



Connecting Communities with Rails & Trails

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Noelle Hunter

Communications Director

noelle@queenslink.org

Momentous Step for Transit Equity—US DOT Awards QueensLink \$400k to Study New Subway Extension and Park Space on the Abandoned Rockaway Beach Branch

QUEENS, NY, January 10th 2025 – The United States Department of Transportation is awarding QueensLink \$400k as part of the [Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program](#). As a nonprofit transit advocacy organization, QueensLink intends to use this funding to perform a study to measure the social, environmental, economic, and equitable impacts of their proposed “rails and trails” project in New York City.

Queens is a divided borough with no rail transit or bicycle infrastructure linking its northern and southern halves. Residents who rely on public transportation often depend on slow, meandering buses to travel within their own borough. The QueensLink vision proposes a multi-modal thoroughfare, incorporating a subway extension and integrated park space to reconnect Queens communities that lack sufficient transit access. If built, QueensLink would create the borough’s first north-south subway line with accompanying bike paths and walking trails along the abandoned Rockaway Beach Branch, a former Long Island Rail Road line. The project addresses

critical equity issues, especially for South Queens residents who endure [some of the city's longest commute times](#). In addition, QueensLink's "rails and trails" approach aims to address [Justice40 initiatives](#) by improving neighborhood access, mitigating adverse effects from climate change, and promoting economic opportunity.

Grant funding for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program comes from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law signed by President Joe Biden, and QueensLink will use this valuable opportunity to conduct a "Community Equity Analysis." This will be a detailed study of the project's environmental impacts, economic potential, accessibility benefits, and sustainability advantages. The QueensLink team hopes this robust analysis will set the stage for future support and eventually lead to the project's construction.

QueensLink's ambitious vision for a subway extension with integrated park space has gained significant momentum in the borough. A [recent poll](#) from New York State Senator Joseph P. Addabbo Jr. indicated that an overwhelming 75% of local residents favor QueensLink as opposed to 22% who support a park-only option and 3% who prefer neither. Leading up to the announcement, the [Manhattan Institute released a detailed report](#) that endorsed a flexible approach to the Rockaway Beach Branch that allows for future transit development.

Numerous elected representatives and local organizations supported QueensLink's successful bid for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program, illustrating the nonprofit's grassroots origin and widespread popularity. The following parties submitted letters of support for the application:



- Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY)
- Congressman Gregory Meeks (D-NY 5)
- New York State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-10)
- New York State Assembly Member Stacey Pheffer-Amato (D-23)
- New York State Assembly Member Khaleel Anderson (D-31)
- New York State Assembly Member Zohran Mamdani (D-36)
- Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr. (D)
- New York City Councilmember Robert Holden (D-30)
- New York City Councilmember Selvena Brooks-Powers (D-31)
- New York City Councilmember Joann Ariola (R-32)
- Felicia Johnson, District Manager of Community Board 14 (Queens)
- Seth Bornstein, Executive Director of the Queens Economic Development Corporation
- Melissa Checker, Chair of the Department of Urban Studies at Queens College
- Jeanne DuPont, Executive Director of the Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability and Equity
- Betsy Plum, Executive Director of Riders Alliance

“We are honored to receive this grant from the United States Department of Transportation, which brings us one step closer to making the QueensLink vision a reality.” said **Rick Horan, Executive Director of QueensLink**. “With this grant funding, we’ll be able to show citizens and decision-makers just how impactful the project will be. We firmly believe that QueensLink’s



emphasis on transit equity, climate change mitigation, and small businesses will benefit everyone.”

“Many parts of Queens, especially South Queens, remain transit deserts, forcing residents to endure long and unreliable commutes.” said **New York State Senator James Sanders Jr.** “The QueensLink project is a game-changer, not just for improving transportation but also for creating new economic opportunities, addressing environmental concerns, and enhancing community connectivity. This funding takes us closer to a future where every resident, regardless of their zip code, has access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.”

"I am pleased that the USDOT's Reconnecting Communities Grant Program has recognized the transformative potential of the QueensLink project by awarding \$400,000 to study its wide-ranging impact," said **New York State Senator Leroy Comrie.** "This funding represents an essential step toward understanding how QueensLink can advance equity, improve transit options, and revitalize our communities while respecting environmental and economic priorities. I am confident in the commitment of our local government partners from the Queens Delegation of the city and state to see this critical project through. Together, we can create a 'rails and trails' system that benefits all residents of Queens and beyond."

“There is an indisputable need to finally reignite Queen’s only north-south rail corridor - and we are now one step closer to making this a reality. This grant by the federal government is a tribute to the tireless advocacy of QueensLink and their ongoing work to get our community the



transportation access it deserves.” said **New York State Assemblymember Stacey Pheffer-Amato.**

“Southeast Queens requires a more robust, more accessible subway network. The bold idea known as QueensLink received \$400k from the United States Department of Transportation from the Reconnecting Communities Grant Program for a feasibility study. I urge Mayor Adams and NYC not to initiate any construction that would endanger the viability of QueensLink,” said **Assemblymember Khaleel M. Anderson.** “We can accomplish the need for expanded public transportation and green space in Queens without compromising one over the other. We should not jeopardize our community by forcing them to choose between a park or a rail line.”

"Residents of South Queens and the Rockaway Peninsula have lacked suitable public transportation options for generations, holding families back from reaching their full potential. These communities deserve the same access to our city via mass transit as any other community, and I look forward to working with my partners in government to make the kind of transit investments these families deserve," said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.**

"Thank you to President Biden and our state's congressional delegation for their leadership in making this funding possible through the game-changing Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.”

“This grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation represents an important opportunity to explore how the QueensLink project could address transit equity and connectivity challenges in Southeast Queens and across our borough,” said **New York City Council Majority Whip**



Selvena N. Brooks-Powers. “As we move forward, it’s crucial to conduct a thorough study to understand the potential impacts on our communities. I support this effort to gather the data and insights needed to determine the best path forward for Queens residents.”

"Increasing transit options that are practical should be a priority, and the QueensLink project is a step in the right direction. This federal grant will allow for a crucial feasibility study, and congrats to Rick and his team for their hard work in making this possible.” said **New York City Councilmember Robert Holden.**

“This award is one step closer to the QueensLink becoming a much needed reality. With the overtaxing of middle class residents in my district because of congestion pricing, we need more options for reliable public transportation to and from transit deserts like the Rockaway peninsula.” said **New York City Councilmember Joann Ariola.**

"A comprehensive study to revitalize – let alone actually revitalizing – a rails and trails project connecting rapid transit deprived areas of Queens is long overdue. QueensLink being a recipient of the USDOT’s Reconnecting Communities Grant Program to begin such a study presents an exciting and hopeful time for transit not just in Queens, but for New York City as well." said **Dwayne Baker, Professor of Urban Studies at Queens College.**



"This is great news. Working together we can improve and enhance both transit access and recreational space for the people of Queens." said **Seth Bornstein, Executive Director of the Queens Economic Development Corporation.**

"U.S. Department of Transportation's funding of the QueensLink "rails and trails" project is a huge boon for the Rockaways and the rest of Queens! QueensLink will not only connect us to the rest of New York City, but it also will bring better economic opportunities to our local businesses, cultural institutions, and schools." said **Jeanne DuPont, Executive Director of RISE (Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability and Equity).**

"The commute across Queens is one of the toughest in the nation," said **Riders Alliance Executive Director Betsy Plum.** "This federal Reconnecting Communities grant will enable thorough study of the QueensLink, an exciting prospect for transit riders in New York's biggest borough. Congratulations to the QueensLink team, which consistently inspires with its work lifting up the challenges and opportunities facing our transit network and millions who rely on it."

QueensLink is a project of QueensRail, a volunteer-run 501(c)3 nonprofit organization founded in 2015 to improve transit in South and Central Queens. For more information, please visit www.QueensLink.org

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www.QueensLink.org

info@QueensLink.org

[@theQueensLink](https://www.instagram.com/theQueensLink)

