

Walkers' coast is clear

Beep pushes plan to complete city waterfront path

MANHATTAN WALKERS are only steps away from enjoying the entire waterfront rim of their island.

Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer is pushing to free up a stretch of the waterfront from Columbia University and another from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to complete the project and give city walkers a more enjoyable and scenic 32-mile course around the waterside perimeter.

"We are incredibly close to being able to walk around the entire rim of this magnificent island," said the borough president two weeks ago. "But close isn't good enough for the people of Manhattan. The time has come to finish what has been a long sought-after goal for this borough."

The two remaining pieces Stringer wants to transform are

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at the MTA's 207th St. subway yard and the Columbia-owned Baker Field, which serves several of its sports teams.

Columbia President Lee Bollinger and MTA Executive Director Katherine Lapp gave Stringer the green light for discussion meetings, but the project planners will have to jump through quite a few difficult hoops for it to become a reality.

The 207th St. yard "is a critically important component in the operation of the subway system, and is scheduled for a major rehabilitation and expansion in the current five-year Capital

Program," Lapp told Stringer in an official letter.

"Preliminary designs for a walkway must undergo a review by NYCT [New York City Transit, operator of the city subways and buses], so as to insure that the project does not impede or harm existing operations."

More than 450 participants had to take mile-long detours inward from the coastline route during the Great Saunter, an annual walk around the edge of Manhattan sponsored by the Shorewalkers this month.

City strider Walt Wright has seen significant improvement in Manhattan during the nine years he has lived here, but he said he hoped the city would help walkers avoid dealing with busy streets and traffic during this event.

"The city has slowly fixed up parts around the city's waterfront," said Wright, vice president of the Shorewalkers. "Hopefully, the parts that are not accessible along Harlem and the East River will become more accessible in years to come. Some people think of those places as dangerous, though."

Wright says Baker Field forces walkers to take a mile-and-a-half detour while the 207th St. subway yard sends walkers on a half-mile detour through city streets.

Despite these alternative routes, Wright knows how important the waterfront is to many city dwellers, especially as Central Park gets more jammed with tourists and residents when the weather gets warmer.

"The waterfront is a real asset," Wright said.