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Bridges & Tunnels   IMMEDIATE

MTA Bridges and Tunnels: Celebrating 75 Years of Linking New York City

**MTA Bridges and Tunnels: Celebrating 75 Years of
Linking New York City**

MTA Bridges and Tunnels, created in the midst of the Great Depression and now the world's largest vehicular toll collection agency, turns 75 this year. In 1968, the agency, then known as the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA), was folded into the newly created Metropolitan Transportation Authority and began providing financial support for MTA regional transit services.

In 2007, MTA Bridges and Tunnels handled a record-high 304.3 million trips, the most in its operating history. During its first 35 years, the authority used toll revenues to finance new projects for the automobile. Since 1968, toll revenues have provided $15 billion in subsidies for public transit. The authority employs 1,800 people, including 900 Bridge and Tunnel Officers, and supervisory officers, all of whom are New York State peace officers.

The original Triborough Bridge Authority (TBA) was established by law in April 1933 with the mission to complete the Triborough Bridge, a stalled municipal project designed to connect the boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx and Queens. In 1929, money had run out and only some piers and the anchorages in Queens and on Wards Island had been built. Federal reconstruction agencies provided the needed $44.2 million in a loan and grant to meet the $60.3 million cost. TBA repaid the federal relief loan with bonds secured by tolls. Robert Moses, who was also city Parks Commissioner and responsible for building the city's first important highways, was appointed as TBA's chief executive officer.

Following the success of the Triborough Bridge, which made headlines when it opened in 1936, the TBA built the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge. The bridge was completed in just 23 months and opened to motorists on April 29, 1939, the day before the New York World's Fair opened at the new Flushing Meadows Park.

The Henry Hudson Parkway and Marine Parkway authorities were created by the state in 1934 as part of a plan to incorporate bridges, parks and parkways. The Henry Hudson Bridge opened Dec. 12, 1936 as the Henry Hudson Parkway's link between Manhattan and the Bronx. The bridge's underwriters were convinced that motorists would refuse to pay the dime toll because of nearby free bridges and refused to allow a second level. Moses, however, was convinced the bridge would be popular and made provisions for a second deck, which opened in 1938 to accommodate already heavy traffic on the span.

The Marine Parkway Bridge, completed in 1937, links the end of Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn to Jacob Riis Park on Rockaway Peninsula in Queens, providing beach access to the rest of the city by car or bus. Gil Hodges' name was added to the bridge in 1978 to honor the Brooklyn Dodgers first baseman and New York Mets Manager.

The Henry Hudson and Marine Parkway authorities were consolidated in 1938 and formed the New York City Parkway Authority. Two years later the parkway authority joined with the TBA, which continued to operate the bridges while the adjacent parks and parkways became part of other city, state and federal agencies.

The Cross Bay Bridge, a bascule lift bridge that already existed between Broad Channel and Rockaway Peninsula, was replaced in 1970 with a fixed bridge that was high enough to let watercraft pass underneath; eliminating traffic delays caused by frequent bridge lifts. It was renamed the Cross Bay Veterans Memorial Bridge in 1973.

The Queens Midtown and Brooklyn-Battery tunnels had been planned by the city and civic groups in the 1920s to relieve traffic on the East River bridges. Under state law, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia set up the New York City Tunnel Authority to build and operate the Queens Midtown Tunnel, which opened to traffic on Nov. 15, 1940.

The Tunnel Authority was authorized to construct the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel in 1936 but financing took until 1940 to secure. An iron and steel shortage also caused work to stop for three years during World War II. In 1946, the financially-troubled Authority was absorbed into the Triborough Bridge Authority, creating the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.

The Throgs Neck and Verrazano-Narrows bridges were created to link the national interstate system. The federal government paid 90 percent of the cost and the state picked up the rest to build the new highways that became the approaches to the bridges.

The Throgs Neck Bridge, which opened on Jan. 11, 1961, crosses the East River between Queens and the Bronx. In Queens, it connects to the Clearview Expressway and Cross Island Parkway. In the Bronx, it connects to the Cross-Bronx and Throgs Neck expressways.

The last major bridge built within the city was the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, linking Brooklyn and Staten Island. The upper deck opened to traffic on Nov. 21, 1964. Its 4,260-foot main suspension span was the world's longest in 1964, and remains the longest in the Western hemisphere. The New York State Legislature added the name of explorer Giovanni Da Verrazano, who is the first recorded explorer to sail into New York Harbor in 1524.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels operates and maintains the following crossings, which link the boroughs of New York City: Bronx-Whitestone, Cross Bay Veterans Memorial, Henry Hudson, Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial, Throgs Neck, Triborough and Verrazano-Narrows Bridges, and the Brooklyn-Battery and Queens Midtown Tunnels.

(Photo captions:
Triborough Bridge suspension span arches over Manhattan's skyline. Photographer: Rodney McCay Morgan. 1941. MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive

Bronx-Whitestone Bridge from Francis Lewis Park in Queens. Photographer: Rodney McCay Morgan. 1941. MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive

Manhattan entrance to Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel with necklace lighting of Verrazano-Narrows Bridge visible in the distance. Photographer: Paul Warchol. 1993. MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive.)