



**Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO**

**On Infrastructure and Emergency Preparedness**

**THE METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE**

**Before the Infrastructure Task Force's First Public Forum**

*City Hall, Monday, February 15, 2008 at 10:00 AM*

Good afternoon. My name is Roland Lewis and I am President of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, a coalition of 323 groups working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, play, transit and education.

I'd like to thank the Committees and especially Chairman Garodnick and Chairwoman James for bringing us all here to discuss plans for providing necessary infrastructure to keep pace with development on the waterfront.

From the levees in New Orleans to the bridge collapse in Minneapolis, we have all seen that the state of our infrastructure is literally a matter of life and death. As we in New York City live on three islands and one peninsula all connected by a web of tunnels and bridges, our infrastructure is of particular concern for New Yorkers. The infrastructure

needs of over 500 miles of our waterfront should be of particular concern to the politicians and policy makers of our city. MWA is currently working with nearly 200 waterfront experts from civic organizations, government, academia and others groups to develop a *Waterfront Action Agenda*, which will suggest solutions for a better waterfront on a variety of issues.

## 1. GOVERNANCE ISSUES

A generation ago, one massive city agency, the Department of Ports and Terminals was in charge of the maintenance of the docks and bulkheads of much of our shore. Tasked with insuring that shipping and commerce carry on in our port, the agency was well funded and staffed by thousands of professionals including design and maintenance employees whose sole responsibility was making sure the specialized infrastructure of the waterfront was maintained. This is no longer the case. Ports and Terminals exist no more. And the responsibility of maintenance and control of what is built on our shores has been Balkanized into more than a dozen agencies. The net result is that maintenance of waterfront infrastructure has too often slipped and critical parts of our shoreline infrastructure – especially piers and bulkheads – have fallen into disrepair. Also the agency that builds or repairs critical shorefront facilities, in most cases the City’s Economic Development Corporation, is not the end user of these facilities. There are twelve agencies that own or manage waterfront facilities. This arrangement too often leads to miscommunication and poor design and maintenance.

## 2. GLOBAL WARMING AND WEATHER EVENTS

Global warming is an environmental fact of our planet's life and every portion of our city's infrastructure must be adjusted and readied for the rising tide. From steam pipes to subway tunnels to electrical transformers to ferry terminals, major infrastructure will need to be examined and possibly adjusted to update. At a minimum, we should measure carefully the rise in water level throughout the Hudson Raritan Estuary. Finally, New York City is the third most vulnerable major American city to hurricane threats. A warning and evacuation system is a critical part of our emergency plan to prepare for this certain environmental calamity.

### 3. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

One of the early recommendations coming from our Waterfront Works Task Force is to ask the City of New York, the State of New York, and the State of New Jersey to create a passenger and freight ferry master plan and implementation strategy, both to reduce congestion in the near term and to ensure that we have the tools we need to use the waterways to meet our mobility needs should disaster strike again.

MWA's *Waterfront Action Agenda* mentioned above gives special emphasis to emergency access and egress infrastructure. As this waterfront is the eastern edge of the largest Central Business District in the nation, the redevelopment of this stretch of waterfront must consider and accommodate future high volumes of passengers and commuters as well as a contingency plan to move goods, and therefore that means the physical capability for a wide variety of vessels to be able to dock.

#### 4. THE WATER IS ALREADY THERE

The good news on the waterfront infrastructure front is that the most critical part of the infrastructure, the water, is already there. The waterways that define the New York - New Jersey metro area are largely untapped transportation resources. Train platforms in Penn Station and the subway tunnels along Manhattan's East Side are completely full at rush hour and most of our river crossings and highways are chronically congested. Still, our waterways are virtually empty compared to these other crowded modes. As “blue avenues,” the potential highways of water that can enhance our mass transit system are particularly attractive because they are *already paid for*, provided for us by nature, and so don't require costly construction to dig tunnels, lay tracks or build bridges.

MWA believes that a ferry ride to work should be as affordable as a subway or bus ride, and the ferries should and can be seamlessly integrated into the region's mass transit system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.