



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

December 17, 2018

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

I am writing to you in regards to the current plans for the rehabilitation of the triple-cantilevered section of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway (BQE). I understand that the current roadways and structures are severely degraded and not up to current design standards, and I applaud your urgency in undertaking this project.

I am concerned, however, that the stated goal of “minimizing construction impacts to local communities and the public” has not been honored. The Department of Transportation (DOT) has failed to engage the surrounding neighborhoods in a substantive manner, has not been sufficiently transparent regarding alternatives to the current project, and has “eliminated several alternatives from further consideration” in a cursory manner.

As you are aware, the community has already expressed deep concerns regarding the impact that these proposals will have on their quality of life. The “innovative” approach would build a highway in close proximity to homes, raising concerns about potential damage, as well as noise, debris, and dust due to construction and traffic. This approach will also impact the promenade, which will be closed for several years during construction. The “traditional” approach, meanwhile, will take more time, be more costly, and could divert traffic through residential streets, affecting local residents.

Given this narrow range of options, I am eager to learn more about the DOT’s process and planning in relation to this work. In particular, I am concerned that this plan was devised without reasonable consideration for concurrent administrative initiatives and goals, sufficient thought to future traffic patterns, and consideration of important community concerns. For instance:

- Was this plan devised in conjunction with the Administration’s FreightNYC Plan and to what extent would that \$100 million investment in modernizing the city’s rail freight distribution system reduce truck traffic on the BQE?
- Was this plan devised with Congestion Pricing in mind and how would tolls on the East River bridges reduce truck and car traffic on this section of the BQE?

- Was this plan devised with the City's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% in mind and how does maintaining a major highway running through residential neighborhoods help advance that goal?
- Have you looked at the long term environmental impact on the surrounding community from property damage, dust and debris due to the Innovative approach? What is the rehabilitation plan that will be needed to repair property, and infrastructure damaged by this project?
- What will the community engagement strategy consist of and how will it ensure that residents have the opportunity to raise their concerns and share their alternative plan ideas? Will there be a forum for residents to learn about all possible solutions aside from the three previously presented and an opportunity to analyze design alternatives?

In addition to answering these questions, I request that the administration be more forthcoming with all available planning documents and immediately share them with members of the surrounding communities. Specifically, a FOIL request was submitted by a local group, A Better Way, in which DOT replied with as a response time by July 29th, 2019. I request that this timeline be revisited and the documents are made available as soon as possible.

I further request that you make every effort to devise a plan that reduces the impact on local residents, homes and properties, open spaces, and landmarks, particularly the Brooklyn Heights Promenade. This planning should be carried out in conjunction with neighborhood representatives and pursued in a timely manner due to the urgency of this project and the expiration of Design-Build authorization in less than two years. I understand the heavy undertaking but we must ensure time is allocated to continue to receive community input and explore various alternatives.

I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

c: Polly Trottenberg, Commissioner, New York City Department of Transportation