

# BQE Panel Update

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# Background

- In September 2018, DOT presented two concepts for the BQE project based on several project assumptions:
  - The BQE should maintain its existing traffic capacity
  - Rebuild generally in the same footprint
  - The project would be based around City/DOT right of way
- These DOT concepts raised significant community concerns, particularly around their extended impacts on the Brooklyn Heights Promenade, and nearby communities
- In April, the City announced formation of an expert panel to take a comprehensive look at this project and its underlying assumptions

# The Panel

- Carlo Scissura, NY Building Congress (Chair)
- Rohit Aggarwala, Sidewalk Labs
- Vincent Alvarez, NYC Central Labor Council
- Kate Ascher, BuroHappold Engineering
- Steve Cohen, Mac Andrews & Forbes Incorporated
- Elizabeth Goldstein, Municipal Arts Society
- Henry “Hank” Gutman, Brooklyn Navy Yard/Brooklyn Bridge Park Board
- Kyle Kimball, Con Edison
- Mitchell Moss, NYU Wagner School of Public Service
- Kaan Ozbay, NYU Tandon School of Engineering
- Hani Nassif, Rutgers School of Engineering
- Benjamin Prosky, American Institute of Architects
- Denise Richardson, General Contractors Association
- Ross Sandler, New York Law School
- Jay Simson, American Council of Engineering Companies of New York
- Tom Wright, Regional Plan Association
- Kathryn Wyde, Partnership for NYC

## Our Work So Far: Early Weeks



- Held 10 full panel meetings, with the first meeting on April 11<sup>th</sup>
- Early meetings oriented us to the project:
  - Understanding and questioning DOT's proposals and the assumptions that led to them
  - Getting an idea of the site conditions, and a better understanding of the project area

## Our Work So Far: Touring the Site

- The Panel toured the project area:
  - Brooklyn Bridge Park shared information on the park's berms and other facilities
  - NYC DEP shared information on the sewer interceptor under Furman Street
  - MTA's NYC Transit provided us a better understanding of their fan plants and substation
  - DOT provided information on structural obstacles, like the Brooklyn Bridge Portal
  - Parks gave us a better understanding of some of the nearby green spaces
  - NYC DCP shared information on land use and related processes



# Our Work So Far: Hearing from Stakeholders



- In April, we held our first community meeting with elected officials and civic stakeholders

- We received presentations from BHA/Mark Wouters, City Comptroller's office, and Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) and have reviewed a number of other proposals, including around tunneling and from 1BBP/360 Furman
- I've also had the opportunity to personally meet with dozens of leaders and organizations to better understand their perspectives

## Our Work So Far: Working With Stakeholders

- We put panel information online, including stakeholder groups at [www.bqe-i278.com/en/expert-panel](http://www.bqe-i278.com/en/expert-panel)
- DOT has provided concept proposers with additional engineering information on the existing structure
- Also worked with DOT to organize site tours for community stakeholders, which I hope many of you were able to join



## Our Work So Far: Hearing from Stakeholders

- As we delved deeper into the project, felt it was important to hear from even more stakeholders, as this project has wide implications
- Excited to be joined by stakeholders from Queens, Staten Island, and additional portions of Brooklyn tonight
- The BQE is a key freight corridor for Brooklyn and the City, so we also heard from the freight industry (12% of the vehicles on this section are trucks)
- Received information about the future of freight from NYCEDC and Port Authority



## Our Work So Far: Legislative Efforts



Photo Credit: Office of Assemblymember Joe Tentolivia @assemblymanjoe

- On behalf of the Panel, I went to Albany along with Commissioner Trottenberg, to update the NYC delegation on our work and urge them to extend the deadlines that were incorporated into the original design build legislation

## Our Work So Far: Legislative Efforts

- Pleased to report that a bill that will allow that schedule flexibility passed – it still requires the Governor’s signature once it reaches his desk, so there’s still more to do
- Representatives Rose, Velázquez, and Nadler have also taken critical steps to help bring two-way tolling to the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge, which could help with BQE capacity

## Our Work So Far: Getting Technical

- **Traffic:** Wanted to understand what kind of vehicles are on the road and where they're coming from and headed – was interested to learn that nearly 90% of all traffic on the triple cantilever begins or ends trips within NYC, and over 60% in Brooklyn and Queens alone
- **Challenging Assumptions:** We cut out the middleman and brought in the project's consultants directly so we could better understand which project limitations were critical and which may have alternative paths
- **Recognizing Constraints:** The MTA has 3 fan plants and 2 substations in the project area and DEP has a 10 foot-wide sewer interceptor under Furman Street, which requires access 24/7

## Our Work So Far: Deeper Dives

- In order to utilize the expertise of our panelists further and allow deeper dives as needed, we created Committees focused on:
  - **Governance, Organizational Capacity, and Legislation/Policy**
  - **Engineering, Feasibility, and Constructability**
  - **Urban Design and Transportation Planning**

## Going Forward: Getting Additional Data

- In order to get a better understanding of the structural conditions, we are working with DOT to:
  - Investigate the sizes and weights of trucks using the BQE, we're partnering w/ Rutgers Professor Hani Nassif (panelist) to use Weigh-In-Motion sensors
  - Look at the “remaining life” of the existing structure, using the WIM data and the time-dependent bridge properties
  - Enlisting a material specialist to consult on the expected durability of a range of rehabilitation and/or replacement schemes

# Going Forward: Principles We've Heard

- There is clear evidence that the section of the BQE that extends from approximately Atlantic Avenue to Sands Street must be replaced or substantially rehabilitated. Its deteriorating condition is a threat to public safety as well as to mobility and economic activity in the metropolitan region.
- The reconstruction of this critical stretch of highway threatens to downgrade the quality of life of several hundred thousand residents of adjacent neighborhoods and must be carefully planned and executed. Disruption of existing traffic patterns could inconvenience millions more. The fact that the BQE is a freight thoroughfare also requires consideration of how to avoid a substantial regional economic impact during the reconstruction process.
- There may be a need for a temporary alternative route during what could be a six to ten-year construction period, but the alternatives proposed by the city Department of Transportation present very serious issues with very little chance of being approved; other alternatives should be explored. The Commission has serious concerns about the proposed highway and encroachment on the Promenade (other than to renovate and upgrade the promenade) or major incursion into the Brooklyn Bridge Park with a temporary highway.<sup>14</sup>

## Going Forward: Principles We've Heard (continued)

- Even temporary encroachment on parkland that would be required to accommodate a temporary bypass on Furman Street is a complex proposition. It should only be considered as part of a broader plan to enhance and protect park access and utilization.
- Diversion of traffic to reduce the volume of vehicles on this stretch of the BQE is a necessary consideration, both during the temporary reconstruction and over the long term. This should be evaluated as part of the studies being conducted for the congestion pricing zone that will be established in Manhattan in 2021 as well as two-way tolls on the Verrazano Bridge. Pricing tools, among others, are options to be considered. Reduction in traffic volume could make two lane per direction solutions an option for temporary and permanent highway plans.
- It is important to develop a set of proposals to accommodate the traffic that is essential to the future of the city, in an environmentally and neighborhood friendly way, and begin implementation, if possible, before work on the BQE commences.

## Going Forward: Principles We've Heard (continued)

- The Department of Transportation is re-examining options for construction techniques that may be faster and less disruptive. Their original proposal assumed complete replacement of the current structure with a highway of equal or greater capacity that would have a 100-year life. It also incorporated upgrading of access and egress points to improve safety and efficiency. There are tests underway now to determine whether more modest repair is justifiable and would reduce the need for a temporary replacement highway.
- In conjunction with review of the reconstruction and traffic diversion plans, there may be opportunities to enhance the area through such projects as improving access to Brooklyn Bridge Park and developing connectivity with other green spaces in the surrounding neighborhoods, improving air quality along the entire BQE corridor and improving pedestrian and cyclist safety in and around the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges.



## Going Forward: Principles We've Heard (continued)

- Reconstruction plans and execution require multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional approvals and collaboration and must be a priority of agencies whose approvals will be required to achieve the best possible solutions to the challenges associated with this essential infrastructure project. Any planning should include a corridor-wide assessment, including the Gowanus Expressway and Cobble Hill Trench.
- Simply shifting the impact of this work from one group of New Yorkers to another is inappropriate, and the analysis should include consideration of unequal access to power and historic inequity.

## Going Forward: Scope of Panel's Work

- Greatly appreciate all the feedback and proposals we've received – we're headed towards the end of this process, and won't have ability to review additional concepts
- Panel will issue a public report at the conclusion of our process – ultimately, it may not comment on specific proposals, but will lay out guiding principles for planning
- Recommendations will also look at opportunities and challenges for this project
- Note that that items like health concerns based on specific staging and other environmental issues will be addressed during the project's environmental review

## Going Forward: Scope of Panel's Work

- Report will look at a number of concept frameworks:
  - Rehab/Repair
  - Reconstruction using only DOT's Right of Way
  - Reconstruction with public space and impacts
  - Concepts that vastly expand the project area or other types of transformative visions
- Panel is also looking at demand management strategies (such as pricing, HOV lanes, etc.) that could allow capacity reduction from 6 to 4 lanes

## What's Next

- Panel will continue meeting as we head into summer and begin drafting recommendations
- Panel would like to convene another community meeting before issuing our report to discuss our findings
- Anticipate issuing a report in early Fall

# Discussion

