



Department of Urban Studies

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RE: Rockaway Beach Branch - Community Equity Analysis Reconnecting Communities  
Pilot Program Grant Application

September 25, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

In 1962 New York City severed service on Queens' only north-south rail corridor thereby disconnecting many communities from access to jobs, education, and recreation. Today, Queens exists as a divided borough. From analyses of average household income to data on racial stratification, a clear and perhaps predictable pattern emerges: south Queens is worse off than north Queens.

The Rockaway Beach Branch corridor lies between two of the most congested roads in the City, Woodhaven Blvd. and the Van Wyck Expwy. This City-owned right of way is uniquely positioned to reconnect southern neighborhoods such as Richmond Hill, Woodhaven, Ozone Park, and the Rockaways—with northern neighborhoods like Rego Park, Forest Hills and even midtown Manhattan. It will provide better access and opportunity for disadvantaged residents while significantly reducing congestion and carbon emissions thereby resulting in cleaner air for the entire borough.

We, the undersigned, request that the USDOT grant the funding for this **Rockaway Beach Branch Community Equity Analysis** to reconnect the communities that need it most. For the relatively small investment of \$500k, this study will provide a framework for rectifying more than six decades of transit inequities in the borough's most disconnected and disadvantaged communities. It will do so by measuring the environmental, economic, and quality-of-life impacts of restoring this vital transit link and detailing how a comprehensive rails and trails project like QueenLink will fulfill the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program goals.

Thank you for ensuring that future generations of south Queens' communities of color will enjoy the same access to opportunities as their neighbors in the north.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Melissa Checker".

Melissa Checker  
Hagedorn Professor of Urban Studies  
Chair, Department of Urban Studies  
Queens College