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A Commute From Rockaway, Now With a Harbor View

By UMAR CHEEMA

Amid whipping wind and rain and beneath gloomy gray skies, a new ferry service was born yesterday, setting sail from Breezy Point, at the tip of the Rockaways, to Lower Manhattan, with a stop in Brooklyn along the way. A total of 51 commuters were aboard for the first two trips, putting on brave faces and rain-slicked coats, and carrying umbrellas.

“Ferry service will make the very difficult commute between the Rockaways and Manhattan much easier and less expensive,” said [Christine C. Quinn](#), the City Council speaker. The service leaves from Riis Landing, in Queens, and is being provided by New York Water Taxi. Also along for the maiden voyage were Joseph P. Addabbo Jr., a council member from Queens, and [Anthony D. Weiner](#), a congressman serving Brooklyn and Queens.

But this first journey was, in fact, the end of a long planning process: New York Water Taxi made a test run, for example, seven months ago. And discussions about introducing a ferry line started long before that. Mr. Addabbo persuaded the Council to set aside \$300,000 a year for each of six years as he argued for the Rockaway run. Of that \$1.8 million, \$1.1 million will subsidize the operation, and the remaining \$700,000 has been given to the Department of Transportation in case the subsidy falls short.

Mr. Weiner also helped direct federal money toward the project. “I’ve contributed \$3 million for the ferry landing,” he said.

“I am very excited, very happy,” said Deirdre Rossi, a commuter on the second morning run. Ms. Rossi, a resident of Rockaway Park, works as an administrative assistant at Goldman Sachs. The ferry, which docks at Pier 11 in downtown Manhattan, shortened her commute by about 20 to 30 minutes.

Tom Fox, the president of New York Water Taxi, said the company’s initial target is 300 commuters a day. “It will take a while to get this number,” he said, noting that even 300 daily riders would still not be enough for the run to become profitable, especially with fuel costs increasing. Profitability, he said, would require 700 passengers a day.

Most of the first-day riders were commuters who said they usually took the bus or drove their own cars to reach Brooklyn subway stations, where they hopped on the subway to Manhattan.

Among them were Mary Brady, who works on Wall Street and previously used the car-subway combination to get to work, and Paula Reich, who relied on the bus-subway relay.

They are almost the commuters that New York Water Taxi is seeking.

“The real target is not getting people off the subway or express bus, but to get them off the car,” Mr. Fox said.

There are two trips in the morning, at 5:45 and 7:45, and two later in the day, at 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. The journey takes an hour, with a stop at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, in Sunset Park, about 20 minutes from Manhattan.

“I can’t make it for the 5:30 ferry,” said Jack Flanagan, a lawyer working in Midtown who was aboard the 7:45 trip. He said many people who had jobs there might not be able to reach Pier 11 in time for the evening sailing.

It is commuters in the western part of the Rockaways, more than those in Far Rockaway, who are expected to benefit the most.

According to the Department of Transportation, about 565 residents of the western Rockaways work in downtown Manhattan. “Of these, 33 percent drive alone, 12 percent carpool, and the rest take the subway and/or bus,” according to a study by the department.

“Potential riders will be from Breezy Point, Roxbury, Belle Harbor and Neponsit — the neighborhood of Rockaway,” Mr. Fox said.

There was little potential benefit seen for those who live farther away. “Sixty percent of the population lives in Far Rockaway,” said Jonathan L. Gaska, the district manager for Community Board 14 in Far Rockaway. He was not optimistic that people from his area would drive 15 to 20 minutes to Riis Landing for the ferry. But, he said, he remained open to the possibility: “I am curious to see what happens.”

For his part, Mr. Gaska said he rode the subway.

While Mr. Gaska said that he thought many working-class residents would balk at the \$12 round-trip cost of the ferry and stick with the subway, Mr. Addabbo, who represents the western Rockaways, said he believed the ferry was cost-efficient when other commuting

expenses, like parking and gas, were added in.

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