up-and-coming galleries, stopping at local shops, restaurants and bars along the way.

Expanding trolley routes to include restaurants, shops and other local attractions can keep visitors in an area for longer without expecting them to spend a full day holed up in museums. Planners need to think on a borough-wide scale about the loops that the trol-

leys should be making—what itineraries would be of interest to locals and visitors? How many vehicles would be needed to conduct a regular, reliable loop? businesses and attractions would make a good fit?

NYC & Co and the state’s tourism agency should do much more to promote the trolleys. NYC & Co. has long been chided for catering to the interests of Manhattan hotel owners, but its recent restructuring has many cultural leaders we spoke with hopeful for a renewed focus on the boroughs. Indeed, the boroughs represent a major selling point for the millions of tourists expected to visit New York in the coming years—especially those who are here for a return visit and have already seen all the major Manhattan sights.

If the trolley’s primary purpose is transportation, frequency and reliability are paramount. The routes must be carefully crafted, with multiple vehicles run-

ning short, regular loops. Service must be frequent and reliable—one late trolley can turn a rider off for good.

Investigate hybrid vehicles and wrapped buses that run on natural gas. Not only do they help the environment, they’re cheaper and less prone to breakdowns. There also are many more vendors that offer the vehicles, and they seem like a natural fit in a city that has made environmental sustainability a priority.

Consider contracting out with private companies to run the trolleys. Running a trolley—let alone a fleet of them—is challenging and time-consuming, and the learning curve is steep. Just as cities like San Diego and Philadelphia have forged partnerships with for-profit companies, New York’s cultural leaders should consider contracting out with companies like Gray Line New York, which has a fleet of trolleys, mini-coaches and vans, and already runs popular tours to Brooklyn.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bronx Council on the Arts: www.bronxarts.org

Bronx Tourism Council: www.ilovethebronx.org

Brooklyn Children’s Museum: www.brooklynkids.org

Brooklyn Tourism: www.visitbrooklyn.org

City Island Seaside Trolley: www.cityislandchamber.org/bronx_trolley.htm

Discover Queens: www.discoverqueens.info

Flushing Meadows Corona Park: www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/vt_flushing_meadows/vt_flushing_meadows_park.html

Flushing Town Hall’s Queens Jazz Trail: www.flushingtownhall.org

Gray Line New York: www.coachusa.com/newyorksightseeing/

Heart of Brooklyn: www.heartofbrooklyn.org

Heart of Brooklyn Trolley: www.heartofbrooklyn.org/visit/getting_around.html#trolley_schedule

Long Island City Cultural Alliance: www.licarts.org

MoreNYC: www.morenyc.info

New York State Tourism: www.iloveny.com

Noguchi Shuttle: www.noguchi.org/directions.html

NYC & Company: www.nycvisit.com

Philadelphia Phlash: www.gophila.com/C/Tours_and_Transportation/401/U/Phlash/1303.html

Prospect Park: www.prospectpark.org

Queens Artlink: www.moma.org/qal

Queens Museum: www.queensmuseum.org

Queens Theatre in the Park: www.queenstheatre.org/directions.html

San Diego Balboa Park Tram: www.balboapark.org/maps/tram.php