QueensLink

Connecting Communities with Rails & Trails

PRESS RELEASE

QueensLink Launches $500,000 in USDOT-Funded Studies to Advance Rail Reactivation, Address Housing and Economic Impacts, and Deepen Community Engagement

Nonprofit issues two Requests for Proposals and a Request for Expressions of Interest as part of Reconnecting Communities Grant Agreement with the Federal Highway Administration.

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Contact: *Matthew Paolucci*
Outreach Coordinator
mattp@queenslink.org

QUEENS, NY – QueensLink, the nonprofit advocating for the reactivation of rail transit and greenway space along the abandoned Rockaway Beach Branch (RBB), today announced the next major step in its campaign to bring the project to life: the launch of $500,000 in federally funded studies under its Full-Funding Grant Agreement with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) through the USDOT Reconnecting Communities Program.

The announcement builds on the momentum of QueensLink's Initial Business Case (IBC) by The Steer Group, released earlier this year, which found that the project would generate billions of dollars in economic growth and travel time savings for New Yorkers, remove millions of car trips from the road annually, and significantly strengthen transit access across the Queens subway network, all while helping address the city's affordability, climate, and transit equity challenges. With that foundation in place, QueensLink is now dividing the

$500,000 grant across three concurrent studies designed to bring the project's economic, housing, and community engagement dimensions into sharper focus: a Regional Economic Input/Output Analysis, a Housing Tenure & Anti-Displacement Study, and a Community Engagement Plan and Program Delivery initiative.

“On behalf of Queens residents, we thank USDOT and New York State for funding these studies,” **said Rick Horan, Executive Director for QueensLink.** “This new data will show how reconnecting Queens with rails and trails will benefit more than 75,000 commuters and makes the case to include QueenLink in MTA’s 2030-2034 Capital Plan.”

The Regional Economic Input/Output Analysis, budgeted at approximately $150,000, will be issued as a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit qualified economics and transportation economics firms. Building on the economic case established in the IBC, the study will measure the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of QueensLink's construction and operation on Eastern Queens and the surrounding region. The selected firm will examine capital investment trends in the study area dating back to 2005, evaluate active and planned development projects, and assess the catalytic economic potential QueensLink could unlock for local businesses and residents.

Running alongside it, **the Housing Tenure & Anti-Displacement Study**, budgeted at approximately $150,000, will also launch as an RFP. This study will examine the existing housing stock along the corridor, assess demographic and market trends, and evaluate the risk of displacement facing longtime residents as the project moves forward. The selected consultant will develop a 20-year housing plan alongside concrete policy recommendations and funding strategies to protect existing residents while encouraging responsible, transit-oriented development and new affordable housing such as the Aqueduct Redevelopment project.

The third component, the **Community Engagement Plan and Program Delivery initiative**, will take a different path. Rather than issuing a full RFP, QueensLink is launching a $25,000 Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) to gather ideas from firms and individuals experienced in community engagement and advocacy work. Their input will directly shape the scope of a forthcoming ~$125,000 Community Engagement Plan Request for Proposal (RFP), which will guide how QueensLink sustains public involvement, communicates findings, and builds long-term advocacy capacity through construction and beyond.

The three studies will run concurrently, with selected teams coordinating on a shared timeline to deliver findings to elected officials, community stakeholders, developers, and nonprofit organizations invested in the project's success. Combined, these efforts represent QueensLink's next major step in its multi-year campaign to reactivate the RBB as a subway line with accompanying park space, following years of grassroots organizing and recent city, state, and federal funding commitments.

"When it comes to speeding up commute times for Queens residents and expanding our city's public transportation network, we must leave no stone unturned in creating opportunities to do exactly that," **said Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** "For families in transit deserts across South Queens and Rockaway, that means identifying more options beyond just driving or riding the bus along Woodhaven and Cross Bay boulevards. I look

forward to reviewing the results of these studies, which will greatly inform how we move forward in making Queens a more navigable borough for all."

"I fought to help secure federal funding for QueensLink because I believe this project has the potential to be a game-changer for our borough," **said State Senator James Sanders Jr**. "These studies will provide critical data on how QueensLink can improve transportation access, generate economic growth, protect residents from displacement, and create new opportunities for communities that have too often been overlooked. A project of this magnitude must be guided by both facts and community input, and I applaud QueensLink for making those priorities central to its planning process. I remain committed to supporting efforts that move this vision forward for the benefit of all Queens residents."

"I'm excited to see these federal funds come to the district to further study the economic, environmental and practical benefits of reactivating rail transit and greenways along the Rockaway Beach Branch via the QueensLink," **said Assemblymember Khaleel Anderson.** "This project continues to prioritize and focus on community engagement from the Rockaways and beyond, and that is reflected in the launch of these studies. At a time when we are seeing greater and more frequent extreme weather events, I look forward to seeing how the QueensLink can help our city and state achieve its essential climate and transit equity goals."

"QueensLink represents exactly the kind of forward-thinking investment our communities need," **said Assemblymember Catalina Cruz.** "These studies will help ensure the project delivers real economic opportunity while protecting longtime residents from displacement and strengthening affordable housing along the corridor. I want to commend QueensLink for being proactive and community-centered in how they're approaching this work, listening to residents and doing the due diligence upfront rather than after the fact. I'm proud to support QueensLink as it takes this important next step, and I look forward to seeing the results."

Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas said "The QueensLink project is an exciting opportunity to bring new transit and green space to Eastern Queens through a project that combines new rail lines and acres of new park land with walking trails, and I am proud to have helped secure the state funding needed to make this next phase possible. But investing in transit also means investing in the people and communities who will live alongside it. As QueensLink moves forward, we must make sure this project strengthens Eastern Queens without displacing the people who call our neighborhoods home. I support the work QueensLink is undertaking to study housing, prevent displacement, understand the economic impacts, and build meaningful community engagement so that this investment benefits our community and does not come at its expense."

"Growing up in Queens, I know how much our lives are shaped by whether we can actually get where we need to go — to work, to school, to see family, or just across our own borough," **said Assemblymember Steven Raga.** "QueensLink has the potential to reconnect communities that have been underserved by transit for generations, while creating new economic opportunities and much-needed housing. But growth cannot come at the expense of the people who already call these neighborhoods home. These studies will help us move this vision forward while protecting longtime residents and making sure the communities along the corridor have a real voice in what comes next."

Assemblymember Claire Valdez said “Queenslink will serve tens of thousands of New Yorkers by cutting travel time and constructing new and accessible subway stations. I am proud to have supported its development in the State Legislature. These next steps will encourage public engagement to expand affordable housing while protecting current homes and bringing economic benefits to surrounding communities.”

Proposals for the two RFPs are due November 18, 2026 with an RSVP-required information session on October 14, and responses to the Community Engagement RFEI are due October 16, 2026 with a quick turnaround on the Community Engagement RFP to be released within that week. Full solicitation documents can be on our website at thequeenslink.org/reports-studies/#RFP_1751862588007-85e517a2-a54e or by clicking here.

About QueensLink: *QueensLink is a project of QueensRail Corporation, a volunteer-run 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2015 to improve transit in South and Central Queens. QueensLink's vision reactivates the abandoned Rockaway Beach Branch as a new subway extension paired with bicycle trails, walking paths, and park space, reconnecting communities that have long lacked adequate transit access. For more information, please visit www.QueensLink.org.*

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