

June 5, 2023

Dear Chair Joshi:

The undersigned are members of the Board of the Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation. We write to you in your capacity as both the Chair of our Board and the Deputy Mayor overseeing the BQE project. As you know, as directors of this corporation we each have a fiduciary duty to protect the interests of the Park and its millions of users. It is in this context that we feel obligated to write this letter.

We are deeply concerned about the impact the DOT plans currently under consideration for the BQE triple-cantilever will have on access to and use of Brooklyn Bridge Park. This is not simply a local issue for Brooklyn Heights and the adjoining neighborhoods. These are critically important questions for the over 5 million people – from all over Brooklyn and beyond, representing the full diversity of this amazing City – for whom, as Mayor Adams described it, an afternoon in the Park is their weekend in the Hamptons. Their interests should not be sacrificed for the sake of a highway.

The DOT asserts that its plans to replace the highway will benefit the public by connecting the Park to what is now the Promenade. But each of the three proposals presented so far would involve the destruction and reconfiguration of substantial portions of existing parkland, and one version would even eliminate all emergency and other essential vehicular access to the stretch of Park running from Pier 2 to Pier 5. If the idea is to create a “Promenade connection” there are far easier and less disruptive ways to do so (including a connection from the end of the Promenade proposed over 15 years ago), without damaging the Park and dramatically changing the Promenade as it now exists.

The overarching problem with the approach the DOT is taking is that you cannot fit the highway and its construction footprint and the Park into the available space. Tearing down the existing structure and building a new highway will mean sacrificing the Park for an unknown but extended period of time. Even if the more elaborate Promenade connection plans were abandoned, neither we nor the public have been provided with any explanation of how the DOT proposes to build a new highway without serious impact on the Park. Among other things, replacing the highway (as opposed to rehabilitating and repairing it) will bring into

play Federal regulations requiring its footprint to expand even at two lanes, and dramatically more at three lanes. Adding a “temporary highway” (renamed a “bypass”) simply compounds the problem.

This is not a new discovery. The basic geography has not changed since 2018, when similar plans proposed by the DOT were resoundingly rejected by the experts, the community and all the local elected officials – including then-Borough President Adams. The space between the existing highway and the Park is still just the two lanes of Furman Street and one of those lanes is covered by the existing roadway. You have correctly described the challenge as being comparable to “threading a needle”, but the DOT has not yet shown any recognition of this constraint. How do they propose to (i) widen the footprint of the highway, (ii) build a temporary highway, and (iii) provide sufficient space for construction workers and their equipment without rendering the center section of the Park unusable and/or unreachable for years? Nothing to date suggests that DOT has found an answer, and certainly none has been shared with us or the public.

Brooklyn Bridge Park cost over \$450 million to build, was finally completed late in 2021 and is the culmination of decades of work by countless people. Some of us have served on this Board since it was created in 2010 and others date back to the original LDC in 1998. We understand what it took to get here and how important the Park is to all its millions of users and to the City’s economy as a tourist attraction.

We recognize that coming up with a solution for the BQE is a difficult problem, but it is not just an engineering question – it is a test of our priorities. When the proposed solutions threaten the integrity of Brooklyn Bridge Park, it becomes everyone’s problem. We, as stewards of the Park, cannot condone sacrificing the use and enjoyment of such an essential public space for the sake of expanding and perpetuating a highway, particularly when less destructive alternatives have been proposed by others. We do not believe the millions of Park users who visit each year would either.

We look forward to working constructively with you and your colleagues in City government and, in particular, to seeing a straight-forward and realistic plan for the BQE that fully protects Brooklyn Bridge Park and its users.

Very truly yours,

Joanne Witty, Vice Chair

Mariana Alexander

Peter Aschkenasy

Gregg Bishop

Martin Connor

Jeffrey D. Friedlander

Henry B. Gutman

Stephen Merkel

Susannah Pasquantonio

Andrea Phillips