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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge Vertical Lift Span Active Year Round

The Marine Parkway Bridge has a 50% summer increase in vehicular traffic thanks to beach-bound motorists, but the raising of its lift span for marine traffic to pass through is steady business all year. The 71-year-old bridge, which connects Brooklyn to the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens and spans the entrance to Jamaica Bay, generally raises its center section more than 100 times per year; in 2007, there were 136 lifts for crossing vessels.

"We lift the bridge frequently in summer because of requests from large sail boats that use the waterway," remarked John Ryder, General Manager of both the Marine Parkway and Cross Bay Bridges in the Rockaways. "But the lift is raised a lot during the off-season, too, mostly for commercial shipping —barges, cranes—and the DEP (New York City Department of Environmental Protection), which has a plant on Beach Channel Drive. Our lift operators can handle whatever type of vessel comes their way."

The U.S. Coast Guard "buoy tender" even comes through on occasion and, if there's a special project going on in Jamaica Bay, such as the Army Corps of Engineers channel-dredging project two summers ago, the lift span might be raised almost every day.

A vertical lift span like that of the Marine Parkway Bridge goes up and down somewhat like an elevator. The normal clearance for the bridge is 55 feet above mean high water; when the center span is raised to full height, total clearance increases to 150 feet. The tops of the steel towers, which curl gracefully, were designed to frame the main span when it was lifted (*see photo*).

Right-of-way belongs to the waterway, regulated by the U.S. Coast Guard, which requires the facility to lift on demand between 8am and 4pm, Monday through Friday. After hours, the ships are required to give eight hours notice; for U.S. Navy and *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration* (NOAA) vessels the bridge opens on signal provided at least a one hour notice is given. The bridge staff schedules weekly maintenance lifts in order to ensure the mechanism is in ship-shape working order; however, lift requests from crossing vessels take precedence over maintenance lifts.

It takes four people to execute the lift process at Marine Parkway: one maintenance operator and one assistant on the Brooklyn side of the lift span and another assistant on the Queens side to halt vehicular traffic while monitoring barrier gates and the pedestrian walkway. In the meantime, Queens-bound traffic is stopped at the toll plaza by a Bridge and Tunnel Officer or Sergeant.

The bridge is normally raised electronically with the help of computer controls. The length of these lifts from traffic closure to resumption is approximately 12 minutes. In this mode, the roadway is raised to its maximum height of 90 feet and returned it to its "seating" or starting position in seven minutes. The remaining five minutes are spent stopping traffic and lowering and raising the gates and barriers. If there is a failure of the computer-controlled lift, the span can be raised via manual controls and emergency motors, which can take up to 20 minutes.

Construction of the Marine Parkway Bridge began in June 1936; it opened to traffic on July 3, 1937. When it was built, the bridge's vertical lift span was the longest in the world for vehicular traffic. The bridge stretches 3,840 feet and has four traffic lanes and a pedestrian path. The center lift truss span is 540-feet-long, with two 540-foot-long side truss spans and two 1,061-foot-long approaches.

The land on either side of the bridge was incorporated into the Gateway National Recreation Area in 1974. In 1978, the span was renamed in honor of the late Gil Hodges, who played first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers and later managed the New York Mets.

Several years ago the agency began a major \$120 million rehabilitation project on the bridge, which replaced the original steel-grated roadway deck of the lift span with a concrete-and-steel orthotropic deck; the elevators and electrical systems in the towers were also replaced, and a new service building was built at the toll plaza.

The Marine Parkway Bridge carries average daily traffic of 23,000 vehicles.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels' facilities, which connect the five boroughs of New York City, are the 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. The agency is the largest toll authority in the nation, helping more than 850,000 vehicles and more than a million people reach their destination each day.

PHOTO CAPTION: Marine Parkway Bridge Vertical Lift Span raised for marine traffic.



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