

August 14, 2023

Dear Governor Hochul, Mayor Adams, Deputy Mayor Joshi, and DOT Commissioner Rodriguez:

Thank you for the opportunities your administration has provided for communities and elected officials to engage in a conversation around the future of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE).

Having now seen the full range of DOT's proposals for the "BQE Central" section, as well as the proposed street-level improvements on the "BQE North & South" sections of the corridor, **we want to state unequivocally that the concepts, designs, and indeed the overall car and truck – centric approach to this work do not meet the expectations or needs of the impacted communities nor the warming planet.**

The concepts we have seen perpetuate many of the existing problems with the BQE, and in some cases would exacerbate unsafe or polluting conditions, for example, the extremely misguided proposals to create additional highway infrastructure on the residential streets of Cobble Hill at Congress Street. Other designs represent an unnecessary expenditure of funding, time, and effort in the service of easing the movement of large trucks on the BQE, such as the needless destruction and reconstruction of the Columbia Heights Bridge, Harry Chapin Playground and parts of Squibb Park.

Rather than take the opportunity to rethink mobility to meet our health, climate, and economic development goals, the proposed "BQE Central" highway rebuild will cost billions to merely re-create the highly problematic infrastructure of the past—while taking large parts of Brooklyn Bridge Park and the Promenade out of commission for years. It prioritizes polluting vehicles over residents – dooming all the BQE-adjacent communities to live with this highway directly in their midst for generations to come.

In 2020, the New York City Council with Arup Engineering issued a report called *The Future of the BQE*. The report clearly articulated the harms of the BQE and asked a critical question that remains even more relevant today:

"We live everyday with the costs and risks of this legacy infrastructure through poor air quality, divided communities, traffic violence, visual blight, and noise pollution – costs which depress economic and social opportunities and disproportionately fall on environmental justice communities. And yet, along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) we as a city are proposing to replace this highway infrastructure in kind? In so doing, not only are we out of step with our own goals, we are re-imposing the burdens that were ignored when we built the highway system in the first place."

We understand there is a meaningful opportunity to access infrastructure-related federal funding that should not be squandered. But, instead of spending billions to rebuild the triple cantilever

bigger and wider for 100 more years of vehicular traffic and/or creating new highway infrastructure designed to make traveling easier for single-occupancy vehicles and truckers (including all the toll-shoppers) we ask NYC DOT to follow the recommendations laid out in the BQE Expert Panel and the City Council's reports.

Specifically:

1. **Take immediate action to prolong the life of the Triple Cantilever** for at least 20 years through waterproofing, repair, and replacement of certain damaged sections, along with any additional critical short-term measures that would mitigate the vibrations from the roadway. Preventing a catastrophic failure must be priority number one. Access the available federal dollars to fund this work.
2. **Acknowledge that any long-term BQE planning must be part of a holistic, corridor-wide transformation.** Today, it is the Triple Cantilever that is crumbling, tomorrow it will be another section of this decrepit highway. The state and city's failure to commit to the implementation of transformational alternatives in the North and South sections of the corridor perpetuates the racial and economic injustice this highway already represents.
3. **Immediately begin implementation of traffic demand management strategies.** The BQE Expert Panel report contains a detailed appendix prepared by Sam Schwartz Engineering outlining various strategies, including closing selected BQE on/off ramps such as the QB Atlantic Ave ramp, and the implementation of HOV lanes to reduce traffic demand on the BQE. New Yorkers are literally choking under the fumes of poorly managed traffic in our neighborhoods and are dying from unchecked traffic violence.

We wholeheartedly support the efforts already underway to move freight more sustainably throughout the city, such as the Blue Highways Program. The plan for a future BQE and the freight management strategies DOT has already begun investing in must reinforce each other, not contradict each other.

4. **Secure available federal funding through the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act for improvements in public transit.** The new infrastructure law is already pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into transportation projects and has created dozens of new USDOT grant programs. Many users of the BQE, especially drivers in single occupancy vehicles, could be encouraged to use public transit instead if it was convenient and efficient.

New York City and New York State must come together to create a new, multi-stakeholder, I-278 governing body that has the authority and vision to manage the necessary planning. The tasks of this body should include the creation of design guidelines and standards for the full corridor in coordination with the impacted communities, support for and coordination of the various demand management strategies including the creation of a regional transportation model, and the creation of a corridor-wide phasing plan along with sources of funding.

We urge this administration to be the anti-Robert Moses and help us rewrite history. We must think seriously about sunsetting our 20th century urban highways, as many other cities have already done, instead of doubling down on rebuilding them in place.

Immediate but substantive repairs on the cantilever will buy time for NYC DOT to make progress on many other forward-thinking and relevant projects that will enable the fulfillment of a true “once in a generation” approach to the BQE: these include congestion pricing, blue highways, micro mobility last-mile delivery, Gateway, Streets Master Plan, and the proposed pedestrian and bike-prioritization in PlaNYC, and more.

In the meantime, the City and State can access federal infrastructure funds for community planning to help flesh out a long-term plan for more equitable and sustainable transportation infrastructure and for investments in a transit-rich future for everyone up and down the BQE corridor, and indeed the entire city.

Sincerely,

A Better Way
America Walks (co-host of the Freeway Fighters Network)
Atlantic Avenue Business Improvement District
Brooklyn Heights Association
Cobble Hill Association
DUMBO Neighborhood Alliance
El Puente
Fifth Avenue Committee
Montague Street Business Improvement District
North Heights Neighbors
North Brooklyn Parks
Open Plans
Street Plans
Transportation Alternatives
160 Columbia Heights
360 Furman Street