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IMMEDIATE

Henry Hudson Bridge General Manager Al Rivera Attentive to Customers and Neighbors

At the northern tip of Manhattan, the 72-year-old Henry Hudson Bridge arches from Inwood Hill Park into the Bronx communities of Spuyten Duyvil and Riverdale, where bridge General Manager Albert Rivera is certainly no stranger. During any given work day, Mr. Rivera is busy making the rounds at the bridge and on either side to check on issues, major or minor, that could affect local residents, as well as motorists who use the bridge. Currently the bridge is in the midst of an \$86.5 million lower level deck reconstruction to be completed in 2010.

The need to ensure a safe and efficient daily crossing for 70,000 vehicles while being a good neighbor to residents in the Bronx and Inwood is a challenge Rivera approaches with energy and enthusiasm.

"The Henry Hudson is exceptional not only in its graceful appearance, but also because of its close proximity to local neighborhoods," explains Rivera, himself a Brooklyn native who now lives on Long Island. "All of us who work at the bridge respect the relationships we've built within these communities — among residents, community organizations, elected officials—and I'm always available to hear their concerns. We also conduct briefings to provide construction updates. At the same time, we must maintain a high level of customer service—our goal is to keep the traffic flowing as smoothly as possible."

The Henry Hudson customer base is widely distributed over the region, since the bridge serves as a critical link between the Bronx, Westchester and Connecticut, and Manhattan. The span's importance to the city's economy is significant: 84% of weekday morning Manhattan-bound crossings are work-related.

On a typical day Mr. Rivera manages the duties of 73 Bridge and Tunnel Officers, Sergeants and maintenance staff, with the assistance of Operations Superintendent Robert Beach and Maintenance Superintendent Raymond Higgins. The bridge engineering staff led by Facility Engineer Walter Hickey is responsible for planning and implementing construction projects, such as the current \$86.5 million deck replacement (contractor: Judlau of Queens, New York), to keep the bridge in a state of good repair. Rivera cites the close cooperation between the engineering and operations staffs for keeping the impact of construction to a minimum for customers and surrounding communities.

From his desk-view window Rivera monitors the flow of traffic through toll lanes, and communicates frequently with the contractors in the event work plans need revision due to changing traffic conditions. Every effort is made to perform construction work during daytime hours to avoid any night disturbance for neighbors. When overnight work is unavoidable, Rivera makes sure local elected officials and the Community Board know in advance, and on occasion will take additional steps, such as distributing information flyers to residential apartment buildings right near the bridge. In addition, he goes out often to inspect the various construction sites on and around the bridge to make sure work areas are clean and not creating problems in residential areas.

The current work to replace the original Depression-era lower level roadway deck and other features has required round-the-clock closure of one southbound lane at a time until it is completed in 2010. Closure of a second lane to accommodate the work is usually postponed until after the morning peak traffic ends at 10 a.m.

Rivera and his staff are also responsible for portions of the Henry Hudson Parkway from Kappock Street in the Bronx to Dyckman Street in upper Manhattan, where tree- and plant-trimming, and even maintenance of huge rock walls, as well as roadway and lighting repairs, are required to clear signs. "There's a new challenge every day, but it's very satisfying to roll up my sleeves and find a way to make things work out for the best."

Rivera is proud of his team and believes that being based in the "homey" close quarters of the compact facility building adjacent to the woodlands of Inwood Park contributes to their dedication. "We truly appreciate our surroundings and the Hudson River views—the beautiful natural setting is a daily reminder to be as non-intrusive a presence in the environment as we can manage while operating a bridge."

During his 21-year career with the agency, Mr. Rivera, who is fluent in Spanish and attended Farmingdale and John Jay Colleges, has worked in a range of positions that honed his management and communication skills, and has extensive experience in preventive maintenance and security issues. Prior to his posting at Henry Hudson, he held supervisory positions at the Throgs Neck Bridge, and earlier in the Internal Security and Maintenance Departments. A classic car enthusiast schooled as a boy by his father in auto mechanics and repair, Rivera worked as a mechanic for aircraft service vehicles at John F. Kennedy International Airport before joining the agency in 1987. The strengths of his diverse professional background serve him well in the multi-faceted role of bridge General Manager—Rivera will doff his jacket and tie at a moment's notice to look under the hood of a vehicle or inspect a generator.

Among Mr. Rivera's more memorable experiences is a dramatic incident that occurred just two months after he became General Manager in March 2005. A large retaining wall along the Henry Hudson Parkway just south of the agency's property line collapsed onto the roadway, closing both the north- and south-bound Parkway. Rivera recalls having to "to jump in with both feet" assisting other city and state agencies with the clean-up and coordination to remove hundreds of thousands of tons of debris, while taking care of daily business at the bridge.

The Henry Hudson's lower level, which has four roadway lanes and carries Manhattan-bound traffic, opened to motorists on December 12, 1936; the upper level, which has three lanes, opened on May 7, 1938, and is used by motorists headed to the Bronx and points north. Last year a total of 24.2 million vehicles crossed the bridge, which does not allow trucks. The Henry Hudson has the highest share of E-ZPass customers—83 among the agency's seven bridges and two tunnels.

When it opened, the Henry Hudson was the longest fixed arch bridge in the world. It was named after the explorer whose ship, the Half Moon (represented in the bridge's trailblazer sign), anchored near the span's current site in 1609.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels' facilities, which connect the five boroughs of New York City, are the Robert F. Kennedy (formerly Triborough), Throgs Neck, Bronx-Whitestone, Henry Hudson, Verrazano-Narrows, Cross Bay Veterans Memorial and Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Bridges, and the Queens Midtown and Brooklyn-Battery Tunnels.

Photo caption: Al Rivera, is General Manager of the Henry Hudson Bridge (in background)

