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## East River Ferry Service, With 7 Stops, Starts Run

By MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM and ADRIANE QUINLAN

The blue-and-white ferry nudged up to the dock at East 34th Street on Monday morning and deposited its cargo: about 70 commuters, their business suits unmoved by the wind, happy to have made it from Brooklyn to Manhattan in less time than it can take to catch an L train at rush hour.

"What is this? Twenty minutes?" José Luis Coirolo, a financial worker from Greenpoint, asked as he hopped on the ferry just before 8 a.m. "Can't beat that; it's a luxury."

It was the inaugural ride of the city's new East River ferry network, the biggest experiment yet for a watery commute long seen as a cure for overcrowded subways and roads.

But ferries, despite their fresh-air amenities, have never quite managed to catch on among modern-day New Yorkers, and past efforts by the city at a workable ferry service have been plagued by low ridership and financial problems.

The city is putting up \$9.3 million over three years to subsidize the new service, operated by [New York Waterway](#), which also runs Hudson River ferries.

The official purpose for the seven-stop ferry network, which runs in a loop from Hunters Point in Queens, making four stops in Brooklyn and two in Manhattan — at East 34th Street and Pier 11 near Wall Street — is to encourage residential and commercial growth along the river's edge. In the morning rush, ferries will arrive every 20 minutes, giving the sense of a seabound subway.

But some transportation experts worry that the boats will appeal only to an affluent sliver of the population — those who can afford upscale apartments along the waterfront. And commuters who work in the core of Midtown may find it not worth the trouble to make it to, say, Madison Avenue or Avenue of the Americas from the shore, even though there will be a shuttle bus going inland.

"If you have a schlep on both sides, you're not going to take the boat," said [Robert E. Paaswell](#), a professor of civil engineering who studies transportation at the City University of New York.

To be sure, Brooklyn and Queens commuters can be plagued by congested subway service, particularly along the crowded L line, which is running at near capacity after a burst of residential development in Williamsburg and Bushwick in Brooklyn. The new ferries will most likely alleviate some of the burden on those trains.

"We don't have canals, so a ferry to Sixth Avenue is unlikely," said Andrew Brent, a City Hall spokesman. "But for residents of the growing waterfront neighborhoods of Dumbo, Williamsburg, Greenpoint or Hunters Point, who already hike or take a bus to the subway, this is a new and, we hope, better option."

The ferries are free until June 24, then will cost \$4 a ride, about double the cost of a subway trip. Mitchell Moss, director of the Rudin Center for Transportation Policy at New York University, said some straphangers might be willing to pay extra for a more reliable commute.

"Waiting for the G train can be an infinite experience," Mr. Moss said. "Four dollars is a bargain compared to the one-hour wait for the G train."

A few dozen commuters rode the early boats on Monday, before giving way to tourists and sightseeing retirees. The ferry operators, who are hoping to attract 400,000 passengers a year, said they were pleased with the first day's ridership, but declined to provide specific numbers.

The first boat departed at 7:15 a.m. with a gaggle of dignitaries and reporters aboard. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, in a seaweed-color tie, leaned on a blue plastic table and took in the view of the Midtown skyline.

"You have no idea what this does for property values," the mayor said approvingly. "Wait till you see all of this development!" He waved at a pair of passing kayakers, who raised their oars in salute.

Nilda and Barry Birnbaum, who are retired, boarded a ferry at the Dumbo stop after 10 a.m., for a test run. They said the trip compared favorably with the Staten Island Ferry, which they rode for years as commuters. "This one's fancier," said Ms. Birnbaum, looking around. "Not as dirty."

Dr. Paaswell, who acknowledged that the ferry may only serve a fraction of the city's population, said he still believed the ferry network could prove a boon to the city's broader reputation.

Despite the caveats, he said, "I love it."

"It enhances New York's value as a global city," he continued. "It's as simple as that."