



**New York State Department of Transportation
Hunts Point Interstate Access Improvement Project Hearing
June 27, 2018
Lynn Kelly, Executive Director**

New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) is the city's independent research-based advocacy organization championing quality parks for all New Yorkers. We write to the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) today with regard to the Hunts Point Interstate Access Improvement Project.

As an organization, NY4P is guided by the principle that every New Yorker should live within a walk to a park, a walk that is safe and accessible to a wide array of users. While we are pleased to know the State is considering the Arthur Sheridan Enhancement Project to create a more pedestrian-friendly Sheridan Boulevard, we are deeply concerned that the NYSDOT Hunts Point Interstate Access Improvement Project sits at odds with the goal of improving access to parks and safety for the Bronx residents who live and work near this roadway. We believe the proposal to create a new exit ramp from the Bruckner Expressway via Edgewater Road will restrict access to the area's waterfront parks, which are the results of decades of local organizing, and are fairly new spaces. We believe that the proposal will additionally exacerbate longstanding health issues in the Longwood and Hunts Point communities.

In June, we released the *Southern Boulevard Open Space Index*, a study centered on the area being considered for residential-focused rezoning by the City. We found that access to open space is a widespread challenge, but is particularly acute for people seeking to access the waterfront parks, Concrete Plant Park and Starlight Park, that now line stretches of the Bronx River coastline. The Edgewater Road ramp proposal put forth in the Hunts Point Interstate Access Improvement Project would create physical and psychological barriers to accessing these open spaces, all of which were the result of decades of hard-fought advocacy by community members who believed that South Bronx residents deserved a cleaner river, and the ability to actively, and passively, enjoy it.

Our *Open Space Index* report found that of the parks that do exist in this part of the borough, women and seniors were particularly underrepresented as users. We are concerned that the proposal to create park access points that exist in the form of a road underpass tunnel and an at-grade railroad crossing will mean that even fewer women and seniors will access these spaces. The perception of safety in accessing parks is critical for women, parents of small children and the elderly, and we do not believe an elevated

ramp that directly abuts public open space is a way to allow the public to feel safe and welcome accessing their parks.

We also have concerns that the State plans to alienate a portion of Concrete Plant Park in order to create these new ramps. This park was only completed in 2009 after years of advocacy, and the alienation would impact one of only two entrances to the park. Additionally, the City recently completed a \$4.5 million Community Parks Initiative restoration of Lyons Square Playground, which is sited along the western boundary of the proposed ramps. This heavily used playground is one of the only sizeable active open spaces in this part of the neighborhood, and we are concerned about the air quality impacts the newly constructed ramps would create for park users, particularly in a part of the City that already suffers disproportionate rates of asthma and asthma-related hospitalizations for both adults and children. The proposals to create a public open space on the city-owned land at Garrison Avenue on the Bronx River, to be known as Garrison Park, should also be considered by the State. An investment of millions of dollars to create much-needed public open space is only as good as the community's ability to safely access and use it. We believe the Edgewater Road ramp proposals would cut off the Garrison Park space from the community it seeks to serve, for the same reasons it will also impact Concrete Plant Park, Lyons Square Playground, and Hunts Point-Riverside Park.

We encourage the State to reject the plan proposed in the Hunts Point Interstate Access Improvement Project, and reiterate our call for NYSDOT to work closely with the community partners who comprise the South Bronx River Watershed Alliance (SBRWA). This coalition has worked for years to explore options to decommission the Sheridan Expressway while accomplishing the goals of: allowing truck traffic to safely reach the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center; increasing access to, and encouraging the creation of open space along the Bronx River; and improving pedestrian safety and access through the neighborhood and to local spaces, among other environmental justice goals. The SBRWA community coalition endorsed a 2013 study by the City of New York that explored the issue of decommissioning the Sheridan while protecting pedestrians, access to open space, and air quality. NY4P believes the proposed solutions of that plan, placing ramps at Oak Point Avenue, would balance community needs with the economic interests of the neighborhood, and are worth the State's consideration.

We formally request that the NYSDOT not place truck ramps on Edgewater Road and instead pursue the alternative proposed plan to locate ramps at Oak Point Avenue and Leggett Avenue. This would minimize impacts on the community by routing trucks to industrial areas away from where people live and play. Pursuing ramps at Oak Point and Leggett Avenues would support previous recommendations developed from an extensive public process that had the support of residents, advocacy groups and the Hunts Point businesses. Thank you for your consideration of our public comment.

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For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. www.ny4p.org