

## How a revitalized transit hub can strengthen East Harlem

By PEGGY SHEPARD and ADRIANO ESPAILLAT  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | NOV 24, 2021 AT 5:00 AM



View of 125th St. in East Harlem. (Google Maps)

Infrastructure projects can help transform communities, providing jobs and fueling the local economy. Take, for example, the Moynihan Train Hall in Midtown, which connects Amtrak, Long Island Rail Road, NJ Transit and the subway into an attractive, highly functional destination that's brought new life to the neighborhood.

As New York continues to rebuild — working towards economic recovery and addressing the

inequities faced by communities of color that were exacerbated during the pandemic — investing in transit improvements would be an ideal way to stimulate economic growth and opportunity for the New Yorkers hit hardest by COVID-19. East Harlem is an underserved community that would benefit greatly from such an investment, especially one that includes community-oriented solutions as well as a more macro lens on the needs of both the city and the state.

### Why East Harlem?

Home to one of Metro-North's busiest stations, the Lexington Ave. line, and the future terminus of the Second Ave. subway, the neighborhood finds itself caught between three potentially cataclysmic forces: disinvestment, climate change and gentrification. The community suffers from public and private disinvestment, gentrification pressures in housing, heat inequities, flooding from heavy rains and storm surge and a crisis of homelessness and addiction along E. 125th St. Investing in a transit hub that connects the rail line with the new and existing subway lines and bus routes — including routes to LaGuardia Airport and water transportation in the Hudson River — could serve as a catalyst for improving the local economy and small business development while addressing these environmental and social issues.

The federal government is looking to make these types of investments with the recently enacted [federal infrastructure package](#) and President Biden's [Justice40 Initiative](#), which is focused on expanding environmental justice and economic opportunity for disadvantaged communities, and through other funding streams like the Capital Investment Grants, and the federal New Starts Program — a critical source of funding for projects like the Second Ave. subway Phase II Extension project. While these efforts represent important changes in urban funding priorities after decades of redlining and other forms of disinvestment, we need to recognize this unique opportunity to create a transit hub in East Harlem that transforms the long-neglected E. 125th St. corridor into a more environmentally and economically sustainable area that is strong enough to face the challenges of climate change and gentrification.

There is also strong political will to support such investments. WE ACT for Environmental Justice brought together more than 40 East Harlem-based community organizations, elected officials, and city and state agencies to develop the [East 125th St. Community Visioning Action Plan](#). The plan offers a roadmap to transform East Harlem's under-resourced 125th St. corridor into an economic hub and cultural destination on par with the thriving Central and West Harlem portions of the thoroughfare.

We support New York State, through the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's, consideration of the recent approval of federal funding for [the second phase of the Second Ave. subway extension](#) project and encourage them to continue to view this infrastructure improvement as an ideal opportunity to invest in an East 125th transit hub. Connecting the future Second Ave. subway extension with the E. 125th St. Lexington Ave. subway and Metro-North stations would create an accessible and attractive destination that serves both the community and commuters. Successfully expanding services and reliable transportation to this region will support the livelihood of over 100,000 East Harlem residents who currently experience barriers to job opportunities, educational advancement, and access to hospitals and medical care due to lack of public transportation.

Additionally, New York City — through its Department of Transportation and other agencies — can create an inviting and resilient streetscape along the corridor to reduce the urban heat island effect, help mitigate flooding and ease both pedestrian and vehicular congestion.

Now is the time to make these investments, addressing the economic challenges created by the pandemic as well as the environmental challenges fueled by climate change.

*[Shepard](#) is co-founder and executive director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice. Espaillat represents Harlem, East Harlem and other neighborhoods in the U.S. House.*