

IDA Submission: Taxi Stands

In 2018, the 34th Partnership (34SP), completed a year-long pilot project to improve their taxi stand on the west side of Seventh Avenue, between 31st and 33rd Streets. This stand is directly outside the main entrance shared by Madison Square Garden (MSG) and Penn Station, the continent's busiest train terminus. The project had two goals, the first of which was to alleviate the chronic automobile congestion that had plagued the location for over a decade. The second was to establish a way-finding system that would efficiently direct people leaving Penn Station in need of a cab to the proper area.

The taxi stand pilot project began in 2017 and was completed in early 2018. Each element was developed with the technical assistance of the traffic team at Sam Schwartz Engineering and executed in full consultation with NYC Department of Transportation.

34SP was fully reimbursed for all capital expenditures and graphic design related to the pilot project by Vornado Realty Trust, the largest real estate owner in the 34th Street District and the owner of the buildings that house Madison Square Garden and Penn Station.

Relieving Vehicular and Pedestrian Congestion

Previously, the taxi stand, like most in the city, had one area designated for both drop-off and pick-up. Vehicular congestion was inevitable at this busy Midtown transit terminal. The situation was frustrating and hazardous for taxi-drivers, potential passengers, and other vehicles using the street.

The pilot project divided the two-block expanse from 31st to 33rd street into separate sections. The northern section (between 32nd and 33rd Streets) was designated as the drop-off area and the southern section (between 31st and 32nd Streets) for pick-up.

Upon approach, taxi drivers are directed to the drop-off area by a sign affixed to a traffic control pole. After dropping off their passengers, they move easily into the pick-up area, also marked with a sign. Taxi drivers also have the option of moving to a middle lane and proceeding down Seventh Avenue, without interfering with the pick-up area.

In addition to streamlining vehicle traffic, the separation of drop-off and pick-up was also intended to relieve pedestrian congestion on the sidewalk. Distinct areas for each function means more space for ingoing and outgoing passengers to avoid each other. The unified visual scheme alerts non-taxi vehicle operators, as well as pedestrians using the sidewalk but not seeking a taxi, that the entire two-block stretch is dedicated to taxi activity.

34SP staffed the pilot with two onsite taxi dispatchers. While one dispatcher waves in taxi from the street into the drop-off area, a second dispatcher manages the pick-up location, directing and aiding passengers.

Wayfinding

With thousands of people entering and exiting the building each hour, the entrance to MSG and Penn Station is often chaotic. There is enormous demand for taxis, especially by commuters at rush hour and by MSG attendees after events. Prospective taxi passengers wait anxiously, unsure where to line up and how long will it take to procure a cab.

34SP's wayfinding system, unified across several graphics elements, was designed to alleviate these anxieties. When leaving Penn Station, visitors see a series of distinctive green-and-yellow arrows that lead them to the sidewalk. There they are met by signs affixed on bollards which read TAXI PICK UP. The taxi stand itself sits to the left. Signs differentiate the pickup and drop-off lines, and additional Surface Arrows reinforce the demarcations on the ground.

The taxi queue itself consists of 10 yellow poles, each indicating TAXI PICKUP ONLY in green lettering, and connected by a green and yellow rope. Potential passengers enter the queue and wait for their taxi, to which they are directed by one of the two dispatchers.

This design directs riders quickly and directly where to go and how to catch a taxi, cutting through the clutter of what can be a frenetic environment. All elements of the taxi apparatus are of the same two colors and use the same visual vocabulary. This creates a unified experience for pedestrians from the time they step on the street until they are seated in a taxi.

Outcomes

The new taxi stand is calmer and more functional than its predecessor. 34SP has received compliments from passengers, taxi drivers, and local building owners saying that the changes have alleviated congestion, both for pedestrians on the sidewalk and vehicles on Seventh Avenue. The NYC Department of Transportation has also expressed its satisfaction with the new taxi stand.

The wayfinding system has been similarly successful, providing clear, unambiguous directions for people seeking taxis.

Though this project officially began in 2017, the 34SP team used knowledge gained from over a decade of operating taxi stands in the area. The process is ongoing and 34SP will continue to monitor the behavior of all actors – passengers, taxi drivers, pedestrians – to ensure its continued success.