

5.15 AESTHETIC RESOURCES

5.15.1 Introduction

This section assesses the potential visual impacts of the proposed South Ferry Terminal Project in the visual context and character of the southern tip of Lower Manhattan. As discussed in Chapter 1, the terminal facilities would be almost entirely below ground with the exception of three surface entry/exit features, and ventilation facilities in Peter Minuit Plaza and Battery Place.

5.15.2 Existing Conditions

5.15.2.1 Visual Quality of Project Corridor

The project corridor begins just north of the Battery Place/Greenwich Street intersection, extends southeast into the eastern edge of Battery Park, and concludes at Peter Minuit Plaza. Following is a description of the existing visual conditions in these areas.

Battery Place/Greenwich Street Intersection

The Battery Place/Greenwich Street intersection is a T-intersection on the north side of Battery Place. Visual features at this intersection include the International Mercantile Marine Building on the northeast corner at One Broadway and the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel blower house on the northwest corner. Battery Place is a major thoroughfare for local, express, and tourist buses, many of which turn north from Battery Place to Greenwich Street for their route through this area of Lower Manhattan. Within Battery Place in front of One Broadway and near the intersection with State Street are two low level traffic islands consisting of a raised paved area and curb. Both the Battery Place/Greenwich Street and Battery Place/State Street intersections are traffic-controlled with signals.

Battery Park

The northern portion of the project corridor would enter Battery Park near its northeast corner. This area contains a wide sidewalk with benches, and a paved area with a flagpole with a commemorative base at center. Just south of the flagpole is the pedestrian path known as Eisenhower Mall, which contains a landscaped area housing a temporary memorial to the 9/11 victims and the damaged WTC “Sphere” sculpture. The historic IRT Control House, which serves as an entrance to MTA/NYCT’s 4 5 Bowling Green subway station, lies at the northeastern edge of the park along State Street.

South of the Sphere sculpture, within the project limits, is a large, flat grassy area interspersed with trees; this area is fenced off from public use by a low-level black iron fence. The trees comprise a mature mix of several different species including London Plane tree, oaks, elms, and maples. Pedestrian walkways in this portion of the park travel in a primarily north-south direction along and parallel to State Street and north-southwest towards a World War II Memorial near New York Harbor. Benches line the pedestrian

walkways. The middle walkway parallel to State Street leads to a children's playground south of the southernmost portion of the project corridor. The playground contains picnic tables, swings, a slide, and other playground equipment for children.

As described in Section 5.3: Public Open Space, the Battery Conservancy has prepared a new plan for Battery Park. According to the Battery Park Master Plan, the majority of the existing tree-canopied area within the project corridor would be allocated as "The Lawn" and "The Town Green." The Lawn would be located in the southeastern portion of the project site and the Town Green would be located in the northwest. The existing linear Eisenhower Mall would become the Eisenhower Oval and encircle the Town Green. Creation of the Town Green would require the removal of trees. The north and east edges of the park would feature a broad sidewalk and new park entrance. Elements of the plan are implemented at the park as the Conservancy raises funds to accomplish them, and as other projects that affect the park contribute to the improvements. A new bike path, sponsored by NYCDOT, would run along the northern edge of the park at Battery Place, cut across the northeast corner of the park, and then run south along the eastern edge of the park at State Street.

State Street and Peter Minuit Plaza

The project corridor exits the eastern edge of Battery Park where the north-south trending portion of State Street curves to become the east-west trending portion of State Street. This eastern portion of Battery Park also contains existing lawn and mature trees, along with a black iron fence and sidewalk at the park's edge. The Battery Park Cannon is located just south of where the project corridor would exit the park. An existing vent grate for the 4 5 subway is also located in the project corridor in this vicinity.

The project corridor terminates at Peter Minuit Plaza, which currently serves as a construction staging area for the Whitehall Ferry Terminal reconstruction project. As such, its visual character is currently one of a construction zone, including construction vehicles and materials, temporary trailers, portable toilets, and unpaved surfaces. Three London Plane trees in the Plaza are being protected from the construction activities, as is the Jewish Tercentenary Flagpole.

According to the Whitehall Ferry Terminal EA and 4(f) Statement (FTA 1999), Peter Minuit Plaza will be reconfigured into a 1.3-acre public open space with a stairway connection to the N R Whitehall Street subway station. The plaza design consists of an expanse of granite and asphalt unit pavers in the pattern of a radiating grid which would connect the northeast and northwest corners of the Plaza to the Ferry Terminal entrances. Two asymmetrical canopies will be located along the adjacent streets to shelter taxicab and subway passengers on the east and bus passengers on the west. Taxicab passenger pick-up and discharge, which formerly occurred along Whitehall and South Streets, will occur at a dedicated passenger drop-off area along the west curb of Whitehall Street. The northern portion of the Plaza would be available for exhibits, outdoor meetings, performances, and other community uses. Figure 34 shows the conceptual design of the reconfigured Plaza.

The Peter Minit Plaza reconstruction, fronting the Whitehall Ferry Terminal, will create a new visual amenity at one of Lower Manhattan's most intensely used transportation nodes and tourist destinations. The Plaza design is intended to ease passenger circulation among the Ferry Terminal, the transit system, and the Financial District street network. The open space is also intended to enhance the unique character of the Lower Manhattan streetscape by recreating elements of its historic layout. For example, State Street, which in the 18th century demarcated the Manhattan shoreline, would recover much of its curvilinear integrity with the elimination of its wide southbound extension to South Street, and thus will provide a more appropriate setting for the historic James Watson House at 7 State Street on the north side of that street.

The new mapped street within the Plaza, to be called Peter Minit Place, will consist of two elements: a new bus turnaround loop within the Plaza, and the existing street along the west side of the Plaza. Bus passenger loading and unloading, turnaround, and layover will occur in the new loop area in the western portion of the Plaza just east of the ferry vehicle queuing lane. The portion of Peter Minit Place along the west side of the Plaza would function similarly to the existing street in that location, containing the one-way NYCDPR and U.S. Coast Guard access road, and the ferry vehicle queuing lane. Peter Minit Plaza will be reconfigured as part of the Whitehall Ferry Terminal reconstruction, after the South Ferry Terminal (which will be built underneath the Plaza) is constructed.

5.15.2.2 Visual Quality of Study Area

Because the South Ferry Terminal Project will be located underground, with only the three entry/ exit points and ventilation facilities punctuating the surface, the study area for visual resource purposes is defined as the area around the project corridor that may be affected by project construction activities. The permanent aboveground facilities will be located within the construction corridor. Figure 35 shows visual resources study area. Figures 15a and 15b in Section 5.2: Land Use and Zoning include photographs showing the existing visual quality of the project corridor and study area.

As the largest park in the vicinity, Battery Park is a tourist focal point within the project study area. The park is surrounded by the financial district to the north and east, the southern part of Battery Park City to the northwest, and the Whitehall Ferry Terminal and New York Harbor to the south. Skyscrapers, which characterize the financial district, range in style from 1890s Queen Anne and Italianate structures and 1930s art deco buildings to modern buildings that have been built on the original 17th century New Amsterdam street pattern. Interspersed among the skyscrapers, smaller 19th century buildings still remain intact, particularly along Beaver Street, Whitehall Street, and Stone Street.

Views of New York Harbor, which include the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, are a key feature of Battery Park. The open space and low structures of Battery Park provide a visual contrast to the tall, rectilinear buildings that typify Lower Manhattan. In addition, the greenery of the park provides a break in the ubiquitous neutrals of concrete, steel, and asphalt that characterize the area.

The western portion of Battery Park contains several dominant features: Castle Clinton, Pier A, and commemorative statues. Castle Clinton is a round, brown brick structure, originally constructed between 1801 and 1811 approximately 200 feet offshore of Manhattan. The land between Castle Clinton and the island was eventually filled in and became part of Battery Park. Pier A, located north of Castle Clinton, is a Victorian pier completed in 1886. The pier is currently closed for renovation. Adjacent to Pier A, a temporary white tent-like pier has been erected for commuters using the ferry to/from New Jersey. This structure obscures views from portions of Battery Park to the Hudson River, New York Harbor, and New Jersey. Beyond Pier A to the north are Robert F. Wagner Jr. Park, the Battery Park City Esplanade, and the Hudson River. The Esplanade provides views of New York Harbor; it features well-lit walkways, benches, railings, lawn areas, and sculptures.

State Street is a four-lane street that borders the east side of the project corridor. The U.S. Custom House is located at the northeast corner of Battery Place and State Street. This building is a New York City Landmark constructed in 1907 in the Beaux-Arts design. South of the Custom House, there are large-scale, modern skyscrapers along State Street. At the foot of State Street, the James Watson House remains as a remnant of early New York history. The four-story brick house was erected in the early 19th century.

South of the project corridor along the waterfront are the U.S. Coast Guard building and American Park Restaurant. The U.S. Coast Guard building is a rectangular, three-story building built in the 1950s, lacking a style or remarkable features. American Park Restaurant is a two-story building with New York Harbor views. Also in this vicinity are a park restroom and staff building, as well as a ventilation structure for the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel.

Modern, rectilinear skyscrapers characterize the area north of the project site. The Battery Park Underpass tunnel emerges from below ground east of Peter Minuit Plaza into South Street.

5.15.3 Potential Environmental Impacts

5.15.3.1 Analysis Year 2005/2006 (Construction)

No Build Condition

Under the No Build Condition, the South Ferry Terminal Project would not be constructed. The No Build Condition assumes that the visual character of the existing station would not change except for routine maintenance and repairs that would not alter the visual character of the existing station.

A number of other projects in the study area are expected to have begun or be completed by 2005/2006. It is anticipated that Battery Park would continue to undergo visual changes as the Battery Park Master Plan is implemented, and Castle Clinton could conceivably be under renovation by this time. Peter Minuit Plaza would be reconstructed

as described previously in this section. The Battery Place component of the Route 9A improvement project would likely be under construction

Proposed Action

Construction of the South Ferry Terminal Project in 2005/2006 would result in localized visual impacts including sidewalk bridging, drilling rigs, cranes, earth moving equipment, portable sanitary facilities, construction field office, perimeter barriers and staging. These visual impacts would be temporary, as streets and sidewalks would be returned to their original state following the completion of construction.

Approximately 50 trees in Battery Park would be potentially impacted from construction of the proposed approach tunnels; that is, trees in or very near the construction zone would either be removed, removed and relocated within the park, or saved in place, as prudent and feasible. Prior to construction, the disposition of each tree would be determined through a tree survey by a landscape architect or arborist, in collaboration with NYCDPR and the Battery Conservancy under an agreement between NYCDPR and MTA/NYCT. Two of the three London Plane trees in Peter Minuit Plaza would also be removed during construction of the South Ferry Terminal. According to discussions between MTA/NYCT and NYCDPR, it would not be prudent and feasible to save them in place or to relocate them.

5.15.3.2 Analysis Year 2008 (Initial Operation)

No Build Condition

Under the No Build Condition, the South Ferry Terminal Project would not be constructed. The No Build Condition assumes that the visual character of the existing station would not change except for routine maintenance and repairs that would not alter the visual character of the existing station. The surface entry/exit stairwells and vent structure would not be built in Peter Minuit Plaza, a stairwell would not be built in the State Street sidewalk adjacent to Battery Park, and the vent grate would not be constructed near the intersection of Battery Place and State Street.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would result in five permanent aboveground structures. Figures 22 and 23 in Section 5.3 Public Open Space show the location of these permanent structures. They include:

- Two surface entry/exit points and a vent structure in Peter Minuit Plaza;
- One surface entry/exit point in the sidewalk between State Street and the eastern edge of Battery Park; and
- One surface vent grate in a reconstructed traffic island in Battery Place near the intersection with State Street.

The remainder of the Proposed Action would be entirely underground and is not expected affect the visual or aesthetic resources of the project corridor and study area.

Figure 36 shows a schematic rendering of what the potential entrance to the South Ferry Terminal nearest to the Whitehall Ferry Building might appear like. The rendering shows the entrance feature in relation to the Ferry Building as it is anticipated to appear once construction is complete. The subway entrance would connect to the canopy that would be constructed between the subway terminal and the Ferry Building as part of the Ferry Building reconstruction project. The stairs and escalator would be below grade. The design of the above grade entry feature is intended to blend with the design of the reconstructed Whitehall Ferry Building.

The other two surface entry/exit features would be designed similar to standard subway entrances found throughout the City, where the stairwell opening is surrounded with a painted steel fence around three sides of the opening. Globe lamp poles would indicate the subway entrance, and a sign indicating the name of the station/service line would be affixed to the fence. These surface entry/exit facilities are intended to blend with their existing settings and would not represent a visual intrusion into the Plaza or sidewalk adjacent to the eastern edge of Battery Park. As described in Chapter 1, one of the objectives of the Proposed Action is to improve intermodal connectivity between transit services in this area of Lower Manhattan. Placement of the subway entry/exits and appropriate signage and lighting in these locations would fulfill that objective.

The louvered vent structure that would be located in Peter Minuit Plaza would be approximately 27 feet by 22 feet in area and 15-20 feet high. The structure would be screened with landscaping and designed to blend in with the reconstructed Plaza design.

As indicated above, approximately 50 trees in the northeastern portion of Battery Park would be potentially impacted from construction of the proposed approach tunnels. MTA/NYCT is evaluating construction methods and techniques related to saving trees in place and through relocation. Any removed trees either would be replaced with new trees in the same vicinity after construction, or the area would be restored and revegetated consistent with the Battery Park Master Plan.

5.15.3.3 Analysis Year 2025 (Long Term Operation)

No Build Condition

Under the No Build Condition, the South Ferry Terminal Project would not be constructed. The No Build Condition assumes that the visual character of the existing station would not change except for routine maintenance and repairs that would not alter the visual character of the existing station. The surface entry/exit stairwells and vent structure would not be built in Peter Minuit Plaza, a stairwell would not be built in the State Street sidewalk adjacent to Battery Park, and the vent grate would not be constructed near the intersection of Battery Place and State Street.

Proposed Action

Operation of the South Ferry Terminal in the long term would not have any adverse impacts on visual resources or urban design. The presence of the aboveground features

would be overall visual elements in the Peter Minuit Plaza area, and would not detract from the urban design and functionality of the Plaza