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Press Release

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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

MTA's Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge Celebrates 70 Years of Linking Two NYC Boroughs

MTA officials joined elected officials and community leaders for a motorcade across the Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge from Brooklyn to Rockaway, and a patriotic ceremony along the ocean today--exactly 70 years from the day the bridge opened for traffic on July 3, 1937. The bridge was built as part of a City plan to develop Jamaica Bay and the Rockaway Peninsula for recreational and residential use. In its seven decades, the bridge has carried millions of residents and visitors to and from the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens both by car and public transportation.

The bridge connects the borough of Brooklyn from the southern end of Flatbush Avenue to Jacob Riis Park in Queens, which was once owned by the City and is now part of the National Park Service's Gateway Recreation Area. It has made the beach more accessible to the rest of the City by car and by public transportation via subway and bus.

MTA Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer Elliot G. Sander and Acting MTA Bridges and Tunnels President David Moretti welcomed the family of the late Brooklyn Dodgers Great and Mets Manager Gil Hodges, whose name was added to the bridge in 1978. The beloved Dodger first baseman was a long time resident of Brooklyn.

Mrs. Joan Hodges and her son Gil Hodges, Jr., rode in the motorcade of circa 1930s-1940s cars along with elected officials and officers of various homeowner, civic and business associations to the newly restored Bathhouse in Riis Park, following the route of the opening day motorcade. A ceremony followed and included patriotic songs by the local youth chorus, The Peninsula Performing Arts Conservatory; a spectacular fireboat water display in the Inlet by the Fire Department Marine Unit; and a photography exhibit in the Bathhouse about the bridge and the park, which itself is celebrating its 75th anniversary.

A Rockaway Point Volunteer Fire Department truck led the motorcade today in a nod to history. On opening day, quite unexpectedly, the first vehicles to cross the bridge were fire trucks that needed to get to a fire on the boardwalk. The official motorcade was forced to wait.

Facts and Figures

The bridge stretches 3,840 feet from end to end and has four traffic lanes and a walkway that is used recreationally by thousands each year. The bridge and the massive 70-acre Riis Park Parking Field was built by the Marine Parkway Authority, under the direction of its sole member, Robert Moses. The parking lot was the largest in the world when it was built in 1937, with space for 14,000 cars. In 1940, the Marine Parkway Authority became part of the Triborough Bridge Authority, a predecessor of MTA Bridges and Tunnels.

Unlike other vertical lift spans of the period, which had a heavy utilitarian appearance, the Marine Parkway Bridge stood out from the rest. Its unique design included whimsical curled tops on each tower, a long tapering approach deck and three center truss span arches that glide gracefully over the water.

When first constructed it was the longest vertical lift span for vehicular traffic in the world. Today, it is still the longest vertical lift span for vehicular traffic in North America. Unlike other lift bridges, a vertical lift span goes up and down like an elevator, using a system of four giant pulley wheels and steel cables. The bridge's normal clearance is 55 feet above mean high tide but when the vertical span is in a lifted position, it raises another 90 feet for a total clearance of 145 feet. It takes about 10 minutes to lift the span, allow a vessel to pass beneath and re-lower it.

Aymar Embury II, who was also the architect for MTA's Triborough and Bronx Whitestone Bridges, was the architect. The Chief Engineers were Madigan-Hyland and Emil H. Praeger, and Robinson & Steinman and Waddell & Hardesty were Consulting Engineers. The bridge was built by American Bridge Company, of Pennsylvania, which is currently working on rehabilitation of the bridge's steel deck, trusses and towers.

In 1938, the bridge's first full year of operation, 1.9 million vehicles crossed the bridge. In 2006, 7.8 million used it. The vertical lift was raised 157 times in 2006 to allow large vessels to pass through Rockaway Inlet.

The Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge is one of nine bridges and tunnels operated by MTA Bridges and Tunnels.

A Look Back at Opening Day: Upstaged by a Fire

The morning of July 3, 1937 marked the grand opening of the new Marine Parkway Memorial Bridge. With the sun shining and the NYPD Police Band ready to play, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Robert Moses, head of the Marine Parkway Authority and city Parks Commissioner and other officials, were getting ready to embark in a 500-car motorcade to christen the bridge.

There was excitement in the air as the band tuned up from its designated place on the bridge's elevated lift span and invited guests got into cars on the Brooklyn side of the bridge along Flatbush Avenue for the inaugural ride across the span.

But the first vehicle to cross the bridge did not belong to the mayor or master builder Robert Moses, who helped make the bridge a reality. About 15 minutes before the ceremonies were scheduled to start, the first vehicles to cross the span were three engine companies from Brooklyn; summoned to help put out a five-alarm fire that destroyed two blocks of wooden concession stands along the Rockaway Beach Boardwalk.

Even before its official opening, the bridge proved it was an asset to the community. Mayor La Guardia pointed out that if the bridge wasn't there, it would have taken the Brooklyn fire companies precious minutes to travel to the old Cross Bay Bridge, four miles to the east.

The Police Band, which scrambled off the lowered lift before the fire trucks screamed across the bridge, resumed their post and the ceremony went on as planned. A gun salute from nearby Fort Tilden announced the beginning of the event, which included a fireboat pumping streams of water into the air and a flyover by nine Martin bomber planes from nearby Mitchell Field.

The vertical lift span was slowly lowered from its lifted position as the Police Department band played the national anthem.