

March 12, 2018

Ms. Tanvi Pandya  
Project Manager  
BQE Project Team  
605 Third Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New York, New York 10158

Re: Scoping Comments for the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway Atlantic  
to Sands Reconstruction Project

Dear Ms. Pandya:

The Brooklyn Heights Association (BHA) strongly supports the long-needed reconstruction to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway cantilever and adjacent structures and would like to take advantage of this opportunity to comment on the scope of the environmental analysis that will be performed by the New York City Department of Transportation as part of the CEQR process.

In advancing its environmental review, the BHA asks that NYCDOT be cognizant of our three paramount concerns:

- First, the increase in the volume of traffic within Brooklyn Heights during the construction period and its impacts on public health and safety;
- Second, the need to invest in making access to Brooklyn Bridge Park both easy and safe, given the barrier imposed by the BQE; and
- Third, the importance of protecting the design of the Promenade and its views of the Brooklyn Bridge, Lower Manhattan, the river, and the harbor.

We specifically ask NYCDOT to fully evaluate the following key considerations in undertaking its environmental review:

**I. Future Community Conditions**

The communities adjacent to the BQE continue to experience significant development, including conversion of many former Watchtower office and residential buildings for commercial, retail and residential uses, and new residential projects at the LICH site and at Pier 6. These developments will likely add to usage of the BQE as well as promote increased automobile and pedestrian traffic on roadways leading to the BQE. Their traffic impacts should be evaluated as part of all future conditions.

## **II. Noise and Vibration**

Noise and vibrations from vehicles, especially trucks, have been a recurrent problem for buildings and their residents in close proximity to the highway, especially on Columbia Heights, Pierrepont Place, Montague Terrace, Willow Street, Grace Court, Remsen Street and Middagh Street. This problem is primarily due to the deteriorating expansion joints between the bridge sections and to the highway's unique cantilever design. We urge NYCDOT to consider the use of structural columns on the west face of the highway structure as a means to lessen or eliminate the future potential for vibration issues.

In addition, design solutions should be considered to reduce overall noise impacts (for example, a vertical sound-absorbing barrier on the cantilever section) on the Promenade and in Brooklyn Bridge Park.

## **III. Traffic and Transportation**

The arterials and secondary roads in and around Brooklyn Heights are already saturated with traffic, and have limited ability to absorb more. NYCDOT has also indicated that if repair work cannot be completed by 2026, further highway deterioration may require all trucks to be diverted onto local streets. A detailed Maintenance and Protection of Traffic Plan must be developed, with special focus on discouraging vehicles, especially trucks, from using local streets in Brooklyn Heights as a detour route. Appropriate signage and the allocation of significant enforcement resources should be considered.

Pedestrian traffic between downtown Brooklyn and Brooklyn Bridge Park, which continues to grow as park usage increases, is an equally critical concern. This project presents both a need and an opportunity for evaluation and identification of design solutions to improve pedestrian safety and the urban environment where the BQE crosses Old Fulton Street, Joralemon Street and Atlantic Avenue. The attached article, entitled "Now this is how you design a freeway underpass," illustrates how the pedestrian environment was improved in one community and its approach should be considered in evaluating how to improve pedestrian safety and access to the park at existing points of entry.

Consideration should be given to lighting and design improvements, including expanded pedestrian walkways under the highway at each location, as well as traffic calming measures to increase inadequate pedestrian space where Joralemon Street intersects with Furman Street. A proposed traffic calming measure for Joralemon Street at the BQE overpass is attached to demonstrate how this could be achieved.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of both the BQE cantilever and the Brooklyn Heights Promenade presents an opportunity for evaluation of a new pedestrian link between the Park and the waterfront at the foot of Montague Street, restoring the historic connection which existed until the highway was built.

Finally, additional vehicular traffic on Atlantic Avenue will also have an adverse impact on bicycle access to the bike lanes in Brooklyn Bridge Park and adjacent to Columbia Street. NYCDOT should evaluate alternative bike routes and improvements, including lane separation or painting on Henry Street south of Atlantic Avenue and on Congress and Kane Street to, provide alternate safer paths for cyclists.

#### **IV. Neighborhood Context**

Brooklyn Heights, as “America’s First Suburb”, has a unique historical character that existed long before the highway was built, and must be protected during highway construction and after its completion. We ask that consideration be given to:

- Incorporating landscaping features within the BQE right-of-way, particularly in areas north of the Brooklyn Bridge where parcels under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks and Recreation are largely barren and underutilized spaces;
- Replacing the materials that line the concrete walls of the highway structure in various locations (and that have been removed alongside the exit to Old Fulton Street, for instance), giving consideration to graffiti resistant materials;
- Assessing how the project can enhance the implementation of the objectives of the Brooklyn Strand Project through incorporating trees and other landscaping elements within the project area; and
- Wherever possible, maximizing parcels of land that can be used for recreational and/or greenscape purposes.

#### **V. Park Impacts**

The scope of the BQE project includes rebuilding of the Brooklyn Heights Promenade. This is a critical park resource for the community. A detailed plan of the staging for these repairs, and the maintenance of as much Promenade access as possible throughout the project should be evaluated. Additionally, attention must be given to protecting or relocating plantings within the Promenade gardens so that the gardens can be more easily restored when the project is completed.

Noise barriers should be incorporated on the western edge of the Queens and Staten Island-bound roadways that absorb traffic noise and minimize the view of traffic from Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Additionally, any expansion of the highway to allow for wider traffic lanes and the inclusion of a shoulder must not intrude in the Scenic View District from the railing of the Promenade.

**VI. The Atlantic Avenue interchange**

The Scoping Document identifies several design deficiencies in the vicinity of this interchange, including the on-ramps at Atlantic Avenue/Columbia Street, which have no acceleration lanes and obscured views of oncoming highway traffic. The BHA has previously brought its concerns about this dangerous interchange to the attention of NYCDOT, and has made several recommendations for improvements, as found in the attached Proposal for Redesign of the Atlantic Avenue (S/B) interchanged for I-278.. Addressing these deficiencies must be given a high priority.

**VII. Construction Impacts**

Reconstruction of the BQE will impact the Brooklyn Heights' community and Brooklyn Bridge Park for several years. Consideration should be given to mitigating impacts during the construction period by:

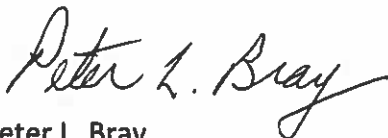
- Identifying routes for construction vehicles and equipment and material suppliers to minimize their use of residential streets.
- Considering ways to utilize water-borne transportation for the delivery of materials and the removal of demolition waste to minimize the number of trucks using residential streets.

**VIII. Other Comments**

Reconstruction of the BQE should be undertaken with consideration of reducing the carbon footprint of the completed project, for example, by incorporating solar panels to power lighting and signage along the highway.

We appreciate this opportunity to bring these concerns and requests for consideration to your attention.

Sincerely,



Peter L. Bray  
Executive Director

**Attachments:**

1. "Now this is how you design a freeway underpass," Curbed, August 11, 2016
2. Proposed traffic calming measures on Joralemon Street at BQE Overpass
3. Proposal for Redesign of the Atlantic Avenue (S/B) Interchange for I-278

TRANSPORTATION

# Now this is how you design a freeway underpass

5

*A California city turns a dark tunnel into an inviting walkway*

BY ALISSA WALKER | @AWALKERINLA | AUG 11, 2016, 3 58PM EDT



The East Campbell Avenue Portals opened this week | City of Campbell

Like most places in the U.S., the Silicon Valley city of Campbell made a big mistake a half-century ago. When California State Route 17 came plowing through town, transportation planners located it so close to Campbell's historic downtown that it sheared the picturesque streets off from the surrounding neighborhoods. This was fine for cars, and awful for everyone else, who now had to duck into a dark, dirty, dangerous hole. This week, a smart redesign of

Campbell's busiest underpass revealed a well-lit path fringed with public art, landscaping, and a sweeping 26-foot-wide sidewalk.

While the East Campbell Avenue Portals may look like a simple infrastructural makeover, the key is in the execution. Nearly all the space in the underpass was devoted to vehicles, with a narrow 4-foot sidewalk—added almost as an afterthought—traveling far too close to fast-moving cars. There just wasn't enough room to keep cars moving *and* give pedestrians more space. So engineers got creative.



The "before" shot, looking a lot like most freeway underpasses do today | City of Campbell

The design uses the existing structural framework to keep key girders in place, then carves out more space for pedestrians, excavating 4,700 cubic yards of dirt

from the sides. A second retaining wall creates a stunning 11,000 square feet of space for walkers to travel beneath the freeway. Lighting, artwork by [Susan Zoccola](#) that depicts locally grown produce, and wayfinding was also added, and new bike lanes now clearly demarcate the roadway.

The portal cost about \$4.85 million, funded mostly through grants, and even though it was delayed due to a redesign, the entire project was finished in less than two years. It took about five years prior to that to study, design, and approve the project. But the good thing is that because it improves upon a standard Caltrans underpass design, it could be easily deployed anywhere else in California—or beyond.



The portals create a pleasant entryway to downtown Campbell. | City of Campbell

One feature that's not easy to see from the image is the addition of a wall that completely separates walkers from bikers and drivers. This creates a quiet, protected stroll, but one concern that I had was that the wall made the pedestrian walkway almost too isolated, and might create spaces that would encourage unsafe behavior. But the city's senior civil engineer Fred Ho assured me that the portals use bright LED lights and cameras at night, and see a lot of natural light during the day. "The tunnel effect appears worse when viewing the portals from the outside," he said. "The openings of the pedestrian portals being 26 feet wide and 15 feet high actually let in a good amount of light."

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REAL  
IS HOW  
WE ROLL

Freeway cap parks—or removing freeways entirely—have become increasingly popular as cities seek to repair the damage inflicted by urban freeways. But capping or “decking” a freeway is expensive, which is why other alternatives need to be explored—including adapting the particular infrastructural



eccentricities of highways for public space, as our own Karrie Jacobs explored through [Houston's Buffalo Bayou project](#). Cities like Miami are [turning the undersides of their transit underpasses](#) into linear parks.



The James Corner Field Operations-designed Underline for beneath Miami's MetroRail | James Corner Field Operations

Maybe solutions can be even simpler than that. In Vancouver, a simple public art piece plays upon the cavernous space below the Granville Bridge. Local artist [Rodney Graham](#) designed a giant, glittery LED-lit chandelier (not crystal, don't worry) which will spin and illuminate, providing both spectacle and lighting for pedestrians. It's being paid for by a developer building the Bjarke Ingels-designed tower nearby, and was [just approved by the city's council](#).





Rodney Graham's LED-lit chandelier would connect a new Vancouver tower to its surrounding neighborhood. | Westbank Corporation

These types of low-cost, high-impact solutions to reconnect neighborhoods severed by highways are part of the USDOT's new **Every Place Counts Design Challenge**, itself part of the larger Ladders of Opportunity campaign to address inequality. Last month, Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx visited four U.S. cities—Spokane, Nashville, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis-St. Paul—which held design workshops in partnership with the Center for New Urbanism focusing on fixing particularly harrowing freeway crossings.



## ATTACHMENT

### Proposed traffic calming measure on Joralemon Street at BQE Overpass.

The Brooklyn Heights Association proposes reducing Joralemon Street to one traffic lane with no parking between Columbia St and Furman Street, and using the current parking lanes for expanded sidewalk space. The goal of this recommended change is to provide greater safety for the large crowds of pedestrian waiting to cross Furman Street to enter Brooklyn Bridge Park, while maintaining traffic access from Joralemon Street to Furman Street.



## Proposal for Redesign of the Atlantic Avenue (S/B) interchange for I-278

### The Problem

The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway southbound exit and entry for Atlantic Avenue is at the end of an descending curve as traffic enters the viaduct leading to the Gowanus Expressway. Traffic entering the southbound lanes have no acceleration space, and must generally come to a full stop, then accelerate quickly. Visibility of oncoming traffic is extremely limited. This creates safety issues, and delays traffic entering the highway.

### Southbound BQE interchange (current condition)



### Proposal

I propose that the outer lane of the southbound BQE be converted to an exit-only lane for traffic exiting to Atlantic Ave/Columbia St. The outer lane south of the interchange would be converted to an entry/acceleration lane.

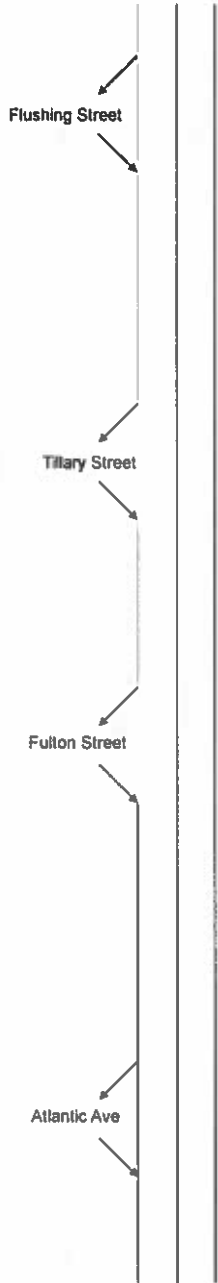
### Southbound BQE interchange (proposed redesign)



**Impact of Change**

Through traffic entering the southbound BQE at Fulton Street (primarily from the Brooklyn Bridge) would need to change to the center or inner lane over the 1 mile (approx.) distance between interchanges. However this is the same traffic pattern that exists at several points in Downtown Brooklyn (the outer lane south of Flushing St becomes an exit-only lane at Tillary Street, followed by an entry lane which becomes an exit-only lane at Fulton Street)

**Current Southbound Traffic Flow**



**Proposed Southbound Traffic Flow**

