

Transit Walk – Deep Dive: Follow the Blue Arrow to the World's Fair

November 3, 2024

Tour Leader – Andrew Sparberg for New York Transit Museum

FOLLOW THE BLUE ARROW

From 1964 NYCTA map

TO THE WORLD'S FAIR



**Begin at
Queensboro Plaza
#7 N**

**61st St.-Woodside
#7 & LIRR cross**

Mets-Willets Point #7

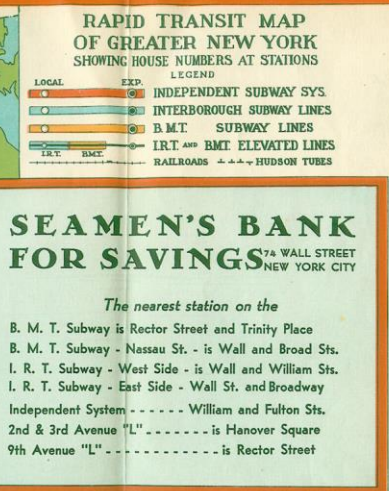
TRIP SUMMMARY

Queens hosted two World's Fairs, at today's Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, 60 and 85 years ago. Running seasonally for four years total, 1939-40 and 1964-1965, the Fairs attracted millions of visitors, the majority of whom arrived by mass transit. Today's #7 line, which in 1939-40 hosted both IRT and BMT trains, provided access to both events. The #7 moniker was then in the future; the route was simply called the Corona-Flushing Line. The IRT provided 50 new cars for the expected surge, while the BMT repainted its older elevated cars in a bright orange and blue livery. For the 1939-40 Fair, the IND subway provided a dedicated service to and from its new Queens Boulevard Line in Forest Hills (this was a temporary service and was not retained after 1940). In June 1940, during the Fair's second season, all three New York subway operators were unified under common management, the New York City Board of Transportation.

For the 1964-65 event, the New York City Transit Authority, which succeeded the Board of Transportation, introduced a completely new 430 car fleet to serve the Fair. These were the R33-36 models, brightly painted in blue and white. In 1964 another signature event occurred just outside the Fairgrounds, as Shea Stadium debuted as the home of the New York Mets. The difference was that in 1964, the entire #7 service was provided by the IRT division. The BMT operation on the #7 line ended in 1949, and the IND did not resurrect its 1939-40 service to/from Forest Hills, since the IND track right-of-way became the Van Wyck Expressway, constructed for the 1964-65 fair.



Left photo, 1939-40 temporary World's Fair station for IND Queens Blvd. trains. Right photo, new R33-36 cars at Willets Point Blvd. station on the #7 line, ready for the 1964-65 Fair. NYTM both photos



All 3 operators – IRT, BMT, and IND – provided service to the 1939-40 World's Fair site (circled).

We begin our trip at Queensboro Plaza in Long Island City, where the #7 and N subway routes converge at a two level, four track station, the only place where the IRT (A division) and BMT-IND (B division) trains share common platforms. From its inception in 1917 until 1949, this station was twice as big, with four additional tracks on the north side, because originally the BMT and IRT operated separate stations and services here. That was the case in 1939-40, but not in 1964-65, when the current operational pattern was in place. Note the photo below. The north side station was removed in the early 1960s.

This station, and the routes that travel beyond here to Flushing and Astoria, are a legacy of the Dual Contracts, a massive subway system expansion that was built 1913-1931 to permit new residential developments in The Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens.

In 1949, the NYC Board of Transportation ended the joint IRT-BMT service to and from Flushing, making the service a completely IRT operation, today's #7 Line. At the same time, the Astoria route, today's N and W, which was also a joint IRT-BMT service, became a strictly BMT service, which it remains today.



Queensboro Plaza, framework for old northside station
(Sparberg photo)

After leaving Queensboro Plaza the #7 line follows a concrete viaduct in the middle of Queens Boulevard for the next three stops. Below, the top photo shows this area, Sunnyside, shortly after the line opened in 1917. The whole idea of building Dual Contracts lines, to provide access to vacant land outside Manhattan, is clearly documented here.



After traversing the viaduct, the #7 uses a conventional steel elevated structure atop Roosevelt Avenue all the way to Mets-Willets Point. Roosevelt Avenue did not exist prior to the #7 line construction, as it was expressly designed (pun intended!) to be the #7 line route. Along this stretch take note of the 61st Street Woodside Station where the #7 crosses over the Long Island Rail Road. This is a major transfer point between both services. The #7 station opened April 21, 1917. The LIRR had been there since the 1860s, but as part of the subway project its route was straightened in 1914 to eliminate some reverse curves and a dangerous grade crossing about a mile to the east, where the LIRR tracks cross over Queens Boulevard. So the current LIRR-#7 Woodside joint stop is a product of the LIRR grade elimination.

The LIRR Woodside station encompasses six tracks and serves all branches. There are four Main Line tracks and two Port Washington Branch tracks. The latter branch served both World's Fairs and continues to serve Citi Field.

Photos on next page show the #7 line in Woodside.



Top, Woodside – 61st St. Station in 2015. (*Sparberg photo*)
 Below, between 61st and 69th Street Stations, 1939, showing
 BMT elevated train. (*NYTM photo*)



#1600 - 1603 k Transit Museum 1939

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After Woodside, we will continue to Mets-Willets Point. We will pass through the community known as Jackson Heights, where the 82nd Street Station deserves a bit of historical attention. When the #7 line reached here in 1917, a real estate developer, the Queensboro Corporation, developed the surrounding blocks as a new garden apartment community that was called Jackson Heights, replacing its original Trains Meadow name. Jackson Heights is an excellent example of what the Dual Contracts wanted to achieve – new residential neighborhoods outside Manhattan with new housing to absorb the outflow from older, crowded neighborhoods. It was marketed as an upscale suburban-style community with open spaces between the apartment buildings. The Fifth Avenue Coach Company, Manhattan's pioneering bus operator, created a new route connecting its namesake avenue to Jackson Heights, aiming to attract affluent shoppers with direct service to and from midtown's fancy department stores. The original station name was 25th St., which changed to 82nd St. in 1925 when Queens adapted a borough-wide street numbering system to replace a collection of local neighborhood names that dated to before 1898.

Train shown below is from the 1964-65 World's Fair, publicizing Vermont's exhibit.

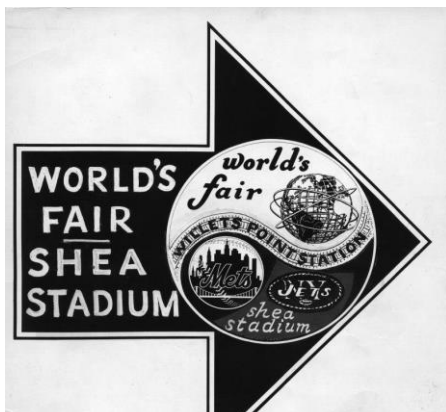


82nd St. – Jackson Heights Station in 1965 *(nycsubway.org photo)*



111th St. Station in 2015. *(nycsubway.org photo)*

After Jackson Heights the #7 Line continues through Corona before it reaches Mets-Willets Point, its next to last stop and the home station for both World's Fairs. That station has become very important since 1964, when baseball's New York Mets began playing home games there, originally at Shea Stadium (below left) and since 2009 at Citi Field. A highlight of the journey is the upper level, bi-directional express track that passes over the platforms at 111th Street Station. This construction is reminiscent of the old "hump" elevated train express stations on Manhattan's old 2nd, 3rd, and 9th Avenue lines.



Willets Point Station and logo, 1964. *NYTM photos*

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When the #7 line opened in 1917, it ended at Alburtis Avenue in Corona, today's 103rd Street Station. Then the route was called the Corona Line. In 1926-28, the line was extended to its final three Queens stations – 111th, Willets Point, and Main Street, which opened in January 1928. After that it was called the Corona-Flushing Line and more recently, simply #7 Flushing. Original Willets Point station was relocated to its current location and enlarged for the 1939 World's Fair. It was modernized for the 1964 Fair and Shea Stadium, and again in 2009 for Citi Field.

Both photos show the 1964-65 Fair. Top photo shows #7 Line and LIRR entrance; Bottom photo shows the Unisphere, the Fair's symbol and still there today.



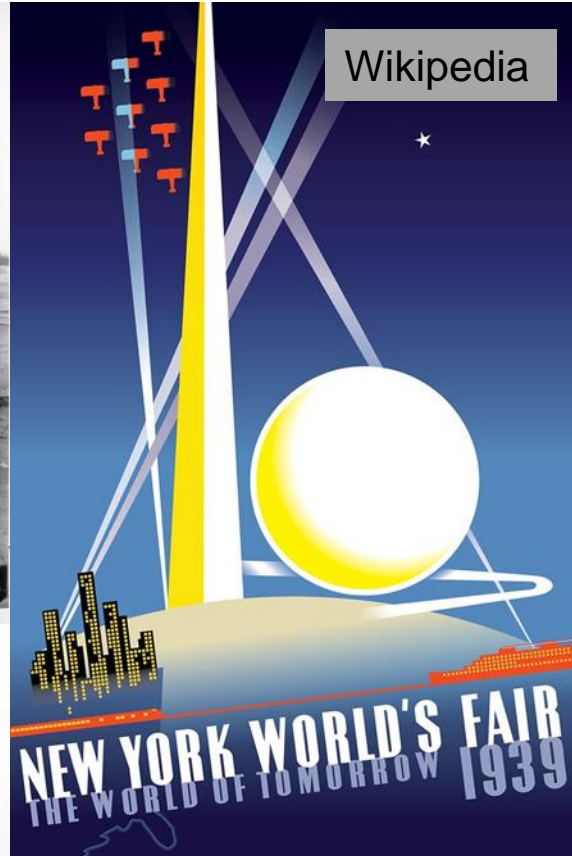
Both photos, Queens Museum collection



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Below illustrations are from the 1939-40 Fair. The two photos show the walkway being build between the #7 line station and the Fair entrance (top), and the newly rebuilt Willets Point Station (bottom). Both are still in use today.

The poster shows the Tylon and Perisphere, the 1939-40 Fair symbols that stood exactly where the Unisphere stands today.



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The photos on pages 11 and 12 show the two rail modes that 1964-65 Fairgoers used – the #7 Flushing Line and the LIRR Port Washington Line. Top photo here shows crowds headed to the Fair in 1964, after leaving the #7 train. Bottom shows a #7 train (either R33WF or R36 class, discharging passengers for the Fair.



AP photo published in Newsday 7/3/2024



Willets Pt Sta May 19. 1964.
NYC Transit R36 cars. *NYTM photo*

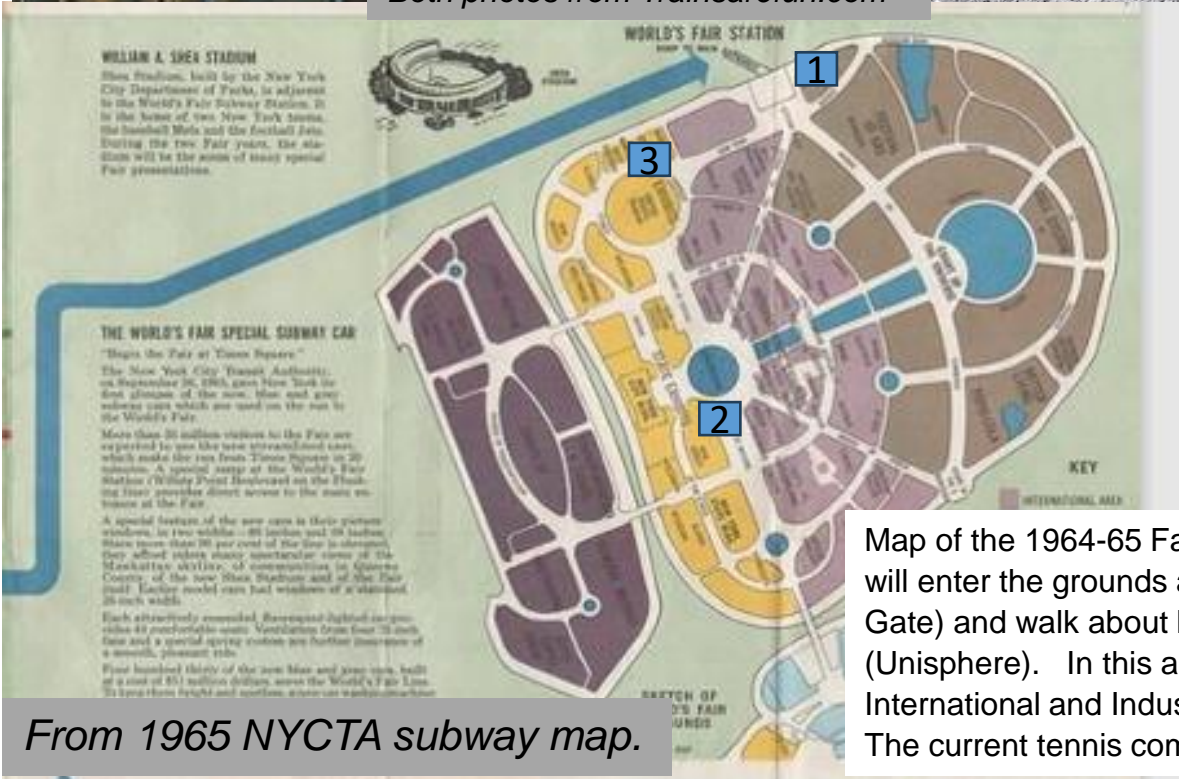
New York Transit Museum

Let's not forget that LIRR also served both Fairs. For the 1964-65 Fair, it built a new six track station (left). The north platform, still in use today, is for Port Washington Branch trains, which today stop here to serve Flushing Meadow-Corona Park, Citi Field, and US Tennis Center. Two additional platforms were built on the south side to accommodate shuttle trains between here and Penn Station. One is still in use as a LIRR car storage facility.

For 1964-65 Fair service, LIRR added thirty new cars to its electric fleet, the P75 class (right). One P75 train is shown below; they were originally painted in an attractive grey and orange scheme. These cars remained in service until 2000, converted for diesel train service after 1972.



Both photos from Trainsarefun.com



From 1965 NYCTA subway map.

Map of the 1964-65 Fair. Our group will enter the grounds at #1 (Main Gate) and walk about halfway to #2 (Unisphere). In this area were the International and Industrial exhibits. The current tennis complex is at #3.