

# Jump start in Brooklyn

Residents staking their claim early on in BQE rebuild

By Allen Zeyher, Managing Editor

Reconstruction of the aged Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) is still years away, but residents are not waiting to protest.

The expressway was built in 1954 with an expected life of 50 years, so it is already past due for refurbishment. The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) said the structure could last another 10 years, but the agency has started planning for its eventual \$250 million replacement.

The focus of the project is the section between Sands Street and Atlantic Avenue in downtown Brooklyn and underneath the Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

The catch is the historic row houses along the path. NYSDOT has not yet decided on a plan, but the residents of the historic district want to head off any possibility that the federal government could seize their land by eminent domain to build a new expressway.

One option being considered at this very preliminary stage is called the "standard" alternative. It would upgrade the expressway to modern standards, such as widening lanes where the current BQE has narrow lanes, extending merge distances and adding shoulders where the current BQE has none.

With its 1950s-style lanes, merges and lack of shoulders, a couple of times a week an accident brings traffic to a crawl at best. Congestion lingers after the accident is cleared.

The second design option, according to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, involves boring a tunnel under Brooklyn Heights and downtown Brooklyn.

The third alternative, and the one that scares historic residents, involves an expansion of the expressway. The expansion would require the demolition of a five-block stretch of Brooklyn Heights, including historic row houses, businesses and a condominium building, according to NBC New York. The plan could demolish 30-50 buildings in the pricey area, including some of the borough's most expensive houses.

Residents protested the original plan for the BQE in 1954, when designer Robert Moses planned for the expressway to run through the heart of the neighborhood. Residents banded together and forced Moses to accept their "Citizen Alternative Plan," which rerouted the expressway and created a three-decked structure along the waterfront, the top level of which was the Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

"We are not expecting the state DOT to go forward with this worst-case scenario for fixing the BQE," Judy Stanton, executive director of the Brooklyn Heights Association, told the *New York Post*. "We are dealing with a different DOT than we were 50 years ago."

NYSDOT plans to do everything it can to make its decision process as transparent as possible, according to Adam Levine, NYSDOT's director of public affairs. Levine called the eminent domain option the "worst-case scenario."



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