

Updated Nov 16, 12:06 AM; Posted Nov 16, 11:57 AM

Meadowlands conference: Taking charge of the future of mass transit

By [David Mosca](#)
For The Jersey Journal



Sarfraz Maredia, left, regional general manager for UBER Technologies, Garo Hovnanian, center, of McKinsey & Co., and Jim Venturi, founder of ReThink Studio, speak at the Meadowlands Regional 2040 Foundation's Thought Leaders conference in East Rutherford on Oct. 26. (Meadowlands Regional Chamber photo)

The Meadowlands Regional 2040 Foundation hosted its third annual Thought Leaders Conference, and as with any conversation in New Jersey that's longer than "hello," the discussion ultimately turned to traffic congestion.

The conference, held late last month at the Hilton Meadowlands in East Rutherford, also spent time on other issues important in the Meadowlands Regional Chamber's 2040 Vision Plan such as growing jobs, address resiliency and improve the quality of life region, which includes communities along or near the Hackensack River in Bergen and Hudson counties.

"These ideas, along with the chamber's comprehensive blueprint to leverage the existing assets and investments in the region will promote business growth and business attraction," said Jim Kirkos, president and CEO of the Meadowlands Regional Chamber. "The 2040 Vision Plan is the result of some of the most creative, analytical, passionate and resourceful minds collaborating to ensure that the Meadowlands as a region can thrive through the year 2040"

The panel featured Sarfraz Maredia, regional general manager for UBER Technologies, Jim Venturi, founder of ReThink Studio, and Garo Hovnanian of McKinsey & Co.

But the linchpin to all other appears to be getting to and from Manhattan, and getting around the region. Krishna Murthy, executive director of Ezride, said his company focuses on corporate clients in the Meadowlands area.

"A lot of businesses are coming into the area and they're all concerned about access to public transportation," Murthy said.

Ezride offers the Meadowlands a network of shuttle services with roughly 20 different routes that transport more than 1,000 people a day. The company also provides carpool and vanpool programs as well as access to people with disabilities.

Maredia announced that UBER would be opening a Greenlight Hub, which serves as a support center for UBER drivers and customers, in Secaucus early next year. The new building will be 7,000 square feet, double the size of the Hoboken hub, and will be located at Harmon Cove Industrial Park, Maredia said.

"Our move to Secaucus reflects Uber's ongoing commitment to serving our New Jersey driver community," said Maredia. "We're excited about the growth we've seen in the Garden State and plan to continue investing in the region."

But on a grander scale, Venturi says the ReThink NYC Regional Unified Network (RUN) plan is the answer to the region's congestion. "Making it possible for users to get from anywhere to everywhere," RUN is a multi-stage program to establish a regional rail network.

"The question is how do we create a viable alternative that allows us to get from anywhere to everywhere affordably throughout the region?" Venturi said.

The plan called for an interconnected system between Manhattan and the Meadowlands, which would cost \$30.5 billion. The work on the Secaucus Junction, which includes additional track work, is expected to cost \$300 million, Venturi said.

"All of the transit networks in the area are ultimately geared toward getting people into Manhattan," said Venturi. "You can still get people into Manhattan, but also purpose them to get around the region. That's the magic that Secaucus can offer.

"So many rail lines come together there because it's so close to the PATH at Journal Square and because it's at (exit) 15X and the NJ Turnpike. You can redirect so many of the buses that

go there and spare them the torture of the helix going through there. It's an opportunity to turn New Jersey from a place that really suffers from these congested roads and into its true self, which is a beautiful state."

Municipalities in the Meadowlands district include Carlstadt, East Rutherford, Hasbrouck Heights, Little Ferry, Lyndhurst, Moonachie, North Arlington, Ridgefield, Rutherford, South Hackensack, Teterboro and Wood-Ridge in Bergen County; and Jersey City, Kearny, North Bergen and Secaucus in Hudson County.



Jim Kirkos, left, president & CEO for the Meadowlands Regional Chamber, with speakers Sarfraz Maredia, regional general manager for UBER Technologies; Garo Hovnanian for McKinsey & Company and Jim Venturi, founder of ReThink Studio, at the Meadowlands Regional 2040 Foundation Thought Leaders conference on Oct. 26. (Meadowlands Regional Chamber photo)