

PROPOSAL LU 0701-2015: A WHITE PAPER

A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFORM A BLIGHTED, 3.5 MILE STRETCH OF ABANDONED RAILWAY IN CENTRAL QUEENS INTO A FAMILY- FRIENDLY LINEAR PARK AND CULTURAL GREENWAY CALLED THE QUEENSWAY.

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ABSTRACT

The QueensWay is an initiative to transform an abandoned railroad line from Rego Park to Ozone Park, and in doing so enhance the economic, social and cultural dynamic of the neighborhood. After closely examining the benefits and flaws of the Manhattan Highline comparatively with the plan for the QueensWay, it is clear that the Queensway has the potential to positively impact the neighborhoods it touches. By focusing on community input and engagement, this project can avoid the issues of gentrification and displacement of current residents. In celebrating the diversity of the varying neighborhoods along the QueensWay as well as incorporating the different concerns of the neighborhoods, the project has become community owned. The goal of the QueensWay is to return to the main focus of public spaces, to promote the enjoyment and betterment of the people that live in surrounding neighborhoods.

INTRODUCTION

Following over 50 years of ceased service, the trust for public land use and Friends of the QueensWay are working towards making the Rockaway Beach Branch (RBB) rail line beneficial for the community by converting this elevated rail structure into a park called the QueensWay. It has many progressive plans including improving connections + neighborhoods, ecology + education, play + health, safety + comfort, culture + economic development, and care + stewardship¹.

The QueensWay is a multi-faceted community endeavor to transform the once advantageous RBB rail line that has become inoperable into an outdoor cultural greenway. See figure 1

This cultural greenway will act as a connector for neighborhoods, connecting Jamaica Bay Greenway to north Flushing Meadows-Corona Park as well as Victory Field to Forest Park trails. In addition to connecting these parks the QueensWay connects Rego Park, Forest Hills, Richmond Hill, Glendale, Woodhaven, and Ozone Park.



Figure 1: Site of Proposed QueensWay

Underneath the QueensWay there are roads that have been called the second deadliest in New York City. There are 12 schools and two little league field complexes whose access requires crossing these deadly streets.³ The QueensWay provides safer routes to these destinations for children and adults to travel by foot or bike that in the past were only travelable by car⁴.

Recreational and Academic Use of the QueensWay

Ecologically and educationally the QueensWay will transform an inaccessible, trash-strewn site into an arboretum-like setting and active learning environment. Early settlers of the region used deposited rocks and sand as the ridgeline to mark territory. The QueensWay attempts to replicate its roots by using similar deposited remnant for paths referred to as “terminal moraine.” Native species of plants and birds have been driven out over time by invasive species. Ecologists plan to up-root invasive species, returning the park to its native splendor. The QueensWay is aligned with the Atlantic Flyway, the main East Coast migration route for birds. The area presently does not exemplify its potential for biodiversity, but with enhancement of the native plant biodiversity the QueensWay plans, during migration season, for a positive increase in educational opportunities to observe different species of birds⁵.



Figure 2: Site of QueensWay

In respect to play and health, the QueensWay includes recreational use for all interests including a skate park, biking and jogging paths, adventure playgrounds, spaces for bocce, chess and game tables, a multi-use pavilion and much more. Utilizing this space, people who live within a mile of the park can increase their exercise by almost 40%.⁷ The National Institute of Health has documented that living near a park produces clear health benefits. Under PLAN NYC every New Yorker should live within 10-minute walk to a park, and many residents in this section of Queens do not meet this requirement. For the citizens near central Queens who live near Forest park, the QueensWay may not have as obvious a benefit, but for the citizens particularly in Richmond Hill and Ozone Park, the QueensWay will produce obvious health benefits⁸.

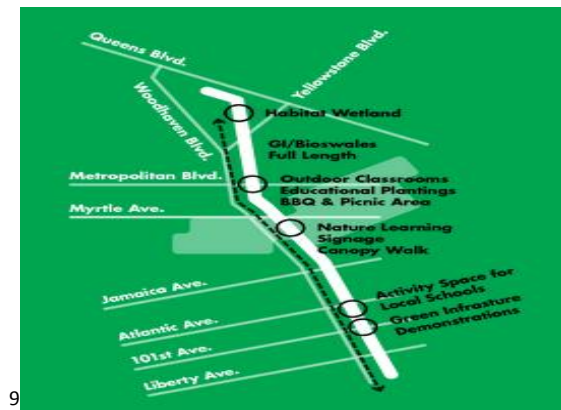


Figure 3: Ecological Spaces¹⁰

Privacy for Adjacent Homes

In regards to safety and comfort, the QueensWay has planned the park to meet the needs of people of all ages and abilities; including ramped entries, comfort stations, benches and four main activity areas. The paths created will purposefully avoid pedestrian and biker conflicts and include access for emergency vehicles. Being central in Queens, the park has plans of avoiding confrontation and providing privacy for adjacent homes¹¹.

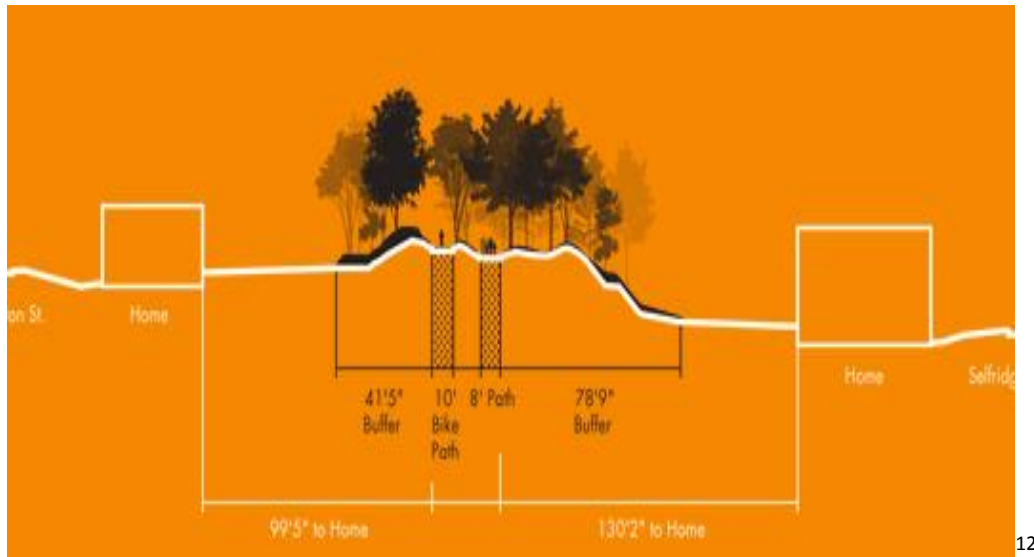


Figure 4: Construction Planning

The pathways that run by the environs of the park have vegetated buffers, secure fencing, and are excavated to be lower than the homes so that QueensWay users do not have any visual connection with adjacent homes as the QueensWay leveling is lower than the homes, protecting the homes' privacy. In addition, each of the four activity areas is decisively not located near any homes. Just as there are barriers from paths to homes, there is a lighting barrier for the comfort of adjacent homes. Low lighting is located near the residential areas as to not disturb neighbors and high light levels are located towards in the main activity area sand entrances. To ensure safety and security, the park has gates at all entrances and will close as dusk, excluding certain winter months when it will close slightly later for commuters. NYC Parks "Police Enforcement Patrol" officers will patrol on bicycles and will be empowered to issue summonses and make arrests while coordinating with local police.

The QueensWay as an Ideal Public Space

An increasingly concerning issue in NYC is gentrification. Gentrification threatens the current social and economic landscape of the city and is integral in deciding future social sustainability in NYC. As the book *Gentrification* describes, gentrification is caused by the "reinvestment of capital in the urban center"¹³. This definition in itself is extremely concerning as it lays out any improvement in urban life or urban beautification as a catalyst for gentrification. When discussing transforming out-of-use infrastructure into a functional public space, the Highline in Chelsea serves as an effective predecessor. The Highline was an out of use elevated train track that was slated for demolition in 1999. Before it was transformed into a public space, the highline was overgrown and had graffiti. Two residents of Chelsea, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, came together to form Friends of the Highline, a group of community activists seeking to have the tracks turned into a park. When Mayor Bloomberg came into office he backed this plan as he believed it would increase tourism in the Chelsea area of NYC. The purpose of the Highline in Manhattan was more focused on tourism rather than community value.

The Highline project essentially used public space to create a homogenous environment, and in doing this ignored the goals that were originally set out by the creation of urban spaces. The Highline Project serves as a reminder, as written by Kelly Chan in BlouinArtInfo, of the threat urban spaces can pose to the social sustainability of existing neighborhoods:

Making something beautiful for the public does not necessarily mean it will be shared, though, especially in a city with such drastic levels of income inequality. For this to happen, the city must step in to ensure that less powerful and less affluent parties are protected, that different socioeconomic groups can still coexist when something desirable pops up on the market. The city acted contrarily by encouraging the rezoning of West Chelsea. The High Line — being such an alluring work of design — became, quite literally, a lure to attract groups powerful enough to steamroll socioeconomic diversity and reconstruct the neighborhood into a more glamorous version of New York. What Moss suggests is that if this continues, New York will soon be a ‘vanishing’ city of people who can afford to ‘only hang out with others just like themselves.’¹⁴

The reason why lessons from the Highline are so crucial for the QueensWay project is that a major part of urban planning is using existing projects as a basis for new construction. As Henry Savitch points out, having successes “in other parts of urban core, the city seeks to recreate that slick wherever there is still space”.¹⁵ Meaning that since Manhattan, NYC’s urban core, is developed at this point, the next obvious places to expand the urban core are to Brooklyn and Queens. This is something we cannot prevent, but we can work to ensure that developments in the urban core promoted social sustainability rather than social evolution.

The goal for the Queens Highline project should be to create a ‘loose space’. This term ‘loose space’ is used by urban planners, Karen Fran and Quentin Stevens to say that people in the communities surrounding a public space, “must recognize possibilities inherent in it and make use of possibilities for their own ends,” and it is through this that public spaces become “symbolic ways of communicating social sustainability.”¹⁶ The QueensWay should be built with the intent of achieving two types of public spaces: neighborhood and circulation. In the book *Privately Owned Public Spaces*, Jerold Kayden describes that a neighborhood space should attract people from an immediate radius and encourage socializing within the community. He then describes that a circulation space encourages movement from point A to point B, and provides a better route of transportation in a neighborhood.¹⁷ Without a doubt, the QueensWay can achieve both of these goals, but it is important that the project is protected from the encouragement of tourism and building rezoning. To make the QueensWay a reality, like the Highline, it will need private funding, but it is not impossible to achieve community focused improvements when “city government and private interests make the public realm, on a grand scale, their shared interest”¹⁸

BACKGROUND

The Manhattan Highline, located in Chelsea, New York City, has given rise to tourism, economic influx, and a serene oasis for NYC dwellers. Along with the many positive outcomes from this attraction there have also been negative effects. As Michael Kimmelman, an expert on public space, noted “The public realm is what we own and control...the streets, squares, parks, infrastructure and public buildings make up the fundamental element in any community — the framework around which everything else grows.”¹⁹ Public space defines a neighborhood. The area of Chelsea changed completely with the addition of the Highline and when an area undergoes such a major transformation it is essential to think of the effects it will have on a community, such as gentrification.

Urban Planning and Land Use

According to the McGill University Center for urban planning, urban planning is defined as a the “technical and political process concerned with the welfare of people, control of the use of land, design of the urban environment including transportation and communication networks, and protection and enhancement of the natural environment.”²⁰ In the past, urban planning has not considered such outcomes, but with the proper urban planning, the QueensWay project can avoid such negative outcomes that have become such pressing issue in New York City.

The QueensWay’s urban planning maps the social and economic landscape for the future of New York as laid out in PLAN NYC. This includes ensuring that thousands more people live within a 10-minute walk from a park.

A focus on land use includes transforming infrastructure that is condemned into a functional public space, such as the Highline in Chelsea. The Highline was an elevated train track that is now a public park. Before the tracks were converted into public space there were many issues surrounding the area. Two resident of Chelsea Joshua David and Robert Hammond, came together to form Friends of the Highline, a group of community activists seeking to have the tracks turned into a park. Mayor Bloomberg backed the project because he believed it would increase tourism in Chelsea.

Funding for the Manhattan Highline

- Total cost was \$273.5 million
- \$123.2 million came from the City of New York
- \$20.3 million from the Federal government
- \$400,000 from the State of New York
- \$132.6 million was raised privately by the Friends of the Highline²¹

As is evident from above, much of the funding for the Manhattan Highline came from private investors with a focus on developing real estate in Chelsea and returns to these investors. While development was promoted, gentrification and rent prices were practically ignored in the legislation process; creating the issue of displacement of the residents of Chelsea. To avoid and prevent these issues from occurring in regard to the QueensWay, legislation will need to be enacted.

The projects that are associated with public space in New York take into account economic and environmental factors. They tend to ignore though, the issues regarding gentrification, displacement, and rising rent prices. This often occurs because of the loose legislation, such as zoning regulations, surrounding the creation of these projects. The chart below displays the change in rent prices in Manhattan form before the establishment of the Manhattan Highline to after it was built.

The increase in rent prices resulting from the Manhattan Highline will be avoided for the Queensway by instituting strict zoning legislation. See Figure 6

MANHATTAN RENTALS					
MANHATTAN RENTAL MARKET					
(Face Rent)	Jan-15	%Chg (Mo.)	Dec-14	%Chg (Yr)	Jan-14
Average Rental Price	\$3,974	0.4%	\$3,980	4.6%	\$3,800
Rental Price per Square Foot	\$53.44	5.9%	\$50.45	6.1%	\$50.37
Median Rental Price	\$3,299	1.5%	\$3,250	5.9%	\$3,114
Number of New Rentals	4,206	49.0%	2,822	40.2%	2,999
Days on Market (From Original List Date)	58	13.7%	51	-4.9%	61
Listing Discount (From Original List Price)	1.8%		3.9%		3.6%
Listing Inventory	5,498	0.1%	5,493	8.2%	5,080
Vacancy Rate	2.43%		2.52%		1.81%
MANHATTAN RENTAL MARKET w/ CONCESSIONS					
(Net Effective Rent)	Jan-15	%Chg (Mo.)	Dec-14	%Chg (Yr)	Jan-14
Median Rental Price	\$3,276	1.5%	\$3,228	6.4%	\$3,079
Number of New Rentals w/Concessions (%)	8.5%		7.8%		13.1%
Free Rent/Owner Paid (Mos)	1.0	-9.1%	1.1	0.0%	1.0

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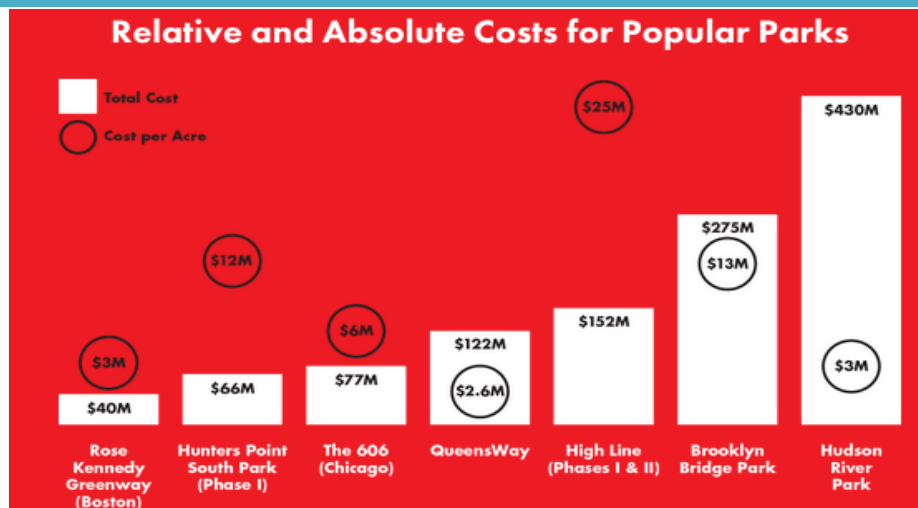
Figure 5: Shifts in rent pricing, West Chelsea

There is no way to prevent the expansion of neighborhoods outside of Manhattan, but there are ways to **guarantee that developments preserve and promote social sustainability, rather than social evolution.** The goal for the QueensWay should be to incorporate the lessons learned from the mistakes of the Highline. It should be built with the intent of achieving two types of public spaces, as Jerold Kayden describes in his book *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience: neighborhood and circulations*. The neighborhood aspect should attract people from neighboring areas and circulation will expand routes of transportation²³. The QueensWay can accomplish both of these goals without gentrification and displacement as an outcome. Efforts can be made to maintain diversity and limit development.

Preliminary Estimates of Cost and Funding

The cost estimate for constructing the QueensWay, including contingencies and design costs, are approximately \$120 million²⁴. As of now, The Trust for Public Land, a non-profit organization that works to create parks and protects land for people²⁵, has raised only \$1.2 million of the \$120 million²⁶. The city itself recently made a huge investment, of \$130 million, in local parks throughout *all five* boroughs, deterring funding for the QueensWay to come from the government. The cost of the park seems feasible especially when compared to the Manhattan Highline. Unlike the Manhattan Highline, the neighborhoods surrounding the proposed QueensWay do not have the revenues to support this project, making the target donors people that have a connection to Queens, such as natives.

The QueensWay plan's cost after considering the necessary construction of the existing bridges, landscape, viaduct, bridge over the LIRR Montauk Branch line, lighting, comfort stations, playgrounds, pavilions, and entry points. This has been approximated to be \$120 million, \$2.6 million per acre.



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Figure 6: Cost of funding a park

The Queensway has received funding from the State of NY Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, The Governor's Regional Economic Development Council, NYC Department of Environmental Protection, Citi Foundation, The Tiffany & Co. Foundation, the Tiger Baron Foundation, the Booth Ferris Foundation, the Scherman Foundation and the Lily Auchincloss Foundation.²⁸ Refer to page 14 for more information.

Queens Community

Public space is essential for the growth of urban communities, such as Queens. Queens is one of the most populated boroughs of New York City. Transforming The Rockaway Rail Line into a park can be extremely valuable for the Queens community, but it must be done in a way that preserves its residents. There must be legislative measures taken in order to avoid problems that occurred with the Manhattan Highline. These projects have heavy effects on real estate prices in the encompassing areas. Legislation has to be instituted to protect these neighborhoods against the rising prices and unfortunate displacement of people. Based on the outcomes of the Manhattan Highline, the QueensWay comes with a forewarning regarding higher property values, which risks placing people who cannot afford the raised prices out of their homes.

Queens is known for its **cultural diversity**. The neighborhoods surrounding the proposed area for the QueensWay don't hold a particular dominant ethnicity, which is very rare in New York City. Figure 7 below represents the population of Queens based on ethnicity:

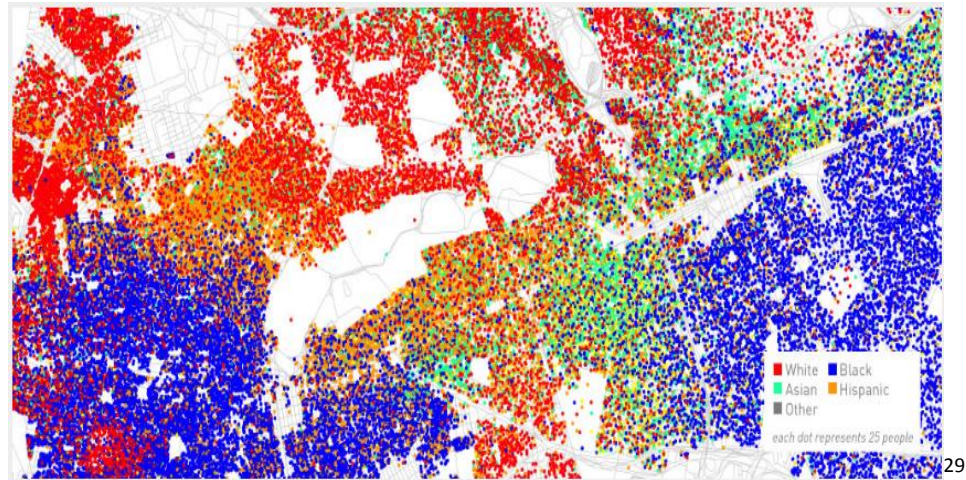


Figure 7: Cultural Diversity Queens

Zoning Regulations

The major defect in the legislative of the Manhattan Highline was the looseness regarding the zoning laws. The legislation provided little regulation for the expansion opportunities, which enabled developers to take advantage of Chelsea and cause displacement. When considering the neighborhoods surrounding the QueensWay, it is vital to incorporate specific zoning laws in order to protect residents against development and expansion.

In order for the diversity in Queens to endure, zoning laws will have to be instated to promote and protect the current neighborhoods in Queens. Thus far, there are various zoning laws in place regarding the areas surrounding the QueensWay. There are also proposed laws that are in the process of being legislated.

The aspects of these laws, specifically pertinent to the QueensWay, include:

- The reinforcement of the neighborhood originality and established building patterns
- Instituting a small amount of new residential and “mixed-use development” opportunities to major passageways and locations near mass transit resources
- Preventing commercial infringement into residential areas by reducing the amount of commercial intersections and overlays³⁰

Land prices must also be considered for the building of the QueensWay. Linear parks across the US have been shown to increase property values for surrounding homes. The consultant team for the Friends of the QueensWay, the nonprofit organization developing the QueensWay, estimates that home values adjacent to the QueensWay would increase by five to seven percent over the first six years (the length of a typical market cycle) after the park opens³¹. The rezoning in Queens provides a framework for orderly growth while protecting residential character, which would most definitely need to be considered for the construction of the QueensWay.

Community Outlet

Culturally and economically, the QueensWay will act as an outlet for preserving the neighborhoods traditions as well as bring more tourists to the neighborhood. Spaces on the QueensWay, specifically the viaduct, will offer platforms for performances and public art. Working with the Queens Chamber of

Commerce, the QueensWay can host seasonal food festivals at the corridors that cross the QueensWay, highlighting the borough's cultural cuisines. These festivals will promote tourism in Queens by having tasting menus from local and surrounding restaurants. Based on current data concerning visits to Forest Park, totaling approximately 900,000 visits, this study projects that the QueensWay will have approximately 1 million annual visits. Assuming this approximation is correct, we assume all visitors will spend about \$7 to \$21 per visit, resulting in an increase in \$2.2 million per year in local spending. This spending will strengthen local businesses and discourage commercial businesses from coming in.³²

The president and chief executive officer of the Trust for Public Land promotes the idea of the Queens project. He says, "The Highline led to the redefinition of the neighborhoods in Manhattan, whereas the **QueensWay will be defined by the neighborhoods it passes through**. Essentially, it will be a cultural trail"³³. This is the quintessence of what should be the outcome of such a project, and in constructing the QueensWay using the community as the focal point of the project this will occur.

PROPOSAL: THE QUEENSWAY AS A BENEFICIAL SPACE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Under the Trust for Public Land, the QueensWay project can be developed as a community owned public space. Through carefully thought out solutions and proposals, the QueensWay will not serve a similar role as the Manhattan Highline. The people along the QueensWay as well as The Trust for Public Land will ensure that this is a project by the community and for the community. The hopes of this proposal are to create community beautification in a way that focuses on community engagement. Beyond this the project will help the city to fulfill a goal under PLANNYC, ensuring that every New Yorker lives within 10 minutes of a park. As it stands now, many citizens on the southern end of the proposed project site do not live within 10 minutes of a park. Below is a list of goals for the community as well as ways for this project to be carried out efficiently and effectively.

Beautification of the Rockaway Beach Branch Line

The existing Rockaway Beach Branch Line is characterized by homelessness, trash and drug use. The area is overrun with un-kept vegetation, and acts as blight on the neighborhood. The goal of the QueensWay project is to revamp the existing piece of infrastructure, and make it an asset for the community.³⁴

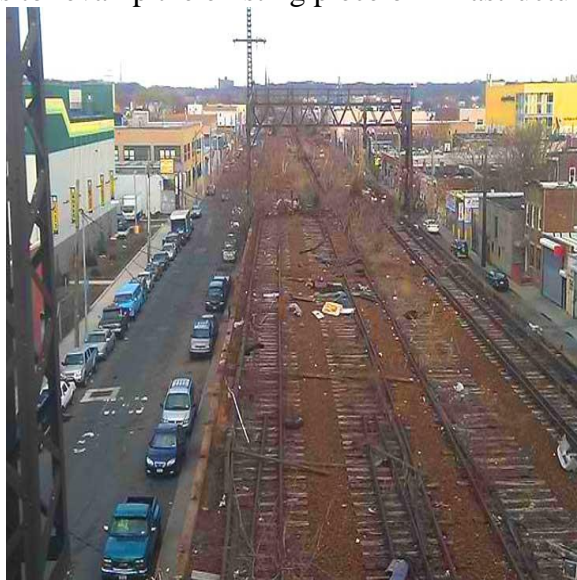


Figure 8: The proposed transformation of the Rockaway Beach Branch Line

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Partnership of The Trust for Public Land and Friends of QueensWay

The Friends of the Queensway (FQW) was founded in 2011 by residents along the former LIRR Rockaway Beach Branch. The group dedicated itself to the conversion of an abandoned stretch of railroad tracks to a thriving public space. Later in 2011, the group entered into a partnership with The Trust for Public Land, the nation's leading nonprofit organization focused on creating public spaces. The two organizations have worked cohesively to incorporate community input into their plan for the Queensway.³⁶

Planning by Engaging Community Involvement

The Trust for Public Land is making use of the Steering Committee, a subdivision of the Friends of the Queensway made up of community representatives. The committee incorporates residents from both the North and South side of the Queensway. The North side is wealthier, with better access to public spaces. The South side is less affluent than the North side.³⁷ The Steering Committee is the voice of the project, and the diversity of its members ensures that all of those affected by the Queensway will have a say in its construction. Community workshops are held in all the surrounding neighborhoods to incorporate community ideas, and many of these ideas have made it into the architectural plan. While outreach is still being done, those both on the North and South ends of the Queensway support the development of this park. High-School students have been incorporated into the planning, and their voices can be seen in the planned addition of a skate park to the South end of the Queensway.³⁸ The goal of the project is to keep the planning as close to the community as possible.

Spaces for Events and Engagement



As seen in figure 8, the QueensWay will feature special areas for events, festivals, and restaurants. These spaces will be used in a way that further promotes community building and supports local businesses, schools, and arts.

Figure 9: Distinguished event Spaces

Growth of Local Business: In partnership with the Queens Chamber of Commerce the QueensWay will host seasonal food festivals as a way of stimulating local spending and celebrating community diversity. See Figure 8.

a. Education

The Queensway will provide education in two ways. First, visitors will be promoted to learn about the ecology of the area. This will mainly consist of the biodiversity of plants and animals within the Queensway. Second, the Queensway will incorporate surrounding schools and provide them with outdoor spaces for instruction. The goal is to have interactive, natural settings for students to learn. Four schools are currently working with the Queensway. Specifically, the Queens Metropolitan High School is being incorporated, and the school hopes to use the space for outdoor science classes.⁴⁰



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Figure 10: Outdoors learning space

b. Vendors

The project would ensure that only local vendors benefit from the economic developments that the QueensWay will provide. The main focus of reaching out to local vendors is to highlight local foods and the diversity they display of the surrounding communities. It is estimated that the Queensway will draw 1 million visits, 250,000 of which will be tourists. The spending of these visitors is approximated to draw \$2.2 million in new local spending.⁴²

Environmental Impact

A secondary outcome of the Queensway will be the creation of green modes of transit. Queens is currently very car dependent, and the addition of this park may reduce this dependence. The addition of a safe and beautiful area to bike and walk may lead to a decrease in car usage. The Trust for Public Land highlights that predicting trends like this is difficult, but that green infrastructure generally leads to more environmentally conscious modes of transit.⁴³

Is There A Better Usage of This Space?⁴⁴

In various Steering Committee meetings, community meetings, and in News Publications, it has been suggested that the space would be better used if it was revived to its original purpose: a railway. It is undeniable that Queens could benefit from more transit but creating a subway line along the retired tracks of the Rockaway Line is not feasible. In analyzing this alternate usage of the space the proposal will dispel any rumors and clarify that a park is the best usage of the former railway line.

1. The MTA is suffering from a *large deficit*. The MTA has a 5-year plan with a 16 billion dollar deficit. The 5-year plan makes no mention of the QueensWay or creation of a new subway line in Queens. The creation of a subway line in the space of the proposed QueensWay would take decades. In evaluating the MTA's 20-year capital

plan it becomes apparent that any rail reactivation is not feasible. The 20-year capital plan has one line that rail reactivation can be considered based on economic feasibility. Due to the MTA's current fiscal issues, it is *highly unlikely* that the MTA would approve rail reactivation even in 20 years.

2. *Rail reactivation extremely expensive and fiscally irresponsible.* Despite having the structural basis for a railway, the undertaking of creating a subway line would require improving the infrastructure of the site. In order for rail reactivation to occur all the overpasses along the tracks would have to be reinforced and much of the old tracks would have to be lifted and replaced.
3. *Rail reactivation would alter current residential areas, posing a threat to the dynamics of current communities.* The placement of a subway line would create a tremendous disturbance in all the neighborhoods the line would run through. In certain stretches of the rail there are residential areas where the end of property lines are three or four feet from the rails. The majority of the people that live in these areas moved after the rail was deactivated. The creation of a rail would drive down property values as well as create a tremendous disturbance. *The residents living a long the line would have major opposition toward rail reactivation making the project even more unlikely.*
4. *There are other ways to provide transit that are more economically responsible and feasible.* An example of the MTA's work towards providing more transit can be seen in the new select bus line on Woodhaven Boulevard. This line will have its own lane and will run frequently, providing more transit and access to areas that are currently underserved.

The creation of a park is the best usage of the former rockaway branch line. Not only is it the most fiscally feasible and responsible solution, but it is also a solution that can benefit the community in the immediate future. It would not be beneficial to the residents of the community to wait 20 years for the possibility of a subway line that would cost exponentially more and destroy residential areas. A park will create a beautiful community owned space that will encourage community development and engagement.

Threats to the Mission of the Project

The Trust for Public Land has worked to avoid the gentrification and flood of tourism that arose in the Manhattan Highline. To combat these forces, the Trust for Public Land is aligning their project as close to community interests as they can, by holding community workshops to gain input and involving the community in the planning process. In addition to this, the Trust for Public Land has worked to incorporate local businesses into the Queensway. They are gaining their funding from public institutions as well as private contributors with a vested interest in the community.⁴⁵

The Trust for Public Land defends the Queensway by stating that the location is not at all susceptible to tourism in the way that West Chelsea is. The Trust for Public Land finds that 70% of the park usage will come from community residents. In addition to this, the zoning in the area is not conducive to development in the way Chelsea is, as it does not easily allow the transfer of air rights which promote the development of large buildings. Any change in existing zoning would require the consent of the Mayor, which is unlikely to happen.⁴⁶

The key factor in preserving the ethnic and cultural dynamic of the neighborhood will be incorporating the same community interest that has been involved in the planning of the Queensway⁴⁷. This, along with the preservation of the existing zoning regulations, will allow the community to renovate the

existing abandoned railroads in a productive manner.

Plausibility Through Proposed Project Funding

The estimated cost of the QueensWay is 122 million dollars⁴⁸. Funding for this project will come from both public and private donors. The initial money for the proposal of the project came from a state grant. The first grant of \$467,000 came from Governor Cuomo's Regional Economic Development Council (REDC).⁴⁹ This money made it possible to begin the Feasibility Study. The City of New York, additionally contributed \$140,000 under environmental and green infrastructure analysis. As of 2014 the project received another REDC grant of \$443,750.⁵⁰ This money will be allocated towards the First Phase of building. As of 2014 the Trust for Public Land has raised an additional 1.5 million from donations.⁵¹ The project will continue to apply for state grants as the state government has proven its commitment thus far to the project.⁵² The City of New York has made a promise to allocate funds towards the Queensway, however as it stands now it is unclear how much money the city will provide and where the city funds will come from. There are rumors that the money is going to come from the 130 million dollar budget of the Community Parks Initiative, but The Trust for Public Land has heard nothing to say this is true or even a possibility.⁵³ Lastly The Trust for Public Land has philanthropy teams focusing on finding a few substantial private donors. The Trust for Public Land is accepting donations, but the bulk of private money will come from a few large donors. The project is not about private donors attempting to place alternation on the project and shift the community focus because the people being approached are Queens natives.⁵⁴ To ensure the continued integrity of the project the private donors being sought are people from Queens, who love Queens, who made it big, and want to see the Queens community continue to develop. All the donors must have the understanding that this is a true community project.

Funding will come from three sources:

- The State through the Regional Economic Development Council. 910,750 dollars have been allocated to date.**
- The City. 140,000 through the city planning department but the budget from which the rest of the funds will be allocated through remains unknown.**
- Private Donors: 1.5 million has been raised to date by the Trust for Public Land. The Trust For Public Land hopes to raise half of the cost of the project *Privately*.**

CONCLUSION:

Through evaluating the flaws of the Manhattan Highline, and examining the purpose of public spaces in New York City, the Queensway can be seen as a positive contribution to NYC. The zoning problems, concerning the development of a separate West Chelsea district that led to large-scale development are almost completely absent in Queens. The area, while susceptible to increasing real estate values, will not face the widespread gentrification that took place in Manhattan. The legislative climate and physical proximity of the Queensway are not conducive to this type of change.

The Queensway will bring a variety of benefits to the surrounding neighborhoods, most namely the transformation of a traditionally overgrown and abandoned stretch of railroad tracks into public space. The Queensway will bring beauty and nature to the area, through the incorporation of plant and animal life. The biodiversity of the Queensway will function in two ways, through installing beauty into the public space and through educating visitors on the natural life of the space. Beyond beauty, the Queensway will function as a safe mode of transportation, via walking or bike, between areas previously only accessible by bus or car.

The project is taking steps to ensure that it is a project by the community and for the community. The



progression of the project from a small grassroots movement to being a major project for The Trust for Public Land shows the nature of this project. The communities surrounding the QueensWay, despite varying ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds are working together to beautify the rails in a way that will incorporate the ideas of the people of the neighborhoods. Every aspect of this project focuses on the community value the QueensWay will bring to this region; this includes planning, funding, education, transportation, local businesses, and environmental impact. The way funding is being dealt with is extremely telling to the tone of the project. By focusing on a mix of donations and private donors that are locally based, the project will remain as owned by the community. In incorporating vendors, local businesses will grow rather than wither and the diversity of these areas will be celebrated as well as strengthened. The park also will meet the PLAN NYC goal to ensure that every New Yorker lives within 10 minutes of a park. The building of the QueensWay will provide many residents with access to a park when they previously did not have one. By including the people in the planning, it allows this space to belong to them and fit their needs and concerns. The QueensWay, as it continues on the path of being a large-scale neighborhood project, will serve as an example of neighborhood beautification that is owned by communities rather than real estate interests. This study is hopeful that there will be future projects that serve to improve the neighborhood dynamic, while preserving the cultural dynamic, through the incorporation of community voice.

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