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On PATH to makeover under Ground Zero

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An underground passageway with airport-style people movers connecting nearly a dozen subway lines with PATH trains could be on tap for lower Manhattan, officials said yesterday.

Gov. Pataki and Port Authority officials announced that the Port Authority will spend $10 million to plan a new subway-PATH network that would run under the World Trade Center site.

A key feature would be a 3,000-foot underground passage that would stretch from the Winter Garden atrium at the World Financial Center all the way east to the Fulton St. station.

Travelers would be able to transfer between the PATH and a slew of lines — the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, A, C, E, N and R.

The passageway is part of a $1.5 billion plan to build a PATH station under Ground Zero in the next five years.

Meanwhile, the Port Authority board approved spending $544 million to restore PATH service to downtown, using a temporary entrance on Church St., within two years.

The board also set aside $51 million to install new PATH turnstiles that accept MetroCards — a move Metropolitan Transportation Authority Chairman Peter Kalikow championed. The turnstiles could be operating in a few months.

"It's one more step towards everyone's goal of a regional transit system," Kalikow said.

The turnstiles also would accept computer chip-bearing "smart cards" that could be used by subway, bus, commuter rail and other mass transit riders in the New York-New Jersey region, officials said.

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