



February 14, 2023

Secretary Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The undersigned are city, state and federal elected officials currently representing portions of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (I-278), which cuts through the length of Brooklyn, New York. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has supported forward-thinking and ambitious solutions to reduce highway infrastructures around the country that have harmed communities by creating inequitable divisions and destroying local environments. Therefore, we hope you will partner with us to create bold, environmentally just and sustainable solutions throughout the full length of the BQE corridor in Brooklyn.

We hope and expect that your agency will commit to transformative change along the entirety of the BQE corridor and prioritize the reimagining of how this structure interacts with environmental justice communities that have been especially harmed by this Robert Moses relic. The triple cantilever structure is falling apart, but the entirety of the BQE across Brooklyn must be addressed.

New York City controls the 1.5 mile stretch of this highway in Brooklyn Heights – a three level structure cantilevered into the retaining wall of a bluff along the waterfront – that is rapidly deteriorating and reaching the end of its useful life. The New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT), under Mayor Eric Adams' leadership, is currently undertaking an expedited design process to replace the Triple Cantilever and is planning to seek federal funding for this critical project.

As the NYCDOT refines its proposal and pursues the environmental review process, we are writing to urge the USDOT to support **maintaining the highway at two lanes of car and truck**

vehicular traffic in each direction. Widening highways in public-transit rich New York City is in direct conflict with our shared public health, safety, and climate goals.

Studies have consistently shown that increasing roadway capacity does *not* reduce congestion, but rather incentivizes roadway use and produces higher traffic volumes.¹ Restoring the Triple Cantilever portion of the BQE to three traffic lanes would likely represent at least six million more vehicles per year in our communities. Further, the BQE's viaducts and trenches cut through several low-income and working-class neighborhoods where most of the residents are people of color. The communities along the BQE corridor already have higher rates of asthma and pulmonary-related disorders from significant vehicular pollution emanating only feet away from their homes, schools, and places of work. Lastly, the 2021 reduction of the lanes on the Triple Cantilever from three to two lanes generated immediate and significant safety improvements.

A recent BQE Expert Panel published a report in January of 2021 which maintained that, "A four-lane configuration will be possible as a result of traffic changes resulting from the State's congestion pricing program, the return to split-toll collection on the Verrazano Bridge, and other traffic management strategies."² The return to split-tolling has since gone into effect, and New York is making strides toward realizing its congestion pricing program, which the BQE panel expected to end bridge shopping by equalizing costs at all Manhattan crossings meaning fewer vehicles using the three Brooklyn to Manhattan bridges.

We recognize that the BQE is a key Northeast regional freight route and reimagining this highway is also a once in a generation opportunity to rethink our freight systems and invest in the original blue highways. We hope the federal government will be a true and active partner with New York City and New York State to collaboratively invest in marine and rail freight infrastructure to reduce our dependence on long-haul trucking.³

Our goals here are strongly aligned with President Biden's focus on modernizing the country's transportation infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions and reconnect communities. We applaud your bold leadership on these issues. As NYCDOT seeks support from the federal government to repair and replace the Triple Cantilever of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, we are urging the U.S. Department of Transportation, under your leadership, to support a maximum two lanes of car and truck traffic on this stretch of the highway and to design solutions that will curb emissions and reconnect Brooklyn communities.

¹ Weingart, Eden. "Widening Highways Doesn't Fix Traffic. So Why Do We Keep Doing It?" *NY Times*, Jan. 6, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/us/widen-highways-traffic.html>

² Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) Expert Panel Report, January 30, 2020. <https://www.bqe-i278.com/en/expert-panel>

³ The U.S. DOT Maritime Administration's \$5.16 million Marine Highway Program award to the city to build out six water landings to allow more efficient and sustainable freight movement on waterways is a great start in reducing truck congestion and wear and tear on our roadways and bridges.

Should you wish to tour the BQE or discuss this matter further, we would welcome the opportunity to do so.

Sincerely,



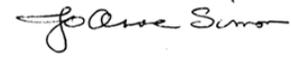
Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Nydia Velázquez
Member of Congress



State Senator
Andrew Gounardes



Assembly Member
Jo Anne Simon



Lincoln Restler
Council Member



Kristen Gonzalez
State Senator



Julia Salazar
State Senator



Robert Carroll
Assembly Member



Maritza Davila
Assembly Member



Emily Gallagher
Assembly Member



Marcela Mitaynes
Assembly Member



Phara Souffrant
Forrest
Assembly Member



Antonio Reynoso
Brooklyn Borough
President



Alexa Aviles
Council Member



Jennifer Gutiérrez
Council Member



Shahana Hanif
Council Member



Crystal Hudson
Council Member

Cc: Hon. Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York
Hon. Eric Adams, Mayor of the City of New York
State DOT Commissioner Marie Therese Dominguez
City DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez